Personal Reflections on Reading Discourse on the Middle East for New Intercultural Understandings

Michael H. PROSSER⓪
(University of Virginia)

Abstract: *While creating a lasting peace process in the Middle East, particularly between Israel and the Arab world, and more specifically with Palestine, has a history of more than 2000 years, this article outlines its history from Theodore Herzl's famous 1896 statement about the "Jewish state" to the present time. The article's emphasis is on gaining new intercultural understandings through reading the discourse that developed over more than a century on the peace process. Rhetorical discourse, on one hand, is speaker/Author-message-channels-and audience-centered, persuasive, and language-based. On the other hand, discourse analysis is descriptive and text oriented, established by setting frames for speaker/author involvement in the discourse, and is always contextual in its orientations. Considering both of these formats of analysis, this article explores Michael Prosser's personal readings on discourse from several different perspectives, the Israeli discourse, Palestinian discourse, Arab discourse, and western discourse, tracing the history of this aspect of the Middle East peace process from Herzl's statement to 2011, a historical period of one hundred and five years . A positive result of reading this discourse is a challenge to offer new intercultural understandings, or a "dialogue among civilizations."*
Key Words: *Arab world; Discourse; Israel; Middle East; Palestine; Western Views*

⓪ Dr. Michael H. Prosser, Professor of University of Virginia.

Introduction

Both rhetorical analysis and discourse analysis offer useful perspectives on reading discourse on the Middle East with the goal to create new intercultural understandings or "a dialogue among civilizations" rather than the "clash of civilizations" as proposed by Samuel P. Huntington in his provocative book in 1996. The rhetorical analyst considers not only the speaker/author/or rhetor as a chief source of understanding, who according to Aristotle must properly use ethos (credibility, good will for the audience and knowledge of the author), proper logos (correct reasoning, based on the probability of the proposition's likelihood of success and evidence for the proposition), and pathos (appropriate emotional appeals to the audience); but also an understanding of the persuasive message itself, or in modern rhetorical studies the role of language as sermonic; the channels through which the message is delivered; and the audience being addressed. In a complementary fashion, the more modern development of discourse analysis, while utilizing some of the aspects of rhetorical analysis, focuses primarily in a descriptive manner, basically on the message, but placed in its contextual setting, and in the case of this article on the history of the Middle East peace process, in the context of this discourse development over the past 105 years, between the Israelis and Arabs, the Israelis and the Palestinians, and between these actors and the Western world.

There are a number of useful axioms relating to the application of both rhetorical and discourse analysis. Plato, through his Socratic dialogues, called upon rhetoric and dialectic to promote truth, goodness, wisdom and the good life for humans, and Aristotle developed this idea further by urging the rhetor to not only promote these principles, but also to lead one's audience towards happiness. As the late Kenneth Burke argued, human beings are symbol makers, symbol users, symbol misusers, the creator of the negative, and tool makers of tools that can make tools (such as the modern computer, for example). Burke and other rhetorical scholars proposed that the purpose of effective rhetoric is to create understandings out of

misunderstandings. Marshall McLuhan's argument that "the medium is itself the message" reading discourse, not precisely by what the message says, but how it is presented. Michel Foucault emphasized that discourse provides us with an understanding of "the archeology of the mind" and is always bound by power relationships, where one interlocutor has superior standing over others. Jurgen Habermas sees the need for the creation of a "universal audience" for understanding messages. Burke tells us that "language is the soul of culture," and with Aristotle's dictum, Marshall McLuhan acknowledged that the "metaphor is the soul of language." In the Middle East, for example, we are aware that highly expressive metaphors often exaggerate contexts, such as Saddam Hussein's "the mother of all wars" metaphor. All discourse is naturally contextual, set in a specific time and place. Certainly, as has often been the case in highly explosive discourse in the Middle East, we are aware that the greatest communication breakdowns often lead to intercultural mistrust, conflicts, wars, and geographical destruction. The former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, postulated that the greatest human rights violations are war and abject poverty, which is often the result of war and the displacement of millions of vulnerable people. As Ray T. Donahue and I have articulated in our book, Diplomatic Discourse: International Conflict in the United Nations (1997), where we discuss both the importance of rhetorical and discourse analysis as means of understanding international discourse and conflicts, the discourse and conflicts in the Middle East process itself are extraordinarily complicated and tortured, with both Israel and the Palestinians deeply mistrusting the other side in the negotiations. We include the 1988 address of PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat to the United Nations Security Council in which he loudly protests Israel's harsh rhetoric and treatment of the Palestinians. Also, in my article for this Journal on Obama's outreach to the Arab world in his June 4, 2009 Cairo address (2009), I discussed the Israeli attacks on Gaza, as a contextual bridge between the Bush and Obama administrations.

