

## Global Journalist: Middle East peace talks back on the table after years of silence

**Abstract:** Stuart Loory stirs up this Nov. 29, 2007 conversation with a pessimistic tone: will peace among Israeli and Palestinians ever be reached? He and his international guests ponder. The American journalist on the panel says the U.S. could have a more active role this time around in helping put an end to this long conflict in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### Bios

[Stuart Loory](#) was a long-time reporter and editor for the Chicago Sun-Times and CNN. He was the inaugural Lee Hills Chair in Free Press Studies at the Missouri School of Journalism. He [died in 2015](#).

[Howard LaFranchi](#) has made his journalism career at The Christian Science Monitor since the late 80's. He has been the publication's diplomacy correspondent in Washington D.C. since 2001.

Shmuel Rosner is an Israeli [journalist](#) and an opinion columnist. He worked for the Israeli newspaper [Haaretz](#) in which he was a senior editor and then Chief Washington Correspondent. His columns can be found in [The New York Times](#). He is the political editor of the [Jewish Journal](#).

Gideon Lichfield is a British journalist [based in the U.S.](#) He has worked for [The Economist](#) for 16 years, taking foreign postings in Israel, Mexico and Russia. He was MIT's Technology Review editor-in-chief and then [WIRED](#)'s EIC, [until August 2023](#).

[Sam Bahour](#) is a Palestinian-American writer and a consultant, who used to be a freelance journalist in the early 2000s. He lived in Ohio and relocated to Palestine in 1995. He has an email exchange with an Israeli writer published by [The Washington Post](#) in 2021.

Dr. Samir al-Taqi is a Syrian [cardiothoracic surgeon](#) and an expert on country risk and geo-strategic assessment. He was the director of the Orient Center for International Studies in Damascus, Syria from 2005-2010. Then became the general director of Orient Research Center (ORC). He is also [a scholar](#).

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**Stuart Loory** 00:00

Welcome to, welcome to, welcome to Global Journalist. I'm Stuart Loory, of the Missouri School of Journ... We're certainly against any success at the huge one-day peace conference on the Israeli-Palestine differences. Sure, President Bush did pose shaking hands with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President, Mahum (sic), Mahmoud Abbas. But, on the other hand, the two Middle Eastern leaders are perceived as weak, and the American President is a lame duck. By the end of the day, there was the startling announcement, though, that the two sides had agreed to reach a peace settlement by the end of next year, which is to say by the end of President Bush's term in office. Given the complications involved: The rise of Hamas with its avowed policy of opposing Israel's existence in the Palestinian territories, and the settlement of a quarter of a million Israelis on the West Bank, which would be a part of Palestine and a two-state solution, can this agreement come to pass? The agreement is based on implementation of the so-called Road Map for Peace, agreed to in 2003 with a goal of a permanent peace by 2005. Well, the map was lost in the deadline is behind us. We have had agreements and good words before after meetings at Camp David, in Oslo, Madrid and Taba -- a resort town in Egypt -- and we have had handshakes. The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded: Arab and Israeli peace seekers twice received it, and if you include American President Jimmy Carter, three times. There has been a lot of talk, but no peace. I'm sorry to sound so pessimistic, maybe our guests today will have a different attitude. They are, Howard LaFranchi, foreign affairs correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor and Shmuel Rosner, Chief Washington correspondent of the Israeli newspaper, Haaretz. They're both in Washington. Gideon Lichfield, Middle East editor of The Economist in Jerusalem. Sam Bahour, a freelance journalist in the West Bank city of Ramallah. And Dr. Samir al-Taqi, director of the Orient Center for International Studies in Damascus, Syria. Let's start in the Middle East. How is the Annapolis agreement viewed in Ramallah and Jerusalem, Sam Bahour? You go first and then Gideon Lichfield.

**Sam Bahour** 02:33

Well, the unfortunate part of Annapolis is that the leaders -- President Abbas specifically -- is coming back to a very, very much 100% occupied land, just like he left. And he's coming back, not even with an acknowledgement from the Israeli side that the, the West Bank Gaza Strip in East Jerusalem is an occupied territory. That was the bare minimum that I was looking for coming out of this: That once Israel acknowledges that the area is occupied militarily, there's a lot of, a set of responsibilities and obligations that go with that. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. The, the leaders in Annapolis are taking great pride in executing a high stakes word processing exercise. Basically, while over 1.5 million Palestinians over the 50% are under the age of 16 in Gaza are being battered beyond recognition. There's a detachment between what's being said in, in Annapolis and how reality is facing us. I don't think the Palestinians are ready to accept any sense of progress unless they see it in their lives on a daily basis.

