



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

The S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace on April 5, 2011 hosted Israeli President Shimon Peres at the U.S. Institute of Peace for a dinner and conversation. CNN's Wolf Blitzer moderated the conversation.

The following is a transcript of the event.

Robert Wexler (President, S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace): Mr. President, President Peres, it is a privilege for all of us to be in your presence this evening. On behalf of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace, I want to genuinely thank each and every one of you for join with us. As you may be aware, President Obama graciously invited President Peres to stay in the Blair House during his visit to Washington this week. To illustrate the richness of wisdom and experience of President Peres, it is important to note that Shimon Peres first stayed in the Blair House fifty years ago this month, working on behalf of American-Israeli relations. (applause)

As we begin, if I may, pay particular recognition to my former colleagues in the United States Congress, Speaker Nancy Pelosi joined us earlier, my hometown Senator, Senator Bill Nelson, Senator Chris Coons, Senator Bob Corker, and Senator Frank Lautenberg. (applause)

Members of the House which I'm sure all of you know is the much more important and powerful body. (laughter) Members of the House, Gary Ackerman, Shelley Berkley, Dan Burton, Steve Cohen, Ted Deutch, who has very big shoes to fill (laughter), Maurice Hinchey, Nita Lowey, Jerry Nadler, David Price, Jan Schakowsky, and Debbie Wasserman Schultz. I would also like to recognize and thank the distinguished and diplomatic representatives who joined us from the following countries: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Israel of Course, Jordan, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom as well as a representative of the European Union and the Palestinian Authority. (applause) I would be remised if I didn't pay special tribute to our Center for Middle East Peace team for their hard work and devotion: Toni Verstandig, Sara Ehrman, Zvika, Yoni, Gigi, and Brandon (applause). But most especially, I want to applaud a patriotic and selfless American, a WWII combat veteran, a visionary for peace in the Middle East, and above all a lifelong Zionist, Danny Abraham.

And with that I will turn the program over to a gentleman who is I would respectfully suggest, in fact the most trusted name in the news, a talented journalist and newsman who was not only kind enough to join us this evening but when asked said it would be a privilege. And it is my privilege to introduce Wolf Blitzer. (applause)

Wolf Blitzer: And it is my pleasure to introduce Shimon Peres. (applause) Mr. President you should know that here in the United States when a President is introduced we don't have long introductions we basically say, ladies and gentlemen the President of the United States. So I took that privilege to introduce you, the President of the State of Israel – thank you for joining us.

President Peres: Thank you very much.

Wolf B: I don't think Shimon Peres needs a whole of introduction. Let's just point out that he was twice Prime Minister of Israel and also the winner of a noble peace prize. He comes at this issue with an enormous amount of history and an enormous amount of credibility, so let's get right to the questioning because the viewers in this room and around the country on CSPAN as well as on CNN are all interested in knowing what you have to say. This is clearly a historic time in the Middle East. We are seeing enormous change. Many have compared it to the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 80's early 90's. Let's talk about Egypt right now – the change, the dramatic change. Is this good for the region or bad for the region? Specifically Egypt, Israel's biggest and most powerful neighbor, certainly the largest of the Arab countries.

President Peres: I wouldn't refer to President Mubarak, I have to be fair and say that President Mubarak played one role that we appreciated very much and that was to prevent another war in the Middle East and we shall never forget it. But I think the fact that the young generation took over and tried to tell their people, we have to join in the new age of modern life and we cannot go on with corruption, division, dictatorship – I think it's a good opening which is needed for the Egyptians and we welcome it very much.

WOLF BLITZER: Are you confident Mr. President that the next government in Egypt will continue to honor the peace treaty with Israel?

President Peres: I do believe there are many reasons for it, but it also depends on what will happen with us and the Palestinians. I think in order to enable the young generation to take over and go their way, we have to find a solution for the conflict between us and the Palestinians. I would like to see that our conflict will follow the nature of these awakenings. Let them be free of it. If they will be free of it, I do believe we will see an Egypt that is freer and more successful.

WOLF BLITZER: I want to get to the Israeli Palestinian peace process in a few moments, but let's continue with Egypt for a moment. I was just there the other day with Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton – walking around Cairo, Tahrir Square, and elsewhere – I got a sense that it was by no means resolved who would emerge as the real leaders of Egypt. How worried, for example, are you that the Muslim Brotherhood could emerge in free and fair elections as the dominant player in the next government.

