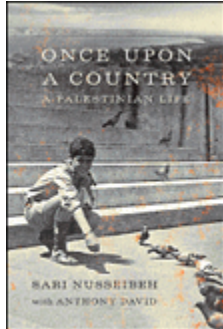




## Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life

Sari Nusseibeh , Joanne J. Myers

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### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to welcome you all here this morning.

Today it is a really great honor to have Sari Nusseibeh here as our guest speaker. He will be discussing his book, a wonderful book actually, called [Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life](#). It will be available for you to purchase at the end of

the hour today.

How does one person work to bring peace to a region, especially when that region is embroiled in turmoil? Well, if you are Sari Nusseibeh and living in a very hostile environment, there is only one way of advancing the idea of democracy to your people. It begins by advocating a path of nonviolence and following a course that counsels your neighbors against hate and myth-making.

Our guest this morning, who is both president of and professor at [Al-Quds University](#), which is the only Arab university in Jerusalem, was a believer in Israeli-Palestinian dialogue long before it was in vogue. Notable for his willingness to speak out, not only against the Israeli occupation of the Territories, but also against the tactics of Palestinian suicide bombers, Professor Nusseibeh has been an advocate of nonviolence for some time.

In the late 1960s, when so many of his compatriots still dreamed of ridding the land of those it considered intruders, he argued for coexistence among Arabs and Jews in a secular, binational state. When he later came along to the idea of a two-state solution, with Israel living in peace alongside Palestine, he stood his ground as many Palestinians were agitating for a single state.

In fact, from his time teaching side by side with Israelis at Hebrew University and throughout his appointment by [Yasser Arafat](#) to administer Arab Jerusalem, he has held fast to a two-state solution, even as the powers around him insisted that it was impossible to achieve this end.

Dr. Nusseibeh's philosophy begins with the premise that Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews are natural allies who are now confronted with the presence of dividing forces, [Hamas](#) and an Israeli security wall, both which make it much more difficult to engage in any dialogue. As he sees it, this leaves but one choice, which is to turn this hatred into mutual understanding.

While certainly not a polemic, *Once Upon a Country* is a remarkable tale which unfolds at the crossroads of history. More than a memoir, it is a chronicle of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that combines one individual's vast experience and his long reflections about what it means to be a Palestinian today.

Dr. Nusseibeh was raised to represent his country. His family's roots in Palestine can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when his ancestors served the Holy City as judges, teachers, politicians, and as doorkeepers to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. His father was a governor of Jerusalem. Educated at Oxford and at Harvard, he was trained to build upon the legacy of his father's support for coexistence and a negotiated solution to the problems of the region.

But the wars of 1967 and 1973 spelled the beginning of the end for the vision of a unified Palestine. It is his response to these events and to those that followed that provides us with a recent history of this ongoing conflict.

This past week has witnessed a sharp escalation of Israeli-Palestinian violence in the West Bank and in Gaza, combined with reports of increased bombings attributed to Islamic radicals. The issue of how to prevent the rhetoric of hatred and despair from getting louder and more intense on both sides is challenging. While it is getting tougher to talk about a resolution to this conflict, it is only natural to seek a voice of reason. Sari Nusseibeh is that voice, and *Once Upon a Country* captures his message.

Please join me in welcoming our guest today, Sari Nusseibeh.

### Remarks

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good morning to all of you. I am very honored to be with you today. I feel a little bit overwhelmed actually, because I feel myself to be in the company of very educated, very well-informed, and critical minds, all expecting me to say something they don't know. I am sure that I have nothing new to tell you.

Several years ago, I went to give a talk at the Hebrew University. It was a time when I had just been appointed by Yasser Arafat to represent the PLO [[Palestine Liberation Organization](#)] in Jerusalem.

A couple of weeks before that, I had written an article in the newspaper basically saying that the violence that had erupted made no sense, that both the Israelis and the Palestinians had to come back to their senses. The article was titled "What Next?"—what, after all the killing and after everybody has been happy and satisfied to kill as many people as they wanted, what else, what afterwards?