**Stuart Loory** 03:36

Gideon, what about in Israel?

**Gideon Lichfield** 03:39

I think the Israeli feeling is probably a lot more positive. Because deeds the ALA Roman mums to come away from Annapolis without actually making any real, concrete commitments in he they said they will try to reach an agreement within a year, but he didn't promise to, and he didn't have to make any acknowledgements to the Palestinians, as Sam, as Sam points out. I think one has, one can look at this a bit, glass half-empty, glass half-full. And if one takes the glass half-full view, then the fact that they are talking about having that they're going to start these talks again for the first time in seven years, is something and the real problem is whether or not (unintelligible) really intends to reach that goal, or whether he is using it. (...)connection problem.

**Stuart Loory** 04:27

The, the conventional wisdom is that a majority of the Israelis and a majority of the Palestinians want to see a settlement, but that it is the, the, the radicals, the, the militants, the aggressive people on both sides who are blocking that settlement. Is that wrong? Shmuel Rosner, what do you think?

**Shmuel Rosner** 04:55

Well, I, I think if, if you ask the general question of whether Israelis and Palestinians want to have a peaceful life? I'm sure the, the answer of most of them will be yes. But, then the question arises of what compromises the two people are willing to make in order to, to make life more peaceful for the both of them? And then it becomes a much more complicated. My newspaper Haaretz just carried a, a public opinion poll after Annapolis, and the first, the first numbers were, were published today,. And according to which you, you can see that most Israelis want peace and are ready to make compromises for the peace process. However, they are still very skeptical about the outcome of, of, of the Annapolis meeting.

**Stuart Loory** 05:54

And what, Sam Bahour, you say that the, the problem is that Israel does not acknowledge that it is occupying territories. It seems to me that that is a given, that everybody understands that, and certainly the Israelis understand that. Why do they have to say, yes, we are occupying?

**Sam Bahour** 06:22

Well, for two reasons. One is that during we, as we are in the crisis, in the midst of the crisis, acknowledging that this area is an occupied territory formally, lies upon them a set of responsibilities to, to mitigate the occupation. The, the, the huge sense of violence that we're seeing on a daily basis is, is partly due to Israel not seeing itself being under the rule of law when it comes to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The, the most loud, the loudest example that is the building of settlements. Settlements are clearly illegal under international law. Israel continues to, continues to build them because they believe that international law does not apply. That's part of the equation. The other part of the equation is that, as we move forward, it's not enough for both the Palestinians and the Israelis to want peace. I believe that the signing majority on both sides clearly want peace, and the contours of that peace agreement -- as I wrote with an Israeli colleague last week in the Los Angeles Times -- we believe is, is known to all. What is needed is a third party, an internationally legitimate third party that can uphold those contours and, and give the incentives needed to both sides to accept. We were hoping that the U.S. would do that this time around. They didn't. They're playing a role of a mediator that is neutral when, in fact, the U.S. is not neutral in this conflict.

**Stuart Loory** 07:45

Okay, I...

**Sam Bahour** 07:46

Someone has to hold the hands of both parties and move forward to an agreement that's rather well known to most people who are involved in the issue.

**Stuart Loory** 07:52

Yeah, I want to come back, Sam, to the question of violence in the territories, but first, I, I would like to go to Howard LaFranchi and ask him to comment on the role of the United States and the need for a mediator, and whether the United States is really going to stay out of it, or is the appointment of General Jim Jones an indication that it is not going to stay out of it? And I also want to know a little bit about the role of the, the so-called quartet: The United States, Russia,

the United Nations, and whoever the, the fourth part of the quartet was, excuse me. But Howard, can you take that up?

**Howard LaFranchi** 08:42

European Union.

**Stuart Loory** 08:43

European Union, excuse me, right you. Go ahead, Howard.