There also are many familiar axioms related to the Middle East, for example, the often repeated Jewish quote from Genesis 15: 18-21 as

a basis for greater Israel: "The LORD made a covenant with Abram saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates," which is often challenged by Arab and Palestinian leaders. The term "The Middle East" is essentially a modern linguistic concept, originated only in 1902. "Eretz Yisrael—the Biblical land of Israel" is often linked both by Jews, Christians, and Muslims by the usage of the term, "Holy Land" referring to the birthplace for all the Abrahamic monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i faith. The various religious groups consider the "Holy Cities" as Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias. Additionally, the Christians identify both Bethlehem and Nazareth as holy sites; and the shared monotheistic "Holiest Sites" include the Foundation Stone, Temple Mount, and Western Wall. The axiom, "the birth of political Zionism" in 1896 is attributed to Theodore Herzl's article "The Jewish State" in which heargued that with growing antisemetism in Europe, a new Jewish state was required in Palestine. In 1897, the first Zionist Congress ''called for the establishment of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law.'' These two persuasive but widely dismissed discourses began the more than a century-long development of the modern readings on the Middle East discourse to the present time. In 2011, Israel ranks the highest in development in Middle East countries on the UN Development Index. Presently, Israel's population, including many of the Jews who came from Eastern Europe, stands at 7,718,600, with a Jewish population of 5, 818,200 and non Jewish minorities (Muslims, Christians, Christian Arabs, and Druze) of 1,579, 700.

Reading about the Middle East Discourse and Conflicts from 1906 to 1977

When Chaim Weizmann and Lord Arthur James Balfour met in 1906, Balfour suggested a Jewish homeland in Uganda. Dr. Weizmann replied: ''Mr. Balfour, supposing I was to offer you Paris instead of London, would you take it?'' ''But Dr. Weizmann, we have London.'' ''That is true,'' Weizmann said, ''but we had Jerusalem

when London was a marsh.'' Balfour asked: ''Are there many Jews who think like you?'' Weizmann answered: ''I believe I speak the mind of millions of Jews whom you will never see and who cannot speak for themselves.'' It is widely believed that this somewhat humorous but persuasive exchange led Lord Belfour and others in the British government to proclaim "The Balfour Declaration" on November 2, 1917: "His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." Considering the exchange between Weizmann and Balfour and the 1917 declaration descriptively and contextually "what is" from the point of view of discourse analysis, as well as persuasively from the perspective of rhetorical analysis "what ought to be," when following the Versailles Treaty at the end of World War I, Great Britain had the British Mandate for Palestine. This declaration greatly increased Jewish immigration to Palestine and gave an increasing emphasis on securing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In 1947, Great Britain turned the Mandate over to the UN, which in 1947 adopted Resolution 181, partitioning the land into two states, Arab and Jewish. As this resolution was the first one passed in the United Nations on the Middle East peace process, it had the basic persuasive symbolic strength of an international law on this subject. The 1947 UN Palestine Partition Plan's final report of the Commission in the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended for the region in 1947: the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state, an Arab state and UN-controlled territory (around Jerusalem). Resolution 181 was adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947. The Jewish community agreed, but Arab countries and Palestinian Arabs did not, resulting in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. On May 14, 1948: Israel became a state, a day celebrated annually in Israel, and also regularly denounced by many Arab countries. In a highly symbolical celebratory discourse, Israel's

first president, David Ben-Gurion, proclaimed the Israeli state, standing below the large portrait of Theodor Herzl, thus linking rhetorically and discursively to Herzl's 1896 call for a Jewish state in Palestine and the first Zionist Congress in 1897.