I said afterwards both sides will just have to come back to square one, have to come back to the table, have to negotiate. I said at the time that they had to negotiate. The framework within which they could negotiate is not something that needs discovery. Everybody more or less knows what that framework is. It is a framework that is based more or less on a two-state solution, more or less on the so-called [Clinton Parameters](#), more or less on what is now called the Arab initiative, more or less on the [Declaration of Principles](#), which I personally signed a little bit later with an Israeli aspiring political leader, [Ami Ayalon](#)—I will come back to him if you like—that this was the thing that we all had to come back to. So I said enough is enough. There is no reason to go on killing and fighting. It just makes more sense to come back and negotiate.

Now, the problem was at the time—still is—why does a solution that looks extremely rational, that looks extremely sensible, probably by agreement or consensus of as many rational and common-sense people as possible, why does such a solution nonetheless in politics not get translated into reality? What is the secret?

To go back to the lecture that I gave at Hebrew University—by the way, I just want to add a note here. I had written that article in the newspaper. I wrote it both in Arabic and in Hebrew and I published it on the same day in the local Arabic paper *Al-Quds*, and also in one of the Israeli newspapers, *Arutz*, so it appeared simultaneously on the same day. I wanted to address both Israelis and Palestinians because I thought that there was no sense in distinguishing between them on national grounds, that people of common sense somehow were on the same side whether they were Israeli or Palestinian, and that's why I addressed both sides at the same time or both nations at the same time.

When I wrote those articles, I didn't really arouse a lot of interest. But when I went to give that talk at

the Hebrew University—Anthony [David] here, to whom we can all credit the better part of the writing of this book, is smiling at me as I relate this story because he knows it very well, of course — when I arrived at the Hebrew University, I saw this long queue of people standing, all wishing to get into the hall. I thought there was either a jazz group or a new film that was playing.

I asked somebody I was walking with, "What's happening? Who's there?" It turned out that they had all come to hear me. The reason they had all come to hear me was not what I wrote, because by itself clearly that did not arouse any interest, but by then the interest was aroused by who I had become over the past few days, namely I had become the PLO man in Jerusalem, so that what I was saying somehow became important. That is really quite crazy, because surely if something is important it should be regarded as important in terms of the content, not in terms of the messenger.

However, to go back to the lecture, as I gave it an idea struck me. Very often this happens to me. I don't prepare my talks or presentations, and I always hope that God will somehow provide me with inspiration as I speak in scary situations like this. An idea did strike me.

I said to the people—I was talking to mostly Israelis—that many years ago this land, the land of Palestine, Israel, Holy Land, was filled with prophets. What did the prophets do? The prophets went around from person to person, from door to door, and tried to deliver a message, to create faith among the people they saw, faith in a future that was sort of a little bit way beyond life, in fact faith in some kind of future in the world of the other world, in the hereafter, in God, in a world beyond life. And, somehow or another, they managed to get people behind them. Somehow or another, they managed to in fact create such support for the faith that they were propounding that it basically became quite preponderant.

I said that perhaps this is what we need to do today. In other words, to go back to my original question, how do you translate what seems to be a rational solution to a problem into reality? To answer that question, I said, maybe what you need is a new kind of prophet. The prophet that we need is a prophet that will once again try to market a vision, and the vision that needs to be marketed is a vision of the future.

But the future we need to have faith in is not a future in the hereafter, but a future here on earth, a future after the conflict, a future of peace between Israelis and Palestinians after the conflict. That is to say that we need perhaps to create faith among the people, Israelis and Palestinians primarily, in what could in fact happen, in what could in fact become of their lives here on earth if they were to bring about peace between them.

I said in that lecture that God no longer apparently sends messengers from somewhere else, so what we need for such a miracle to occur is the people themselves to make that miracle. What did I mean by "the people themselves?" I meant ordinary men and women on both sides.

