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P.M. HARPER AND P.M. OF ISRAEL Q&A

MODERATOR: What we'll do now is we'll be taking questions briefly. I'd ask that the questions be short and we'll start with the Israeli side.

Mr. Elkahana(ph), (inaudible).

MODERATOR: We will translate afterwards.

QUESTION: (speaks in foreign language).

MODERATOR: The first question was that the recent escalation in the south, the missiles that have hit Israeli targets also in Eilat.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: (speaks in foreign language).

MODERATOR: Prime minister, in English, please.

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER (Canadian Prime Minister): Yes, I wouldn't want to say there is no price, but you know, my... my general view of the world is that people respect your view if you express it appropriately and they understand it's genuine.

You know, and the fact of the matter is Canada has deep relations with many Arab countries. Obviously I was at the Palestinian Authority

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yesterday where we're a significant contributor to development of their institutions and security and governance.

There's other parts of the Arab world where Canada has important strategic and commercial relationships. And frankly, on many matters where we were probably far more often agree than disagree.

So look, I don't think it's automatically the view that if you have a particularly issue where you disagree that this needs to rupture a relationship irrevocably.

MODERATOR: Prime Minister, would you like to say what you said in English?

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I would like to comment in English on the question to the Prime Minister. There is a new Middle East out there. It's different. I mean, there are automatic positions that are always voiced. But if you scratch the surface underneath you'll see that there is a concern in many of the countries in the Middle East right now, the greatest concerns they have are two. The first is the arming of Iran with nuclear weapons. And the second is the spread of the Muslim Brotherhood. And in meeting those twin challenges, these countries do not see Israel as their enemy but as being on the same side of a difficult conflict.

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They... it is not that they agree with us on the Palestinian issue, although many of them say solve it as you will, but this is what these two issues, that I talked about. Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and the aggressive designs of the Muslim Brotherhood is what shapes many of the Arab world's leading countries today.

So I think just as we're updating our free trade agreement to be adaptable to the global economy, I think it's important for commentators in the Middle East to adopt their commentary on Canada – Israel relations to the new Middle East as I've described it.

MODERATOR: And on the Canadian side we'll start with Jacques from Global News on your left.

JACQUES BOURBEAU (Global News): Good afternoon. My question is for Prime Minister Harper.

Sir, you've been here for a couple of days now. You've seen parts of Jerusalem, you've travelled to the West Bank. You've spoken with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders. I'm wondering what has made the biggest impressions on you so far, and have you changed your opinions about this region in any way?

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Well, look, I think the biggest thing that strikes me as I was told it would, particularly coming

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from our country, which is so unique and you require such elaborate transportation from literally to get from anywhere to anywhere, the first thing that strikes you here, particularly when you're talking about an era of intense conflict or potential conflict, is the real shortness of the distances. How small all of the space truly is, which obviously speaks to the security concerns of Israel in particular, but security concerns that exist in the region, how truly existential any security threat of any kind really is.

And it also speaks, obviously being on... I would also say being on both sides of the border and having yet another opportunity to speak to both leaders, all of this speaks as well to the desirability, extreme desirability to find a peaceful resolution of some of the ongoing unresolved issues in this particular region.

I remain convinced there is such a solution and my conversations with the two leaders in the last couple of days, while certainly not shying away from areas where there are sharp differences of opinion, convince me more than ever that there are creative and useful ways that peace can be achieved.

ANIMATEUR: Et en français, Monsieur le premier ministre.

TRES HONORABLE STEPHEN HARPER: En français, la grande réalité ici c'est tout à fait différent que notre pays. Il n'y a pas d'espace ici. On parle des conflits et des disputes dans une région comme un comté canadien en

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effet. C'est très petit et ça explique évidemment l'importance des questions de sécurité, des questions de sécurité surtout pour Israël sont immédiatement des questions d'existence.

Et ça c'est une réalité d'un conflit dans une très petite région. En même temps pendant mes conversations avec les deux chefs, pendant les deux journées je reste convaincu qu'on doit trouver une solution, une solution de paix pour cette région et je suis convaincu à cause de mes conversations malgré les différences et les grandes difficultés qui existent qu'une telle paix est possible.