In 1956, under the leadership and persuasive rhetoric of Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, the Suez Canal crisis (also called the Tripartite Aggression) erupted on July 26. The Egyptian government nationalized the Suez Canal Company; all its Egyptian assets, rights and obligations which Nasser transferred to the Suez Canal Authority. At the UN Security Council, we can read the contrastive discourse on the crisis taking a very strange diplomatic turn, as in an unusual example of jointly promoted US-Soviet rhetoric, the US and USSR stood together on one side of the debate with Egypt while France and Great Britain supported the other side with Israel, and against their ally, the US. The US had promised to build the Aswan Dam for Egypt at the same time that Egypt was establishing closer ties to the USSR and had recently recognized the PRC when a possible war between the Mainland China and Taiwan was being widely debated and feared. Diplomatic pressure from the US and the USSR at the UN and elsewhere forced France, and the Great Britain to withdraw from the area. Following the planned invasion of the eastern Sinai by Israel, on October29-31, 1956 to April, 1957 when the Suez Canal was blocked to shipping, and the later French and British occupation of the Suez Canal Zone, on December 22, 1956, the Canal Zone was restored to Egyptian control, following the French and British withdrawal, and the landing of UNEF troops through the acceptance of Egypt. Israeli forces remained, however, until March 1957 which both symbolically and literally prolonging the crisis.

In November 1966, Syria signed a mutual defense agreement with Egypt and The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) attacked the city of as-Samu in the Jordanian-occupied West Bank, with the Jordanian units engaging the Israelis quickly beaten back. Jordanian King Hussein harshly criticized Egyptian President Nasser for failing to come to Jordan's aid, and "hiding behind UNEF skirts." On June 5-10, 1967 "Six-Day War", following inflammatory rhetoric by the Arabs, Israel

took control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. At this time, the US hesitated from immediately calling for a cease fire until Israel had achieved its military objectives. In a testy exchange between USSR leader Alexi Kosygin to President Lyndon B. Johnson meeting at Glasboro State College in New Jersey, Kosygin said: : "If you want war, you will get war." One of the most important and later the basis for the fundamental UN and international discourse on the Middle East, UN Security Council Resolution 242 in November, 1967 called for an "Inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war," "Peaceful and accepted settlement," "Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," "Termination of all claims or states of belligerency," "Every state has the right to live within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force," and "Just settlement of the refugee problem." Much later, following the Oslo Accords, the PLO leadership accepted this Resolution in its "Declaration of Principles."

During the surprise Arab attack on Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Syrian forces overran much of southern Golan Heights, before being pushed back by Israel. Israel and Syria signed a ceasefire in 1974 with almost all the Heights in Israeli hands. East of the 1974 ceasefire line lies the Syrian controlled part of the Heights, an area not captured by Israel, 500 square kilometers or Israeli withdrawal from 100 square kilometers or 30% of the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights have been under military administration since 1967. In 1981, Israel passed its Golan Heights Law, which applied Israeli ''laws, jurisdiction and administration'' to the Israeli occupied Golan Heights. Then Prime Minister Golda Meir's reflections on the Golan Heights stated: "The Syrians seemed bent on an escalation of the conflict; they kept up an endless bombardment of Israel's settlements below the Golan Heights ,and Israeli fishermen and farmers faced what was sometimes virtually daily attacks by snipers. I used to visit the settlements occasionally and watch the settlers go about their work as though there was nothing at all unusual in plowing with a military escort or putting children to sleep – every single night – in underground air

raid shelters.''