That is what actually drove me at one stage to work with Ami Ayalon to sign a petition, a Declaration of Principles, outlining a solution of six principles. My thought was if we could get enough people to sign on both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, that would in fact put enough pressure on the two leaderships that would then push those leaderships, impose upon them the need to reach a settlement.

Now, Arafat at the time was still alive. He passed away. We had elections in Palestine. The people in Palestine voted to replace him, or to substitute him, by [Abu Mazen](#). It was considered at the time that this election was in fact a vote for peace, that by voting for Abu Mazen the Palestinians had done what was required of them, they had done what was required of them for voting for peace. But unfortunately, as you well know, after Abu Mazen was elected, nothing in fact happened, and we are where we are today.

So today I ask myself: Can we do this again? Is it possible to move forward, especially in the context of violence that exists? You just heard about the violence that is once again erupting.

My answer is today that the situation is different. Whereas four or five years ago, when I stood up and said the leaders can't do it, the international community can't do it, so we the people have to do it, and

we started this process at the time, today I feel that the situation is totally different. Today I feel that the people on both sides are totally helpless.

Actually, I feel even the leaders on both sides probably today are totally helpless, in the sense that perhaps you have a strong leadership on the Palestinian side, maybe a weak leadership today on the Israeli side. But, unfortunately, the weak leadership on the Israeli side is therefore not in a position to bring about peace with the Palestinians; and the strong leadership on the Palestinian side is not interested in bringing peace for the Israelis or for the Palestinians.

So what can we do? My own feeling is that the only thing that can be done, again to go back to miracles and miracle making and faith, is to introduce an extra, additional dimension. In this case, in my opinion, maybe the extra dimension that should be introduced is the international community, and the international community led by none other—surprise, surprise—than the United States.

Now, what can the United States do in this kind of situation? I want to give you a kind of imaginary scenario. I realize it is crazy, I realize it sounds simplistic, but it is an imaginary scenario, you must understand.

Let us assume that, just like whenever it was—when was it, in 1976, or when was it that [President Sadat](#) made his visit?

**VOICE:** 1978.

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** This time around, I don't know how busy President Bush is, what his schedule is like, but let us say President Bush or [Condoleezza Rice](#)—I think ideally it would be [President Bush](#) and Condoleezza Rice—were to charter a plane and to go to the Middle East and pick up a few leaders. I would choose to go to Saudi Arabia first, perhaps also certainly Jordan, Cairo, so we have the Saudi king, we have the Jordanian king, we have the Egyptian president. Since their excellencies the ambassadors of Tunisia and Algeria are here, I would also suggest the charter plane to pass by Algeria and Tunisia.

So have a few presidents, kings, prime ministers—four or five will be enough—pick up Abu Mazen on the way, of course, and land in Tel Aviv, and sit in the hotel. There are a couple of nice hotels in Jerusalem. King David is one. The American Colony is one. Simply sit there and declare that they are going to be sitting there for the following few days.

Invite the Israeli Prime Minister and ask the Israeli Prime Minister to immediately begin negotiations with the Arab delegates, the kings and the presidents, on the basis of the latest Arab peace plan.

Now, the Arab presidents and kings have actually met recently and once again reiterated their commitment to this peace plan. So far, of course, there has been a lot of diplomacy being played in the backstage to try and get the peace plan together, to try to get the two sides to begin negotiations.

But there is a lot of bickering being done at this moment about this particular item or that. In my own experience, bickering over items simply can waste an opportunity in the context of the Middle East.

If we have already the readiness and the willingness and a declared intention to reach peace, I think that this is sufficient to be used in order to get the negotiations started.