**Howard LaFranchi** 08:46

Yeah, well, I think first of all, there's a right now, there's a feeling that, that we're getting some mixed signals. I mean, President Bush yesterday in sending off the two the Israeli and Palestinian leader from the Rose Garden off to their, to their negotiations that are to start on December 12th, he used, he used the word engaged. He said that, that he would remain engaged and the United States would be engaged. And of course, as you mentioned -- the General Jones was named as the special security envoy -- but on the other hand, it's a, it's a, it's a new approach that they're trying both the, the Secretary of State Rice and, and certainly the President, hum Secretary Rice is much more of a stand back approach. And so, a lot of experts and a lot of people who have been involved in these, in these, in this process, in the past, you know, say that, as you said, that, that someone, someone really at a very high level, needs to be there, pushing things along, proposing things at, at a time when, when, when disputes are reached, as, as someone said to me yesterday, "You know, we'll see what happens. The test will come when, when they it's all fine and good when they're smiling and shaking hands, but the test will come when they reach a, a dispute or a roadblock, something they can't get beyond. And you know, will the United States be there as that kind of third party to, to keep things going?" There is still very, a very strong sense that really the main reason that this conference took place in the first place was that President Bush had, had other interests, that he wanted to bring the Israelis and Arab countries together, really, as a, as a way of confronting Iran and the rise of extremism in the region. And that that's really where his interests lie, and that the, the conference having come off that, that you know that in a sense, he's served his purpose, and so that he'll watch things and, and perhaps jump back in if there's a moment, but, but that's really his interest. As for the, the quartet, now, I noticed that the, the language calls the language of the joint statement calls on refers to the United States as the monitor and judge of the roadmap as it moves forward. And that seems to sort of relegate the quartet to a, to a background position, a sort of ignores the quartet. On the other hand, we do have rumblings of eve... even before the Congress (sic) conference, we heard that Moscow was interested in, in hosting a follow-up conference and remaining involved. And there may be a Syria connection

there. But, so, and I think we'll also see at the, the, the conference the Palestinian the donors conference in Paris on December 17th, I believe it starts, that's probably where the European Union will be more involved. So, maybe we'll see sort of a, a, a atomizing or splitting up of the quartet into specific, specific roles.

**Stuart Loory** 12:23

Let's bring Dr. Samir al-Taqi into the discussion. Dr. al-Taqi Syria was a reluctant attendant at the conference. Did it gain anything while it was there? And also, what about the, the need for talks on Lebanon? Can the, the Israeli-Palestinian question be solved without dealing with Lebanon as well?

**Samir al-Taqi** 12:54

I think in the Syrian perception, the coming to Annapolis was seen as a success, practically. Because at the end of the game, Syria was very much embarrassed and did have lots of problems and sees that all the problems that have been created in the region came from this kind of agreement between Mr. Sharon and Mr. Bush to, to try to close the conflict, the Arab-Israeli conflict, without solving it. That's what's behind in the Syrian eyes, the withdrawal, the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, the build up of the, of the wall, asking Syria to get rid of, of some of its armament, asking Syria to sack the Palestinian and the demand for the disarmament of Hezbollah. So, Syria was gambling that this approach, relying on the, the logic of force by Israel and the United States, will not succeed. And for Syria, going to Annapolis is an indication that this logic was failing in the region, especially that the whole approach of the American, the whole approach of the American administration to the problems of the region, truce to be completely crippled now, the situation in, in, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in Iraq, etc, etc. So, I think the Syrians do see that going to Annapolis is an indication that their gambling on the failure of the American approach and the Israeli approach, about the logical force was not succeeding. About Lebanon, I think yes, if, if going to Annapolis would really initiate a process of reconciliation in the region, of stabilization of the region, instead of the so-called constructive chaos -- threatening states and trying to push them to the verge till the destruction of the nation state in the region -- if this is the, the American approach, I think this will open quite new perspectives for, for the situation in Lebanon.