Reading the Discourse about the Middle East Peace Process, 1977-1993

On November 9, 1977, Anwar El Sadat startled the Arab world by announcing his intention to go to Jerusalem. Ten days later he arrived for the groundbreaking three-day visit, which launched the first peace process between Israel and an Arab state. The Sadat visit came about after his Cairo speech stating that he would travel anywhere, ''even Jerusalem,'' to discuss peace. The Begin government declared that, if Israel thought that Sadat would accept an invitation, Israel would invite him. In Sadat's Knesset speech he talked about his views on peace, the status of Israel's occupied territories, and the Palestinian refugee problem. Symbolically, it was the most important discourse for a renewed peace process since the founding of Israel in 1948. Through President Jimmy Carter's 1979 Camp David Accords, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed the first Israeli-Arab peace treaty. The other Arab states refused to endorse or participate in it. And the Arab League moved its headquarters from Cairo and most members broke ties with Egypt, ushering in nearly a decade of Egyptian isolation in the Arab world. Sadat was assassinated by Egyptian fundamentalists in 1981. President Carter moved to rejuvenate the Middle East and to replace bilateral peace talks with a comprehensive multilateral approach. Carter visited Anwar El Sadat in Egypt, King Hussein in Jordan, Hafez al-Assad of Syria, and Yitzhak Rabin of Israel as a part of his personal diplomatic and persuasive endeavor to achieve a Middle East process. King Hussein refused to take part in the process fearing isolating Jordan from the Arab world and provoking Syria and the PLO. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad only agreed to meet Carter in Geneva. Nonetheless, these meetings gave Carter a basic plan for restarting the peace process based on the Geneva Conference and presented three main objectives for Arab-Israeli peace: "Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace, Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories

gained in the Six Day War and to ensure that Israel's security would not be threatened; and securing an undivided Jerusalem." The 1978 Camp David Accords signed by Begin and el Sadat, following thirteen days of secret negotiations at Camp David. Two framework agreements signed at White House, were witnessed by President Carter. "A Framework for the Conclusion of Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel," led to 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, and resulting in Sadat and Begin sharing the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize. The long-term importance of the Camp David Accords signaled persuasively and descriptively that the joint discourse had resulted in a very important Middle East peace conference; the view of Egypt within the Arab world changed; Egypt had more power than any of the other Arab states to advance their interests; the Camp David Accords ended a united Arab front in opposition to Israel. And the Accords were supported by most Egyptians and Israelis. The discursive success of Begin, Sadat, and Carter at Camp David demonstrated to other Arab states and entities that negotiations with Israel were possible. Because of the Iranian hostage crisis, President Carter was often vilified as a weak leader, but late in his only term of office, his accomplishments clearly included his efforts for the Israeli-Arab peace process; his return of the Panama Canal to Panama; and the US-PRC establishment of full diplomatic recognition by the US for the PRC. Also, in my opinion, the release of the US hostages in Iraq were also direct results of his diplomatic efforts, but credit was given improperly to newly sworn-in President Ronald Reagan as he was being inaugurated on January 20, 1981. In 2002, President Carter received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work "to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts" and he has been active since his Presidency in helping to negotiate many international conflicts.

During early January 1981, I was a member of a US faculty study delegation of 26 participants in Lebanon, Jordan, and the occupied territories of Israel while the PLO controlled much of Lebanon. We met with Chairman Arafat, many local delegations, and the outgoing US ambassador in Beirut, as well as with the Jordanian Council of Foreign Relations and various delegations in the West Bank of Israel

and the Gaza Strip. Publically, US officials were restricted from meeting with Chairman Arafat, but secretly negotiations continued between the US government and the PLO under Arafat's leadership, who labeled himself as "a stateless person," required to travel internationally through a UN passport, and who called for open negotiations with the American and Israeli governments and the PLO. In 1982, several American and British negotiators were taken hostage in Lebanon and held for a long period. When we were in southern Lebanon in Tyre, our entire delegation was forced into an underground air shelter, and the Israeli shelling was reported by The International Harold Tribune the next day. In Israel, government officials refused to meet with our delegation because we had met with PLO officials and Chairman Arafat. Thus in this case, Israeli discourse was harsh, but without an actual opportunity for it between Israeli leaders and the American professorial delegation.