Now, I think that if President Bush or Condoleezza Rice does this, manages to convince Arab leaders who recently sat together and once again declared their commitment to the peace plan, if you can convince them to come along with her, and land in Tel Aviv, and bring [Olmert](#) to the table and begin negotiations—I am not suggesting Olmert himself; I am thinking of whoever will do all the technical details of the negotiation—I can assure you there is no detail in the possible negotiation between Israel and Palestine that has not already been done, nothing. You name it, and people have actually worked on it, and they have worked on it for years and years. And I mean people, technicians, technical negotiators, and so on. Everything is in the drawers. We don't need inventions or new creations to get the agreement to be signed. All we need is the context, and this actually can be created.

I think in such a way perhaps the environment, political environment, can indeed be changed and we can indeed in fact reach an agreement.

I believe that the majority of people in Israel and Palestine are ready for an agreement. On the surface it doesn't look this way. On the surface you look and you see extremism, fundamentalism; you see anger, frustration; you hear about hatred. But I think it is a surface expression of disillusionment. I believe that if one is able to provide the people on both sides with hope, if better than hope we can in fact create faith among the people on both sides in the future, than I think then a peace agreement can be done because the people are ready.

In most of the polls, as you know, that have been done on both sides there is readiness on both sides to reach an agreement on two states.

Let me say one final thing about one state and two states. In a sense, it is also something to do with my own commitments and feelings. I think I owe you to be clear about this.

I am not personally an ardent nationalist. In other words, I don't look upon the Palestinian state, or any state, as an end in itself. I look upon the state, or any political structure, as a means to an end. My own interests are that in any political system I am part of that I am respected, I am given my due respect as a human being, that my values are respected as a human being by that system and in that system. This comes first.

My involvement in the resistance to occupation, nonviolent as it has been but persistent, has been predicated only on the principle that I want to be as free as I deserve to be as a human being and as equal with other human beings as I deserve to be. It has never been predicated on the fact that I am, for example, Palestinian or that my occupier is Israeli. So that if I were, say, Martian and my occupier were I don't know from what planet, I would not have different ideas. My commitments are basically human commitments.

Now, if my values I find can be addressed only in the context of one state, it is that which I will go for. If my values can only be addressed in the context of two states, it is that which I will go for.

I think in any case one cannot force a relationship of a political system by one party against the other. In other words, when you talk about the possibility of one state, such a possibility, such a system, cannot be brought about by force, in my view. If it is to be brought about, it has to be brought about by the agreement of everybody concerned. If you look at the context, neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians are actually interested in having one state.

And if you bring about two states, it also has to come about by the agreement of the two sides. You cannot impose a solution. The solution has to be the solution that people want.

So one state or two states to me is indifferent. What is important are the values. What is important is that the solution comes about through negotiation, through mutual understanding. In my own view, if the two sides sit around the table, they will find a lot of things in common, far more in common to work with than either side has with parties abroad.

I would like to say finally that I am very grateful. I am grateful to my wife for having stayed with me all this time and bore up with what we had to go through. She has become more stuck to Jerusalem than I am over the years. I think I did something wrong or something happened. I keep telling her, "Look at New York. It looks beautiful. How about coming over?" She says, "Only for a visit. We have to go back to Jerusalem."

I want to also express my thanks in this particular context of the book to Anthony, without whom of course also this wouldn't have come about. It is a very wonderfully written book. Everything that is good about it—style, writing, ideas, and so on—could only have been done with Anthony or by him. So thanks to him.

Thank you for listening.

**JOANNE MYERS:** I guess if your fantasy could become a reality we would all be very grateful.

I would like to open the floor to questions.

### Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** Professor Nusseibeh, the [Camp David proposals of President Clinton](#), which were endorsed by [Ehu Barak](#), seemed to conform in most respects with, among other things, the Declaration of Principles and the [Saudi Arabian proposals](#). Why do you think that Yasser Arafat turned them down?

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** That's a very difficult question, sir. As you know, there have been many interpretations and many theories about this.

One theory, and that I mention in the book, has to do specifically with the way that the Jerusalem issue was approached. Apparently, there wasn't enough sensitivity to how this was dealt with. Now, that is possible, and quite a few other interpretations are possible.