MODERATOR: Ilil Shakar(ph), Israël Radio Galatz(ph).

QUESTION: (speaks in foreign language).

Mr. Prime Minister, we heard your very supportive speech yesterday in the Knesset. Do you support Israel on the issue of the settlements building as well?

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: (speaks in foreign language).

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: On your question, I've said repeatedly I'm not here to single out Israel for criticism. You know, we've got more than enough people standing up in the world ready to do that. You don't need me.

I'm here to talk about our shared values and interests on specific... there are specific questions on which we disagree in terms of all of the

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issues around the peace process. I think you could find the government's of Canada's positions. They're available publicly. But I would just say this. I think the most important thing is that it is for Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate these matters and to come to resolutions that are mutually agreeable. And of course you know, I would just say and I'm just... I'm not saying to wag the finger just as a truism. But such agreements have to be reached and they of course will be difficult for both sides, but that's the nature of such a process.

MODERATOR: Would you like to say in English what you said in Hebrew, Prime Minister?

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: My views about the Iran agreement reached in Geneva are well known. And I believe that I made them clear yesterday in the Knesset as well. Now we're looking at the next agreement. And the next agreement must not leave Iran with a capability to manufacture nuclear weapons. There are many details to this, but this is the bottom line. And there is a danger that the sanctions regime will be dissolved and this goal will not be reached.

So the jury's out on the international community, on all of us to make sure that we do not enable the most dangerous regime in the world, Iran, to have the world's most dangerous weapons or to be able to manufacture the world's most dangerous weapons which are atomic weapons.

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This is our mission. And this is... should be a common collective mission. But it's definitely our mission.

MODERATOR: And we'll finish with Bob Fife, from CTV News.

ROBERT FIFE (CTV News): I'm going to put a question to both prime ministers, if I can, and Mr. Harper, you can answer in both English and French. Mr. Netanyahu, please go ahead and try your French, you're welcome to do so.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: You don't really want that.

ROBERT FIFE: Prime Minister, you have never publicly criticized Israel but you say that you have privately disagreed with Mr. Netanyahu on issues and that Israel knows Canada's position on settlement expansion and concessions to the Palestinians to get a peace deal. So, Prime Minister, did you clearly state Canada's position on the settlements in your meetings with Mr. Netanyahu. And, Mr. Netanyahu, are you okay with what Canada, with what you have done on these settlements, but which the United States has said are illegitimate?

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Let me answer first. The answer of course is yes, and have done so on many occasions. And both,

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as I say, leaders on both sides know what Canada's view is on this, which is, as I say, publicly available.

I would just say this. Once again let me emphasize it. I am not here to single out Israel for criticism. I find it, you know, interesting, let me just make it as an observation, that you know, yesterday in the Palestinian Authority, no one asked me there, no one asked me there, to single out the Palestinian Authority for any criticism in terms of governance or human rights or anything else. I'm asked to single out Israel. When I'm in Israel, I'm asked to single out Israel. When I'm in Palestinian Authority I'm asked to single out Israel and in half... half the other places around the world you ask me to single out Israel.

So you know, look, I think we should know from our own ... I'll say a bit more. We should know from our own experience in Canada, and I think notwithstanding all of our failings, we have a pretty good record on trying to conciliate and make welcome in our country people of many different languages, religions and cultures something that, you know, was really embedded in the DNA of our country because our joint French and British background.

And the one lesson I think we have learned is that when somebody is a minority, and particularly a small minority in the world, one goes out of one's way to embrace them, not to single them out for criticism.

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That's a fundamental Canadian ethic. And that is why I think many Canadians understand the approach I'm taking, which doesn't in any way, as I say, prevent me from expressing to the government of Israel or to the government of the Palestinian Authority the various issues on which we disagree and on which our disagreements quite frankly are matters of... are matters of public record.

And which by the way I think expressing some of these differences when they're not... when they're not relevant to the vital interests of Canada on a day to day basis, it is frankly more productive to discuss with them in private settings where quite frankly we're able to exercise a much more positive influence.

En français, oui, surtout avec une telle réponse.

Je note seulement encore une fois je suis pas ici pour critiquer Israël. C'est bien intéressant que hier, j'étais avec l'Autorité palestinienne et personne ne me demande de faire des critiques de la gouvernance sur les droits humains ou de telles choses avec le président Abbas.