PRESIDENT PERES: I wouldn't exclude it, but I wouldn't take it as the only solution or the only alternative. The real problem of Egypt is poverty, to start with. In 1952 when the young officer revolted there were 18 million people in Egypt. Today 50 years later, there are 81 million. Egypt grew in population five times. Nothing else grew at the same pace.

And the real problem is how to enable Egypt to escape its poverty. Egypt is not a country that has a river, it is a river that feeds a country. The Nile didn't grow five times. It is a desert and the Nile is really though only compensation. And I think Egypt can escape poverty if they will join in the modern age – which means an economy that doesn't hang in rivers and land, but rather on science and technology. The young generation that has revolted are educated people that cannot find a job. It was a combination of young people and women. Women who want to have their freedom and equality. And I think they will not, even if it will not succeed the first time, they will not give up. They have opened their eyes thanks to modern communication: internet, facebook, smart phones. They have seen the ugliness of corruption, the ugliness of [inaudible], the ugliness of division and now they will not close their eyes. Now the Muslim Brotherhood are not more than 15-20%, they are not a majority of the Egyptians, but it depends on who is better organized and who will go to the ballots. But generally they are not and will not be a majority, neither will they be the solution.

WOLF BLITZER: Because when I was in Cairo a number of people said to me, don't be surprised if the Muslim Brotherhood in new elections, get a lot more than 15-20%.

PRESIDENT PERES: They may get more but they don't have a solution to the Egyptian poverty. What are they suggesting? Suppose they'll pray ten times a day. Will this solve the problems of Egypt? The problems of Egypt are not prayers, but poverty. And many of the young people understand this. And they may have overplayed their hand. You know, one of the illusions in life is that the vicious side is perfect and the right side is imperfect. This is nonsense. The vicious side is as imperfect as the right side. We exaggerate all the time about the strengths of all those people who are fanatic and extreme, they are not as perfect, and they don't carry a solution.

WOLF BLITZER: Alright let's move on to Syria, while we're on the region. I spoke the other day with an Israeli who said, that as much as Israel has had problems with Hafez el-Assad and Bashar el-Assad there hasn't been any violence along the Golan Heights for 40 years or so,

and as bad as the relationship might be with Syria, they're worried about what might happen next. Are you worried about what's happening in Syria right now from Israel's perspective?

PRESIDENT PERES: First of all 'worry' is not a policy. You have to ask yourself what can be done. Suppose we are worried what does it mean? I believe that finally a democratic system in Syria is our best bet for the future. And I wouldn't make any other calculations. The president of Syria was self assured that the people are in love with him, well it emerged as an illusion. In politics you have to distinguish between support and supporters. Support exists as long as you own the government, when you're in crisis the supporters disappear. And the first time in 40 years that the South Americans say they are not as supportive as they were. Today they are looking around and say, we didn't do it, neither can we stop it, neither can we change it. And I believe that if democracy or freedom will take its place in Syria, this is the best for the future.

WOLF BLITZER: And next door in Lebanon as well?

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes. Lebanon was taken over by a religious group – Hezbollah – but they are not so religious. They became an arsenal of missiles against Israel. They are extreme. They split Lebanon that was a peaceful country. They want to control the government. But again, what for? What is their message? They are getting a billion dollars a year from Iran. Iran finances them. They are serving the Iranians more than they are serving the Lebanese. Basic facts are basic facts and you shouldn't overlook them. We would like to see Lebanon free, united, democratic. This is the best solution.

WOLF BLITZER: How close was Israel to a peace deal on the Golan Heights with Syria?

PRESIDENT PERES: If Syria will divorce the Iranians and the Hezbollah we are very close. If they want to have it both ways then nothing will happen.

WOLF BLITZER: Because you were in very deep negotiations through Turkey and others with the Syrians, and you almost had a deal.

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes. The problem is if they are really ready to make a choice between the Iranian way and the peaceful way.

WOLF BLITZER: Is Israel ready to give up the Golan Heights?

PRESIDENT PERES: All Prime Ministers in the past said so and PM Rabin and left a deposit with the United States saying it. We are ready to change the situation in the Golan Heights, but not to the point where the Iranians will take over the Golan Heights. Our love for the Iranians is not sufficient to have been so close to Israel.