**Stuart Loory** 14:59

Okay, I want to come back to the implementation of the roadmap, which is apparently what the Annapolis agreement said had to be done. But first, I have to tell our listeners that this is Global Journalist. I'm Stuart Loory. Our guests today are Dr. Samir al-Taqi of the Orient Institute for International Studies, in Damascus. Gideon Lichfield, of the economist, in Jerusalem. Sam

Bahour, a freelance journalist in Ramallah, on the West Bank, and Shmuel Rosner of the Israeli newspaper Haaretz and Howard LaFranchi of the Christian Science Monitor, they're both in Washington. You may listen to this program again make questions or ask questions or make comments by going to [www.globaljournalist.org](http://www.globaljournalist.org). Sam Bahour, if I can start with you on this, the, the roadmap, as I understand it, had three phases to it. The first phase dealt with the, the containment of so-called violence, and the, the burden appeared to be on the Israel, or, I'm sorry, on the Palestinians, in that regard, to stop its violence, its attacks against Israel. Israel, in the first phase, was not to start withdrawing settlements from the West Bank, but to stop the additional construction of settlements. That would appear to go against what you were saying about the Israelis being the cause of the violence in Palestine. We have the, the growth of Hamas, which, as you know, has been responsible for a lot of violence in Gaza. How do you deal with that, Sam?

**Sam Bahour** 17:04

Several points. First and foremost is the mere acceptance of the roadmap as a document to move forward on. The Palestinians accepted it as it was presented. The Israelis accepted it at the time with, I believe, 14 reservations, and those 14 reservations basically nullified their acceptance. So, first and foremost, I'm not hearing from Annapolis anything with regards to have, has Israel removed its 14 reservations on the roadmap? This is first. Secondly, correct the Palestinians had an obligation in the roadmap, or have an obligation in the roadmap to take a more proactive stance in terms of security, and they have done that under the watchful eye of general Dayton, from the U.S., who is overseeing the, the, the rehabilitation of the Palestinian security forces. But let me correct you, in the roadmap, Israel is under the obligation to freeze all settlement activity without exceptions, including East Jerusalem. It doesn't refer only to natural growth, for example. So, this is a huge test that we will see if Israel will meet. Also, there's another concrete mechanism within the roadmap which calls on Israel to reopen Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. And most importantly -- for me as a businessperson as well -- is to list the internal closures that are spread out throughout the West Bank in order for Palestinians to be able to travel from their home to their work without going through multiple Israeli checkpoints. These are concrete, measurable items that we will find out if the parties are able to implement in a very, very short period of time. The roadmap failed when it was first implemented. It expired, and now it's being brought back to life. Unless there's a third party, and the U.S. may move it a little bit more forward now -- given that the reality on the ground is much more serious with Hamas taking over Gaza -- but at the end of the day, the roadmap does give us something very, very important, which is concrete milestones that we can measure it against.

**Stuart Loory** 19:12

Shmuel Rosner, do you have a reaction to that?

**Shmuel Rosner** 19:15

Yes, I, I think that what we hear from Ramallah is, is really the old, the old tune of, of Palestinian complaints that are, that are no longer relevant in the in the era of the post-Annapolis meeting. What, what Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed upon in Annapolis, with the blessing of the international community, is to try and, and to try it to track this process, which will include negoti... negotiations over finals, final status agreement. Hello?

**Stuart Loory** 19:55

Yeah, go ahead. We lost Gideon Lichfield again. But keep talking.

**Shmuel Rosner** 19:58

It, it will, it will include negotiation over final status agreements on the one hand, and on the other hand -- and I will, I will argue that this is the more the more important part of the deal -- that the two sides will try to implement the roadmap in a serious way. Now saying that the Palestinians already fulfill their obligations under the roadmap, which are not just to stop violence, but rather to dismantle, alter organizations or and to reorganize the, the security forces, the security forces or the Palestinian Authority. I think, I think this is, this is really overstating the situation on the ground. And we didn't yet speak about Gaza. You know, if we only, we only talk about the West Bank, but their organizations in Gaza are also part of the roadmap deal. The Palestinian Authority did not come and say, "Well, we give up on Gaza. You take Gaza, we only want to the, the West Bank, so we only have to dismantle the organizations in the West Bank". So, at least, if, if you talk to Israeli sources, and, and we spoke to the Prime Minister just yesterday, according to, from his point of view, dismantling the organizations in Gaza is part of the deal. Now, Mr. Bahour is right in the sense that Israel also have some tests that it will that it will need to pass, which include the freezing settlement activities. This will not be an easy task for the Israeli government, politically, but they will have to do it if they want to, to fulfill their obligations under the roadmap. And that's why they brought in the General Jones, former NATO commander, and he will be the one judging whether both Palestinians and Israelis are fulfilling their obligations. And, and then we'll see what he says.

**Stuart Loory** 22:03

That certainly gives the United States a strong role in all this, doesn't it?

