**PASSIA Meeting 2012**

**Date:** Thursday**,** 29/ March/ 2012

**Time:** 17,00-19,00 PM, Jerusalem

**Topic:** U.S. Presidential Elections and the Middle East

**Speaker:** Prof. Everret Mendlshon, Professor of the History of Science, Emeritus & Founder and first president of the Cambridge based Institute for Peace and International Security

**Moderator:** Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Head of PASSIA

Agenda:

* Presentation by Prof. Everret Mendlshon
* A General Discussion: Q&A

Proceedings:

* An introduction of PASSIA and its programs
* Presentation
* Q&As

Presentation:

1- USA Presidential Elections:

* Prof. Mendlshon: Anyone who claims to have an understanding of what is happening in the Middle East is not to be taken seriously. Because of the uncertainty that envelopes the entire situation.
* Prof. Mendlshon referred to an article of the New York Times by Ethan Bronner that was published on March, 7, 2012 and entitled “Mideast Dins Drown Out Palestinians”.
* He commented on the article by saying: U.S. politicians must realize that the world will be different and that the presidency will shy away from dramatic action during election’s year.
* The President’s taking a specific concrete position towards the Middle East is a political vulnerability especially during election’s year. Because of Jewish Americans and Christian Fundamentalists to whom the security and wellbeing of Israel is a priority.
* Jews in the United States have always been closer to the Democratic Party as 70% of them usually vote for democrats.
* Today they are more open to republicans and started to form new alliances with them. And have invited republican officials and candidates to give speeches at the AIPAC, these candidates made public statements that support Israeli more than Israelis themselves would do.
* Obama has pledged undying support to Israel, but stood by his position that opposes launching a war against Iran.
* The USA’s opposition to launching a war against Iran resonated in Israeli Newspapers headlines, the English copy of Haaretz first page headline on March, 29, 2012 read: “Israel’s Plans to attack Iran put on hold until next year at the earliest.”
* The details of a classified war game that was held by the US army to assess the repercussions of an Israeli attack on Iran was mad public (New York Times, March, 19, 2012), the game predicted that 200 American navy officers will die in an Iranian missile attack that targets an American naval ship in response to an Israeli raid.
* It is very clear now that the U.S doesn’t want a war with Iran now, it is also obvious that no American president can afford another war or military escalation in Afghanistan.
* Tension is high between Pres. Obama and PM Netanyahu who would not like to see Obama reelected.

Palestinian- Israeli Conflict:

* If a war on Iran was launched the Palestinian- Israeli peace issue will be pushed out from the scene.
* Rhetorically: the USA and Israel are still committed to the two states solution.
* However, the two states solution is no longer viable in my opinion.
* There are a number of other possible options suggested by both sides:
* A Democratic Secular State in all of Palestine for both Palestinians and Jews.
* One state with dominant Jew population (this state includes the West Bank and Jerusalem and leaves Gaza out because, in Gaza strip alone there are 1.6 million Palestinians).
* One state two nations which is theoretically viable but unpractical and unrealistic.
* Sticking with the status quo, after forty years the Israelis would realize that it maintains a disfranchised population. Which is not the case!
* The Palestinians and Israelis should go for the least bad option.
* Another article highlighted by Prof. Mendlshon is “Obama’s AIPAC trifecta” by Gray Kamiya published by Salon.com on March 8, 2012.
* The article’s subtitle and first Paragraph explains the trifecta in mind: “He schooled Natanyahu, made the GOP warmonger look like idiots, and weakened the Israel lobby”

“President Obama just gave Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a serious whupping. In the process, he greatly reduced the risk of a catastrophic war, made his saber-rattling Republican opponents look like idiots, and seriously weakened the powerful Israel lobby. And he did it all while pledging undying support for Israel. It was a virtuoso display of political judo.”

* The U.S. presidential elections will take place after eight months from now, I will make an conjecture “the US army officials said to the president that they will not support him publicly if he engages in a war with Iran”

USA and the Middle East:

* The U.S. explicitly doesn’t want to engage militarily in the ME whether in Iran or Syria at the moment, unlike Libya where they were involved under the NATO’s umbrella last year.
* The army wants to withdraw from Afghanistan rapidly and clearly as soon as they can, while hoping that Iraq won’t explode anytime soon.
* However, the U.S. recommitted itself to the $1.3 billion of military aid to Egypt. This was meant to express its support to Egypt during the hard times “we are there for you”.