Mais il me semble que tout le monde demande qu'on critique Israël quand on est en Israël, on critique Israël quand on est ailleurs. Et c'est un standard réservé par le monde juste pour Israël.

Et selon moi et selon je pense la pratique de tolérance et d'inclusion qui est la tradition canadienne qui a comme l'origine notre nature

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binationale fondée par les francophones et les anglophones, quand on est une minorité, ce n'est pas le cas qu'on critique, qu'on ne peut pas critiquer une minorité, mais on tente d'abord toujours de comprendre la position des minorités, surtout une très petite minorité dans le monde, et de faire des tentatives d'embrasser, d'embrasser une telle minorité.

Et c'est ce que je fais. C'est la raison pour laquelle je pense que mes positions sont appréciées par beaucoup de Canadiens. Bien sûr nous exprimons régulièrement les différences entre nos positions et celles du gouvernement de l'Israël comme celles de l'Autorité palestinienne. Et je pense que quand on parle des choses qui ne sont pas dans des vrais intérêts nationaux immédiats de notre pays le Canada, il est plus fructueux de discuter de telles choses, fructueux de discuter de telles choses en privé.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: Mon français ne suffit pas pour exprimer mes réponses à votre question parce que je parlais quand j'avais 14 ans. J'oublie tout ce que je...

But I will make up for it. I'll respond in English and not in sound byte form because you asked a serious question and I want to respond in a serious manner. Now, there are two things that I want to puncture. Two prevailing myths. Well, one is no longer with us. The first one which was repeated ad nauseam, you can check if you were a repeater, but until recently, everybody who

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knew anything about the Middle East explained at the core of the conflict – always in the singular, conflict – the core of the conflict in the Middle East was the Palestinian problem.

Do you remember that?

Now today you'd be laughed out of most places. I'm not sure out of Concordia University, the last time I looked. But you'd be laughed out of most places, including the leading campuses in the west, even there, if you argue this, what was accepted as a common obvious truth because today you look at Syria imploding, you look at Lebanon imploding, you look at Yemen imploding, you look at Libya imploding. Shall I continue the list? I can't. I just finished being a Foreign Minister and I don't want to step on more diplomatic mines.

Look everywhere, almost everywhere, from Gibraltar to the Khyber Pass and the whole place is imploding. Certainly the Arab world is in great instability.

And this has nothing to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It's got a lot to do with the endemic roots of instability, the cultural and historic developments or lack thereof in the Arab World. Yet this basic truth was completely ignored and in its place was substituted this argument of the centrality of the Palestinian conflict.

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And today we know that what plagues all of the rest of the Arab world unfortunately could plague our areas as well and we have to take it into account when we talk about vacating territory because practically the only places that are stable and do not have rockets fired from them or terrorism and violence perpetrated in them is in fact the places where Israel is and some other places that enjoy a particular kind of financial support.

That's about it! So the core of the many conflicts of the Middle East is not the Palestinian conflict.

But what is the core of the Palestinian conflict itself? And here you have another great myth. And the myth is that the core is basically the settlements. Okay? Now mind you the settlements issue on which Canada has a different position from Israel, I guarantee you that's the case. Okay?

But the core, the settlement issue has to be resolved and will be resolved in the context of peace negotiations. But it is not the core of the conflict. We know that because this conflict rages for half a century before there was a single Israeli settlement, before there was a single Israel soldier in Judea, Samaria or Gaza. This conflict began in 1920, 1921 with the attack on the Jewish immigration depot and murderous attack in Jaffa, in Jaffa.

And it raged on and the attack on the ancient Jewish community of Hebron. It's been there since practically unbroken since the time of

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Abraham, almost 4,000 years, and continued in the great attacks by the Palestinians on the Jews here in 1936 to 1939. There were no settlements there.

It continued in the rejection of the Partition Resolution in 1947 that called for a Palestinian state next to... An Arab state actually, next to the Jewish state. There were no settlements there and it continued right up to 1967 when the West Bank, Judea, Samaria, and Gaza were firmly in Arab hands and it was meant to do what? To liberate the lands that were already in their hands?