WOLF BLITZER: So you would insist on demilitarization if Israel withdrew from the Golan Heights?

PRESIDENT PERES: Demilitarization is not enough. They cannot run a double policy. It's either peace with Israel or serving the Iranian and the Hezbollah way. [inaudible] If the Syrians want to have peace, we are ready, we are willing to have it. But not under the imagination of something that is not real. If they will make a choice, we shall make a choice.

WOLF BLITZER: I want to get to the Israeli Palestinian issue in a second, but in Jordan, just checking in on all your neighbors – are you worried about what's going on in Jordan right now?

PRESIDENT PERES: Look I'm worried about everything – I don't know what one can do with worries. I think what we have to do is help the king. He is a responsible leader who is trying to serve his people. He is in a very difficult situation economically. And if we are really serious, we have to help him to overcome the economic difficulties. He is short of water, he is short of energy. And I think we have to help him to overcome, and when I say we I don't mean Israel, I think Israel should keep herself in the middle not in the front. But whoever can help him, and I think for example, the non-governmental companies today in the United States who are being run by intelligent people, by responsible people. And they wouldn't like it to appear, the CEOs of the great companies in the United States, as profiteering from the poverty of other people, so they have created their own foundations to give back the money to the people. If they will do it, not in a way of charity and philanthropy, but in a way of destiny and politics, instead of just helping sick people in a country to help sick countries to be able to cure themselves, and they will take care of their own sick people. It can be a great change. We have to act positive – feelings, moods are important. But you have to make, finally, a choice.

WOLF BLITZER: How did your meetings with President Obama go today?

PRESIDENT PERES: Very well. I trust the president. I think he is serious. I think he has a dilemma that all of us have. The dilemma is between following the call of values, the primacy of the moral choice, and the realistic situation which is not necessarily as moral as you would like it to be. And to be honest, whenever you can have a moral call as the supreme consideration – do it. If you don't have a moral call and you have to choose between difficult and complicated situations, the least vicious is the best one. I think the president does it, wherever he can he prefers a moral call, otherwise he is trying to do the least damaging choice. It doesn't depend upon him, he cannot control the world. I don't think the United States has declined. I think the burden upon the United States has increased. You have the same shoulders but not the same burden. The world became larger in numbers, complicated in nature, different giants. And I think the United States remains the real responsible power in our time. The uniqueness of the United States in my eye is that this is the only great power in

history that became great by giving, not by taking. They are helping other people to regain their independence, their future. You send your boys to fight for other people – some of them lose their wars. You won the wars, you got territories and assets – you didn't keep anything for yourself. You gave to the Japanese and improved Japan, you gave to Germany and improved Germany, you had the Marshall plan for Europe, and you are all the time using generosity as the salt of historic policy. I don't know any other.

WOLF BLITZER: What do you say to those Israelis who don't consider President Obama a friend of Israel?

PRESIDENT PERES: I am saying they are mistaken.

WOLF BLITZER: Give me an example of why they're mistaken.

PRESIDENT PERES: Pragmatically for example they didn't believe that the United States would use its veto power in the UN Security Council. The president said, and told me several times, that as long as he is president the security of the State of Israel will be on the top of his political considerations. He does it in fact [inaudible]. The United States was the only country that didn't accept the Goldstone Report about Gaza, now Goldstone himself changed his view and the United States justified it. So wherever we turn I can see we have a response. The president is not always flowery in his language. And occasionally he too doesn't go to the end of his intentions. For example, if I take his Cairo speech the United States wants to improve her relations with the Muslim world. What for? In order to enable the Muslims to improve their own [inaudible]. Now we also would like to improve our policies with the Muslim world. Islam is not our enemy. The Muslims are not our enemies. We would like to live in peace with all religions. We would like in Egypt the same thing. So I believe we also have to be more balanced. And I couldn't recall a turn to the president which he says no I'm not interested.

WOLF BLITZER: Did the President ask you once again today to freeze all settlement activity?

PRESIDENT PERES: The President told me this is the policy of the United States. But I told him this is the policy, but there was also a pragmatic situation over the last 40 years, for example, concerning Jerusalem. For 40 years no Israeli government, either from the right or from the left, built in the Arab suburbs in Jerusalem, we are going to continue. So the United States officially didn't support it but pragmatically accepted it. The same is about the settlements in the West Bank. The United States is against building more or building new settlements. We are a democratic country and the best the present government can do is not to build new settlements and to limit the building only in the existing settlements in the built up area.