USA and Political Islam:

* Prof. John Esposito is organizing a tour for Muslim Brotherhood members in the United States.
* This implies the following: The willingness of the United States to receive Muslim Brotherhood representatives and issue visas for them. And the willingness of the Brotherhood to establish connections with the USA.
* I have seen change in the Muslim Brotherhood agenda in the Past six months
* My advice to all politicians is not to judge the Middle East according to previous criteria

**Q&A:**

* We believe that the Palestinians are no longer on the USA’s agenda?
* It is obvious that the USA will not get into a fight with Israel over the Palestinians, in fact if I was a policy maker I won’t either. It is hard to say that this is a political position I am willing to take. The Palestinian issue is way down in the line in deed. Abu Mazen’s announcing his willingness to reenter negotiations with the Israel if Israel stops its settlement’s activity is a smart move because he knows that Israel won’t deliver in this case. However, if the Palestinian state was recognized I believe the negotiation process will go forward. The negotiations will be on state to state bases instead of occupation- occupier bases.
* But Palestinians are still alive in the Arab awakening; the Palestinian cause is at the core of the Arab awakening.
* In a meeting I attended at Carter Center in the USA in 1985, I have asked President Carter why American presidents start showing interest in the Palestinian cause after leaving office? Pres. Carter answered by saying, no it is the Arabs who do nothing more than lip service to the Palestinians.
* Indeed if the Arabs started demanding more from the Americans maybe things will change. However, it is important to highlight that President Carter didn’t have a strong foreign policy or international affairs background before serving as president.
* You know Pres. Clinton almost achieved a breakthrough in the Palestinian- Israeli conflict. However, for President Obama, I believe that a second term President Obama will not be as nice to the Israelis as the first term President Obama. You can’t insult an American President like Netanyahu did and expect no answer from him. Obama’s memory is vivid, I believe that a secret file in a secret drawer in the Whitehouse is there recording every insult and embarrassment the Israeli PM gave the USA’s president and there will be consequences.
* Regarding the Arab spring, the USA has no idea what to do, they don’t have a clear policy or Agenda.
* The policy in the Middle East for dealing with the Palestinian- Israeli conflict needs to change from critical to suggestive. Instead of just criticizing the USA’s policy or the Palestinian- Israeli impasse, they should start presenting suggestions to get out of the current deadlock.
* There is nothing new to learn about the Palestinian- Israeli conflict, it is only a matter of political will to resolve the issue.
* The Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons might go ahead with a plan of a mass hunger strike for the entire 6000 prisoners. What kind of effect that might have on the Israeli government’s and the USA’s position?
* On the political level it won’t change much, but it will be a non-violence symbolic movement that will bring the world’s attention again to the Palestinian plight.
* Do you think that the Israelis might attempt to discredit Obama?
* They might try to, but the thing is if they failed to discredit him and he wins the Presidential elections. His memory is vivid, and Israel as a state will suffer from the results.
* What differentiates the Israelis and Palestinians political approach?
* The only difference is that the Israelis know what they want; they knew what they want from day one. The Palestinians don’t seem to know what they want until now!
* Do you think that the re-annexation of the West Bank to Jordan is possible?
* The last thing the Jordanian leadership wants is to annex Palestine. King Hussein when he gave up sovereignty over the West Bank in 1988 he did it because he did not want to be responsible for Palestine. Anyways, this option is no longer viable.
* What are the implications of Netanyahu demanding the USA’s and Europe recognition of Israel as a Jewish state?
* First of all Pres. Obama’s recognition of Israel as a Jewish state within his speech was rather rhetorical than official. However, in my opinion Israel’s demand for such recognition is an attempt to set another barrier in the way of the negotiations. As you all know neither Jordan, nor Egypt recognized Israel as a Jewish State when they signed the peace agreements. Requiring recognizing Israel as a Jewish state as prerequisite for pursuing the negotiations is meant to hurdle the peace process.
* Do you believe that USA is inconsistent in dealing with Political Islam, as they are willing to deal with Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood, but are not willing to deal with Hamas?
* There are two sides to this story. First of all the USA’s declination to work with Hamas is because of Hamas’s refusal of previous PLO’s agreements. In addition to Hamas’s reluctance in terms of engaging with the USA. However, in my opinion the USA might consider reengaging with Hamas if the later accepts and endorses the PLO’s agreements, this however will be determined by the terms and conditions of the Fateh- Hamas reconciliation.
* What is your message to the Palestinians?
* The Palestinians need to be very clear about the kind of recognition they are willing to give to Israel in return of the Palestinian State declaration.
* It is clear to me that things have slipped back to a low point because Israel is controlled by a right wing government and the Palestinians don’t really know what they want.
* Israel’s portrayal of Palestinians as primitive peasants or terrorist within the Israeli curricula. Meanwhile, the Israeli Ministry of Education censorship over the Palestinian curricula to prevent any inclusion of the Palestinian culture or history in classrooms. This will build a generation that is more leaning towards conflict, racism, and discrimination, instead of Peace??
* I believe that the Israeli curricula not only present the Palestinian as the “other” but also as the “enemy”. And this in fact can only be described as saddening.