The thing about Camp David is that nobody really has a good, comprehensive, bird's-eye view of what happened. The negotiations in Camp David did not take place in the same way, for instance, as the [negotiations a little bit later in Taba](#) took place. At Taba you had a whole group sitting at the same table with the whole group on the other side, Israelis and Palestinians. You had somebody sitting there, the Europeans, who were taking down the minutes. So at the end of the day we had a full picture from a neutral point of view on what was happening.

Now, at Camp David, unfortunately, there were different negotiations taking place at the same time bilaterally, with different people, and it isn't really clear at the end of the day exactly what went on.

Nonetheless, the Clinton proposals do in fact correspond with, as you said, the other ideas. I think if we ever, if I hope, come back to negotiations, we have to be guided by the Clinton proposals as well as by the other relevant ideas which all more or less relate to each other.

I think it is unfortunate what happened at Camp David. I think, rather than blame each other for what happened, I think we should understand what went wrong, scientifically if you like, in order to not fall into the same mistake next time, in the next round.

**QUESTION:** If I may, I would like to ask you two questions. Unless I missed something that you said, I think that this chartered airplane on its way to Tel Aviv did not pick up the prime minister of the Palestinians. You did?

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** It picked up Abu Mazen.

**QUESTIONER:** He's the president.

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** But at the airport in Gaza.

**QUESTIONER:** And the prime minister, who represents Hamas, was not on that plane, and he represents, as you indicated earlier in your talk, a very powerful opposition to a settlement. So I'm wondering how you would deal with that opposition in terms of your own plan or your own scheme for bringing about a settlement.

My second question is you spoke about respect for the individual, but surely a mass of individuals make up a nation. I have never heard a proposal for a settlement of this issue in which the Palestinians had a proper army, which is a characteristic of a respected state in the international system. I am wondering, are you willing to accept a Palestinian state that is restricted from having the accoutrements or the attributes of a normal state?

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** It is unfortunate that the normal state is described in the way that you do. I will come back to this in a minute.

But in answer to the first question, I was assuming that it would pick up Abu Mazen and not the prime minister. I was assuming that if an agreement is reached through Abu Mazen's participation, then this can be put to a plebiscite, and then the Palestinians can decide whether they want it or not. If the Palestinian people then decide they want it, then the people that represent them will also have to reflect this.

Now, another scenario, another idea if you like, is the following. Instead of President Bush taking the trouble of taking the airplane and passing by all the presidents and going on to Tel Aviv, somebody in Israel, a leader, say Olmert, stands up and says: "I am prepared to offer the Palestinians the following peace plan," and he offers the peace plan—for example the one that I signed, the Declaration of Principles, with Ami Ayalon—and says the following: "We, the Israelis, and I, the Israeli leader, am prepared to commit myself to this plan with a Palestinian government that is democratically elected, which is also willing to commit itself to this plan."

This might then bring about the call for new elections. At that point in time, the Palestinian Party definitely will come forward and say, "I am prepared to develop a program, a party platform, which is based on this, and I will run for election on this basis"—or [Fatah](#) itself can do this, or Abu Mazen himself can do this.

I think also there the chances are that what we will have is then a replacement of the existing ideology of the ruling system in Palestine.

Now, with regard to militarization, the sixth principle in the six-point document that I signed with Ami Ayalon actually calls for the non-militarization of a Palestinian state.

Now, some Palestinian colleagues have said to me, "How come you are asking? Was this a condition that the Israelis have asked you to accept?" My response has been to this that this is a condition that I make as a Palestinian.

I don't want any arms, and I'll tell you why. Because when you buy arms or weapons, it is for one of two reasons: it is either, rationally speaking, to conquer another country; or to defend yourself against another army. But in our case as Palestinians, however much we arm ourselves, we are neither going to be able to conquer Israel with the arms that we have, nor are we going to be able to defend ourselves either against Israel, or anybody else for that matter.