WOLF BLITZER: You support that?

PRESIDENT PERES: If I support it? It's an act of government. This is the will of the people. And I respect the will of the people. So I support the democratic system. Another present consideration – this is the best we can achieve. While the United States will not change its principles for the transition period it can be as pragmatic as all of we are.

WOLF BLITZER: Is the UN General Assembly going to vote to recognize an independent Palestinian state in September?

PRESIDENT PERES: It's a possibility. And this is a mistake.

WOLF BLITZER: Why?

PRESIDENT PERES: Because peace must be the result of an agreement.

WOLF BLITZER: You do support a Palestinian state?

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes 100% percent

WOLF BLITZER: You support a 2 state solution

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes sir

WOLF BLITZER: And everybody knows what the outline of that Palestinian state will be

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes

WOLF BLITZER: So what's the problem?

PRESIDENT PERES: The problem is the delineation of the exact borders and how to answer the security needs of Israel itself being alone in the Middle East. Because the Palestinians are split. You have Abbas the President who is for peace but you have Hamas who wants to destroy Israel. While we respect very much the position of Abbas, we cannot close our eyes to the danger of Hamas in Gaza. We left Gaza completely out of our own free will. We said and we repeatedly said it we don't want to return to Gaza. We left Gaza – in order to bring back the settlers we had to mobilize 75,000 policemen. We have had to pay \$2.5 billion compensation. We left Gaza and Hamas took over from the hands of Fatah. And they started shooting at us. We cannot understand to this very day, why are they shooting? What are the reasons? We left Gaza and are not coming back. What is the purpose? What do they want to achieve?

WOLF BLITZER: So the question is if the vote is happening in September at the UN General Assembly to recognize a Palestinian state, Israel is a member of the General Assembly, you think Israel will vote against this resolution?

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes.

WOLF BLITZER: Did the President of the United States tell you how the United States would vote?

PRESIDENT PERES: I didn't ask him.

WOLF BLITZER: Did he raise the issue with you.

PRESIDENT PERES: I judge by what they did. The United States did whatever they can to have a preference of an agreed peace, not an imposed peace. The United Nations can vote. Now I ask you, I'm asking myself, can they stop terror? Can they answer the danger of Iran? What does it mean to have a resolution in the air? Who will answer those dangers? Is the United Nations capable of doing it? They are not capable. They must be responsible. We cannot solve the problems just by issuing declarations, you have to relate to the real problems.

WOLF BLITZER: Is President Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, committed to the peace process?

PRESIDENT PERES: In my judgment, yes.

WOLF BLITZER: And Prime Minister Fayyad?

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes I think maybe this is the best group we could have.

WOLF BLITZER: So you should take advantage of that opportunity and negotiate peace with them.

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes, Right. But they too have their own conditions, and Israel has their own conditions, to get peace. Maybe more psychological than material. But the psychological gap is also a problem and we are handling it in a free manner. I do believe and I do hope it is possible to bridge over the differences between President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

WOLF BLITZER: But nothing is happening right now?

PRESIDENT PERES: I think there is an attempt to achieve it but I wouldn't go into details, and I wouldn't give up the hope that we can reopen negotiations.

WOLF BLITZER: Have you seen this Israeli Peace Initiative which 200 Israelis have now signed including former leaders of the military the security services calling for a Palestinian state basically in the pre-'67 borders including the capital in East Jerusalem.

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes.

WOLF BLITZER: Do you support this peace Israeli Peace Initiative?

PRESIDENT PERES: I have to support the policy of the government. It is a democratic country. And with my due respect to the opposition, I have to respect the majority and the majority today is for a two-state solution but with a very heavy emphasis on security and mutual understandings and agreement.

WOLF BLITZER: And as part of that agreement would you be willing to give up land of pre-'67 Israel to the Palestinians in exchange for some land in the Palestinian territories that would become part of the State of Israel... as part of a final peace settlement with the Palestinians?

PRESIDENT PERES: We are willing and ready to go for a swap. If we need some percentage to have agreed and secure borders we shall compensate with other pieces of land.