**Shmuel Rosner** 22:07

It does, it does give the United States a very strong role.

**Stuart Loory** 22:11

Yeah. Howard LaFranchi, what we have just heard from Shmuel Rosner and Sam Bahour is a restatement of everything that we have been hearing for years and years about the responsibilities of the other side. And when you listen to it, or at least when I listen to it, I don't get the feeling that there is much of a, a mood for agreement. Is that the feeling in the United States?

**Howard LaFranchi** 22:48

Well, I think what, what, what has changed here, I think, is that there's a sense that there are two leaders who -- though they may be weak, each one of them in his way and, and with his in his own country, in his own environment, but failed to, I'm unable to say country, because obviously, Palestine is not a country yet, but -- but despite that, that the two leaders do seem to get along. They seem to have a, a rapport between them, and they both are dedicated to this. I think that's, that's the one sort of strand of optimism that, that certainly President Bush is hoping, that is holding to. But also a sense that sort of "après moi le déluge", sort of this, you know, there are external reasons that, that are pushing us to do this now, that, that if we don't do this, and that the, the time is very short, but if we don't do this, you know, there are forces that are, that are gaining strength out there that are not in our interest, and they're not in the interest of our people. So, I think there's that behind it. But, you know, as the, you know, as the other participants have said, you know, the, the roadmap was, was announced in 2003 by President Bush, really, very little progress was made there. So, this is sort of seen as, as one said, is, you know, sort of roadmap plus, getting back to the roadmap, those very basic nuts and bolts of security and easing up on Palestinian living conditions on one side, while, while pursuing the second track final status negotiations at the same time. That's sort of Condoleezza Rice's idea, and time will only tell if it works.

**Stuart Loory** 24:48

Yeah. I, I'd like to ask what ever became of Tony Blair? He left office as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom last August, and he accepted a job as the Middle East envoy for the European Union. We've heard little, very little from him. He was in Annapolis, as I understand it, but there was not much said about what impact he has had. Who wants...?

**Shmuel Rosner** 25:20

This is something I, I would be happy to, to talk about, because I sat with Tony Blair yesterday morning for an hour and, and we spoke. This is Shmuel. A, a group, a group of our Haaretz reporters met with, with Mr. Blair here in Washington. He was in Annapolis, and I think his, his, his actually doing quite a lot of work. He, he, he now should be considered an, an expert on, on Israeli-Palestinian affairs. He has a very detailed, detailed plan for helping the Palestinians building their institutions. And I think you'll see his role growing if, when, when we go into, into the, the conference in Paris of the countries that will be contributed, contributing money to the Palestinians. And then his role will be growing on the ground, as the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his Prime Minister Salam Fayyad will keep trying to build the Palestinians, Palestinian institutions, which is, I think, the most important role of all parties if, if one really wants a Palestinian State to materialize one day in the future.

**Stuart Loory** 26:38

Yeah, Howard?

**Howard LaFranchi** 26:39

This is Howard.

**Stuart Loory** 26:40

Yeah, Howard, let me follow up on that with a question to you. Is the United States -- while at the same time it is not, or it's saying that it's not taking a strong role -- freezing out people like Tony Blair or countries like Russia? And does it, is it looking for any credit, or all of the credit, for any progress in the Middle East?

**Howard LaFranchi** 27:04

Now, I don't think there's any freezing out. I think certainly as Shmuel said that, you know, the, the December conference in Paris, that's sort of Tony Blair's baby, and we'll, we'll, we'll see a lot more of him there. He's been working behind the scenes. But, but that conference, I think even more, is going to be a test of, of the, the resolve and the, the participation...

**Stuart Loory** 27:32

Yeah, I'm sorry. Howard, I am sorry, but I do have to cut you off. We're out of time. We certainly have a long shot coming out of Annapolis. Our guests today have been Shmuel Rosner of Haaretz and Howard Lafranchi of the Christian Science Monitor in Washington. Dr. Samir al-Taqi of the Orient Center for International Studies in Damascus. Gideon Lichfield of The Economist, in Jerusalem. And Sam Bahour, a freelance journalist in Ramallah. Our director is Pat Akers and our producers Devin Benton Yu Lee (ph), Heather Perne (ph) and Kathryn Wolf (ph). For all, I'm Stuart Loory. Global Journalist, will be back next week.