So what does it remain? It remains that we spend our money on arms that are totally irrelevant from our point of view. Far better to spend the money on things that are relevant. For us, the Palestinians, the matters that are relevant, to go back to the individuals and to our rights, are the matters that actually affect our lives—education, social services, health, development, the economy. This is where we have our future, not in making ourselves armed.

I believe furthermore that actually we are stronger the less armed we are, and we are strongest, even facing Israel, which is a nuclear country. We are stronger, and can be stronger even than Israel, which is a nuclear country, if we are totally armless. That is what the position of a normal state is, in my understanding of normal.

**QUESTION:** It was wonderful to listen to a Palestinian intellectual. You outlined very clearly, which we have heard and understood, many of us, that there is a rational solution which is reasonable to a majority, a strong majority at that, on both sides. But to get that process in motion you need some catalysts, and you picked two kings, a president, and also the president of the United States with his foreign secretary. That is a very good group.

But as far as the United States, I think this question. It is so necessary to have bipartisan support of this. In a very modest way, Sweden broke it in 1988, the first meeting between the PLO and the United

States, and we saw to it that we had help from [Rita Hauser](#) in New York and [Stanley Scheinbaum](#) from Los Angeles, a Democrat and a Republican. That was very useful for gaining the support of [George Shultz](#) for the plan. Of course, his support was instrumental in the end. So I say that you have to have this. You should also have a Democrat onboard that plane. If it be the Speaker of the House or not, I will not say.

But then there are other forces which I think could be useful catalysts to get things moving on the Israeli-Palestinian track. We used to have two-track negotiations, Israel used to have with Syria and with the Palestinians. That was how Barak started. His idea was—I heard him say that—that one should energize the other when there was lack of progress on the other.

I don't think it would be a good thing perhaps to bring the Syrian President onboard, but if the Israelis could get the negotiations with Syria going, it is also a very rational solution, and even more reasonable than with you. It is easier: it is return our land or give our land in return for Arab recognition of Israel, which would be enormously important.

Thank you.

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** I think your suggestions, Your Excellency, are well taken. I think you are quite right.

The idea of the chartered plane only came to me as I was speaking now. I am willing to include, as long as the airplane is big enough, all the parties that you mentioned. Certainly, if you think about it, one should include, in fact, representatives from as many backgrounds as possible who will facilitate the discussions.

I am very well aware of the Swedish initiative back in 1988. And as I look towards the door now, I see the head of the agent of my book, Dorothy Harman [phonetic]. She just came in, it seems. I would also like to recognize her for having encouraged me to write this book. She worked it out with my wife behind my back as I was preparing to go spend a sabbatical at Harvard, which is related to the 1988 Swedish initiative, because at Harvard at the Radcliffe Institute I was the Rita Hauser Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute.

Of course I have known Rita Hauser for many years actually, and I have known other people who were involved in the Swedish initiative at the time. This was work that was extremely valuable also for the development of the peace camp in Israel. I was, in fact, involved from those early days in much of the work that was done in order to push for a general reconciliation at the formal level.

The idea of the chartered airplane, or Air Force One, is actually just this. We tend to think that matters in politics can only be settled in traditional ways. I believe that where the problem seems so complicated, where the human suffering seems so enormous, very often it ceases to make sense for decision-makers and politicians to address the problem in traditional ways. I think it is often in those situations necessary for actors to come out of the box, if you like, and to try something that is or sounds or seems totally crazy.

In this situation, in the situation of the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, we need for the choice of a better world a crazy effort in order to extricate us Israelis and Palestinians from the mess that we are now in. I believe it has to be done with a shock. That is why I need Air Force One, whatever it is called.

**QUESTION:** I think in your airplane that you propose maybe you should have a waiting list, because others might help.

I am concerned about what is taking place in Gaza. In Gaza the kidnapping of the British journalist is an illustration of the state of things in the Palestinian Territory. My question is: Is this because of helplessness, desperation, that things are being radicalized more than they are? We think Hamas is radical, but there is someone who is more radical than Hamas. Is it because of the state of things?