WOLF BLITZER: In other words, maybe part of the Galilee or the Negev?

PRESIDENT PERES: No, no, no. What is decided is decided. I do not believe the Arabs would like to divorce Israel. For them it is hurting their basic rights to live where they used to live. So I wouldn't force anybody. Peace must be done by agreement and I think it can be achieved in an agreed manner.

WOLF BLITZER: How close in your opinion, government of Israel, is Iran to building a nuclear bomb?

PRESIDENT PERES: I really don't know the answer. There are different ideas – some say a year, two years, three years. It's very hard to know because it's very hard to measure where exactly they are, they Iranians. But I do believe that a nuclear Iran is a problem for the rest of the world and I think that Israel should not monopolize Iran as our private menace. A nuclear bomb in the hands of fanatic and irresponsible people are dangerous for Washington, for New York, for Paris, for Moscow, for everyone. And I believe all of them today including also the Russians understand that the nuclear bomb in the hands of fanatic people is the greatest danger to the peace in the world.

WOLF BLITZER: Is it your opinion that Iran recently suffered a major setback in its nuclear weapons program by cyber warfare, the Stuxnet worm, that has been widely reported.

PRESIDENT PERES: I know what I read in the papers.

WOLF BLITZER: I think you know more than that.

PRESIDENT PERES: Well what I know is not far from what's being written. But I don't think I have to take a position on intelligence and I don't have to go into figures and numbers which are uncertain.

WOLF BLITZER: But without getting into who was responsible for that, did it seriously set back Iran's nuclear program?

PRESIDENT PERES: I don't have a definite answer to that.

WOLF BLITZER: Do you want to tell us who was responsible for it?

PRESIDENT PERES: Why is it needed.

WOLF BLITZER: I'm a journalist I'm curious.

PRESIDENT PERES: You're a journalist, I'm a politician. I don't have to answer those questions. (laughter)

WOLF BLITZER: I didn't really expect you to tell me. How much of a role is Iran playing, in your opinion, in the Middle East in North Africa right now in this unrest that we're seeing.

PRESIDENT PERES: Well they are spending. By the way whoever has oil loses his balance of consideration, from Venezuela up to Iran. Oil is not being produced, oil is being discovered. So it's easy money and they don't need the agreement of their people to spend it and they spend it frivolously. To give a billion dollars for example to sustain Hezbollah, while there is 30% unemployment in Iran, to take away bread from the youngsters and spend it on enriched uranium is a scandal. And I do believe that the best way to change the situation in Iran is to support the Iranian people who are ashamed of their own government.

I believe that in dealing with Iran the economic sanctions are important, but what I feel is missing is the moral call. Of all corruptions I think moral corruption is the most dangerous one. Today Iran is the model of moral corruption: misusing money, calling for terror for death for hatred, without having any message neither for their own people nor for the rest of world. They spend money in Lebanon, in Sudan, in Hamas – they're also trying to arrive in South America. What for? What is really the ambition of Ahmadinejad? What does he want? Or the supreme Leader of Khameni. What do they want? What they want in my judgment is to be greater than they are – they want greatness. Greatness is something that is very hard to achieve if you don't have it. You cannot achieve it neither by force nor by decision. [inaudible]

It became dangerous since you have nuclear bombs, because for nuclear bombs you don't need a majority. You don't even need a minority. A small group of people can carry it from one place to another place. And that's the great problem.

WOLF BLITZER: A couple little things as we are almost out of time that you can just clarify. There is a report in some of the Israeli newspapers already that you asked President Obama to free the convicted American spy, Jonathan Pollard, did you?

PRESIDENT PERES: Yes

WOLF BLITZER: What's the argument?

PRESIDENT PERES: The argument is human. Not judgment but consideration. The man is sick; he's been in prison for a long time. I myself I am in charge of pardoning different people. I have 6,000 appeals a year and I have to check everything very carefully, Now, I am not an additional level for the judges, what the court decides I respect, but I am in power to use non-Judicial considerations: human suffering, the state of health and that's what they asked. I didn't ask him to change his mind about the wrongs that Pollard did but to consider the human consideration. Clemency not pardon.

WOLF BLITZER: What did he say?

PRESIDENT PERES: I didn't expect him to answer. I know myself that somebody tell me, ask me this type of question leave me alone I should make my considerations. I would just listen to what they have to say respectfully with respect and I didn't expect that the President would answer my request. I simply put the consideration before him.