For 47 years this conflict raged violently over what? Not the settlements, not the territories because they were not in our possession. So if you have half a century of conflict, 47 years, 46 years of conflict, there must be something else that is at the core of this conflict.

And we have a pretty good indication what that is, because when we actually vacated territory, well, one of the two territories, Gaza, we actually did the textbook requirement of many in the international community. Which is uproot the settlements, go back to the 67 lines, and you'll get peace. Territory for peace. Settlements, uproot settlements for peace. We did that.

We gave territory, and we uprooted the settlements but we didn't get peace! What we got are... what is it now, 12,000 rockets fired there? No, no, from Gaza, Gaza alone. 16,000. 16,000 missiles. Who can count? I mean, they keep coming, okay?

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And when we ask, we ask the people of Gaza or the people who rule, why are you firing missiles into Israeli territory? Is it to liberate Judea Samaria, the West Bank?

You know what their response is? Yeah, that too. But no, it's to liberate Palestine. And what is Palestine? It's Beshava, it's Ashkelon, (inaudible), they call it, it's Ashdod, and it's Jaffa! They say it. Well, that's the bad guys. The guys who use terror. Now happily we have partners across the road here who do not use terror. But we want to know well, since Hamas is clearly committed to our destruction, we want to make sure that the other people are willing to coexist with us. And we asked what is the source of this animosity? Hamas is not interested in the settlements. They got the settlements. Hamas is not interested in territory. They got the territory. Hamas is not interested in the 67 border. They got it.

Hamas is interested in eliminating Israel.

Now you may say well, then the cause of the conflict is the absence of a Jewish... of a Palestinian state. If it's not the settlements, it's the absence of a state.

But we repeatedly offered to establish such a state, first in 1947 in the Partition Resolution, and then by successive Israeli governments, including ours.

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So when we look at the Palestinian Authority and we say so are you willing, assuming we resolve this issue, assuming we resolve the settlements, which is not the core of the conflict, will you recognize the nation state of the Jewish people? Will you coexist finally? You get your territory, under your terms. These are not my terms. Under your terms.

67, no settlements. Will you recognize the Jewish state, for God's sake? Hum! That's humming and awing, okay? Will you recognize the Jewish state? Here is the core of the conflict and here is the key to its solution. The core of the conflict is not settlements. The core of the conflict are not the territories. The core of the conflict is not the absence of a Palestinian state. The core of the conflict is the persistent refusal to reconcile to an independent nation state of the Jewish people. That's what this conflict is about, this conflict.

There are many conflicts in the Middle East. This conflict is about that. That's why in the course of these negotiations we say that to have genuine peace between us and the Palestinians there must be a Palestinian acceptance finally of a nation state for the Jewish people. If the Palestinians expect me and my people to recognize a nation state for the Palestinian people, surely we can expect them to recognize a nation state for the Jewish people. After all we've only been here for a millennia. That's it. That's what this is about.

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And you know, when that begins, that'll be a great day. When that actually happens, when there's a Palestinian leader, I hope it's Mr. Abbas, when he has the courage to give what I call the (inaudible) speech because I gave a speech at Bar Ilan University in which I spoke about two states for two peoples. And believe me that required some doing, okay? Some saying sometimes required some doing.

If he's willing to do that, that'll be important. Does it guarantee that this will percolate into the Palestinian society? I don't know. They've been, you know, using a lot of incitement and the cultural hate has been instilled there for generations but it's a beginning. It's an important beginning, a necessary beginning. It may not be sufficient to maintain the peace and that's why we need the security arrangements that I talked about.

But since you asked about the settlements, then yes we'll deal with it in the course of a final settlement of peace. But no, it is not the core of the conflict. The core of the conflict is the persistent refusal to accept a Jewish nation state. That was a summation that you can put in a sound byte. But because of the plethora of distortion and shallowness of this discussion as Prime Minister Harper has said about the general discussions about Israel then I put before you a great challenge. Put everything I just said in your media. If you do that, I will put a hat on and take it off for you.

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Thank you very much.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Prime Ministers, Prime Ministers, Ministers, we're going over there now for a photograph. Ambassadors too, please. This is the photograph to commemorate the occasion.

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