Second, why couldn't the Palestinian Authority deal with it effectively?

Third, will this phenomenon, if the state of hopelessness prevails, spread to the West Bank?

The final question is: What is the effect of this on the peace process? I don't want to spoil the atmosphere of optimism this morning.

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

I think everybody heard what His Excellency is saying, and I think it is very important to point out that indeed the situation in the Palestinian Territories is extremely difficult, probably more difficult than it has ever been in my own experience.

I think it is more difficult than it has ever been historically. I have asked older people on both sides actually, Israelis as well as Palestinians, "Has it ever been this bad between us?" I have been given the answer that in their own experience it has never been this bad.

We look back to the 1930s, for instance, as we look upon the Palestinian-Israeli history, and also the late 1940s, where we had a lot of conflict and bloodshed and so on, and suffering, human suffering. But apparently now, over the past few years, it has actually become much worse. This many people don't realize. It is actually much worse.

Therefore, there is reason to be depressed. I share His Excellency's point that I should be—and I want to say I am—depressed about the political situation.

There is a disintegration in our social and demographic structure in Palestine, whether in Gaza or in the West Bank. Last week, for the first time in my own experience, some people from a middle-class school, a respectable school in east Jerusalem, went and stabbed a colleague of theirs, seventeen or sixteen years old. They went to his house, knocked on the door, brought him out, had a brawl, and stabbed him. This is a story that would never, never have happened to my knowledge in the entire Palestinian history, that school students from that kind of background and that kind of school would do that kind of thing to each other.

Another person a week earlier in front of the Damascus Gate in the Old City was actually attacked with a sword and his throat slit.

So again, against a background of a worsening economic and social climate, a worsening climate of values, a climate of disintegration that is taking place.

Now, this makes one extremely depressed. I think, however, that because it is depressing, because it is like this, I think more effort should be spent. I insist that, in spite of the hatred and in spite of the anger and the frustration that one sees and one feels, that deep beneath, underneath that, there is the willingness, the readiness, on the part of the community on both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, to make that peace. I think people need a nudge.

I think it just doesn't make any sense to let matters just go on bleeding as they are, because, by the way, not just the Palestinians are bleeding, also the Israelis. The two are symbiotically connected. The Israelis cannot survive if the Palestinians bleed to death. It is in Israel's interest, as much as in our interest, to have a viable Palestinian state, and as quickly as possible.

**QUESTION:** First of all, I want to thank you for this message of hope, and there was a lot of hope in your message, which is unusual to hear today.

Let's assume that your hope and your visions are fulfilled and this plane arrives in Tel Aviv and all the cast of characters you mentioned sit down and agree and there is an agreement reached. Can they really withstand other forces in the region that are very powerful forces—such as Iran, such as [Hezbollah](#), and parts of Hamas—that really it is not in their interest or in any of their desires to have an agreement? Can

they withstand these forces that exist in the region?

**SARI NUSSEIBEH:** Before I say this, I want to tell you that I really shouldn't be standing up here and speaking as though I knew things more than you do. I really feel terrible about this. But I will tell you what I feel in my guts. It is very simplistic what I will tell you.

First of all, I don't believe in terms, in names— Hamas, this, that. I believe more importantly in people. People are what is important, not the names or the ideologies or the belief systems. It is the people that are important.

Secondly, I think the people are the same. That is to say whether you are in Iran, whether you are wearing a scarf in I don't know where, whatever you are doing, people are the same. They are driven by the same passions. They have the same values inside. They have the same needs, desires, concerns. People need to be respected, whether they are Iranian, whether they are Muslim, whether they are Buddhist, whether whatever. They need to be respected.

I think it is as human beings that people must and can address each other. I feel that to the extent that this is done, to that extent peace can prevail—slowly perhaps—because there are p

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