WOLF BLITZER: We're out of time but I'll leave this conversation with you on one final thought, is there hope – because I think all these people here and the people watching on television right now -- that within the next few months that George Mitchell and the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and the President, someone can really breakthrough and help the Israeli and Palestinians achieve a peace agreement?

PRESIDENT PERES: I want to answer you seriously. It's a possibility not a certainty. I wouldn't exclude it but wouldn't say it's already achieved. Because all of us including the Israelis and Palestinians, we know that to move ahead involves taking risks and people don't feel easy taking risks, it's not a game. You may endanger your life. But not to take a risk is even more risky.

I spoke with Abu Mazen and I said look for years and years Egypt and Jordan really helped us drive at peace. Now, that Egypt has its problems and Jordan has its problems we have to come on their side too. Now how can we help them? What we can do is take out the conflict between us as a reason for who will win the confrontation between the young generation who wants to introduce freedom and the old generation who wants to continue [inaudible]. If we should take it out, then there is going to be elections in Egypt for the Parliament for the

president, then the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not be on top of the consideration then can consider freely what is good for Egypt. And I told the President of the Palestinian people let's bring it out, let's bring an end to the conflict.

I think they all realize the situation and that they have to make a choice between two risky situations. One is to make the necessary concessions to bring an end to the conflict. And the other if it wouldn't be done the conflict may color the final results of the young generation. I don't agree with Professor Huntington that this is a clash of civilizations. I think it's a clash of generations. I think there is a young generation that wants to enter a new age of freedom, of honesty, and maybe different from the old concept that democracy is just free expression but self-expression. They're education youngsters who went through university. 30-35% of them are unemployed and cannot find jobs. The problem is can Egypt escape poverty or not. Can they escape poverty? My answer is yes. Is the problem just financial? No. Today the problem is to understand that there is no longer a regional economy but a global economy. That way to introduce growth into an economy is not just through the traditional dependence on the land and cultivating the land but hanging on the potential that science and technology offers. And I think we have to enable them and have to free them from the old prejudices.

People prefer to remember than to think. About when they remember they forget about the things. They only remember the sunny side of the past but what they don't forget are prejudices. They don't forget prejudices. It is very hard to forget prejudices but we have to. We are facing a new world, a new era that doesn't hang up on the land but it hangs up on the science. Science doesn't have borders, science doesn't need to be achieved by armies, it cannot be controlled by police. It's open and free for all. The meaning of democracy today is not just to be equal but to have the right to be different. And we have to enable the Arab people to join in the new world. Only the new world can help them escape the traditional poverty.

WOLF BLITZER: Would it smart for the President of the United States to do what Jimmy Carter did and invite the parties, Israelis and Palestinians, to Camp David and negotiate a peace agreement?

PRESIDENT PERES: The President tried to do it and I wouldn't advise...

WOLF BLITZER: Which President?

PRESIDENT PERES: President Obama, he met with the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian President and I think the President is ready to do it but wants to make sure that in the wake of such a meeting there will be direct negotiations. And if the parties will agree to negotiations despite their differences. When President Carter invited Prime Minister Begin and

Mr. Sadat, Sadat was an exceptional statesman. He is the only Arab leader that I can think of who says I am ready to go to Jerusalem. I am ready to make peace. If we had more Sadats, the President would have more alternatives. But now I think the President is ready to make the necessary steps, provided that it won't just be a show. But in the wake of the meeting, there will be direct negotiations between the two parties.

He doesn't want to impose a solution. He really thinks – like all of us – that the solution from an agreement, not an imposition. And that's why I respect the President and he's trying to do the right thing. And careful not to create illusions and not to create something that is imaginative. So it is a different situation because there are different parties. And it is not a lost hope but neither is an assured prospect. It's a possibility and we have to work very hard, and very seriously to make this possibility into a reality. And that should be the task of all of us.

WOLF BLITZER: And on that note, thank you so much Mr. President and on behalf of all us good luck to you and to all the Israeli people, to the Palestinians and to the entire region. Thank you.

Robert Wexler: I want to thank President Peres and Wolf Blitzer and I also want to acknowledge my friend Congressman Jim Moran and apologize for missing him earlier...and thank you for joining us this evening.