During the Presidency of George Herbert Walker Bush, the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace Conference was convened on October 30 under the sponsorship of Spain and co-sponsored by the US and USSR. As the last conference cosponsored by both the US and USSR, before the Soviet collapse, it was an early, but unsuccessful attempt by the international community to start a peace process through negotiations involving Israel and Palestinians as well as Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Reading the Discourse about the Middle East Process, 1993 to 2011

In Israeli-Arab Peace process in Oslo 1993 during fourteen secret meetings, in cooperation with the Norwegian government, Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Shimon Peres sent the highest-ranking non-political representative and a military lawyer to continue the negotiations. Israeli and Palestinian delegations in Norway lived in the same residence, with meals at the same table, and ongoing friendly discussions in contrast to the Madrid conference where the delegations met only in the formal sessions. In August 1993, the delegations reached an agreement, signed in secrecy by Peres while

visiting Oslo.   The Palestinians and Israelis had not yet agreed on the Accord's wording, with the PLO to acknowledge the state of Israel and pledging to reject violence, while Israel would recognize the (unelected) PLO as the official Palestinian authority, and also allowing Arafat to return to the West Bank. In relation to the he Oslo Accords, Benjamin Netanyahu's comments provided an interesting view of what was supposed to be private discourse, in a 2001 video, Netanyahu, reportedly unaware that he was being recorded, said: ''They asked me before the election if I'd honor [the Oslo accords]... I said I would, but [that] I'm going to interpret the accords in such a way that would allow me to put an end to this galloping forward to the '67 borders. How did we do it? Nobody said what defined military zones were. Defined military zones are security zones; as far as I'm concerned, the entire Jordan Valley is a defined military zone. Go argue." Netanyahu then explained how he conditioned his signing of the 1997 Hebron agreement on American consent that there be no withdrawals from "specified military locations," and insisted he be allowed to specify which areas constituted a ''military location'' - such as the whole of the Jordan Valley. He asked rhetorically: ''Why is that important? Because from that moment on I stopped the Oslo Accords."

The Jordan-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1994 normalized relations between the two countries and resolved territorial disputes," discursively as an end to the age of wars." The conflict had already roughly cost US$18.3 billion. The treaty was closely linked with efforts to create peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The signing ceremony occurred at the southern border crossing of Arabah on October 26, and made Jordan only the second Arab country, after Egypt, to normalize relations with Israel.

The 1998 Wye River Memorandum negotiated between Israel and the Palestine Authority to implement the earlier Interim Agreement was moderated by the US at the Aspen Institute Wye River Conference Centers near Wye River, Maryland and signed on October 23, 1998. President William Jefferson Clinton opened the summit at the secluded Wye River Conference Center on October 15, 1998 and he

returned at least six times (and perhaps more secretly) to the site to press Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to overcome remaining obstacles, with Chairman Arafat. Clinton invited King Hussein to join the talks.

Earlier in March 2000, Pope John Paul II made the second historic and highly symbolic papal and interreligious visit to Israel (the first having occurred by Pope Paul VI.)   Expectations grew considerably about the likely conclusion of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian peace process. At the July 2000 Camp David Summit, President Clinton moderated meetings between Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Barak reportedly offered the Palestinian leader approximately 95% of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, and proposed that 69 Jewish settlements (which comprised 85% of the West Bank's Jewish settlers) would be given to Palestinians. He also proposed ''temporary Israeli control'' indefinitely over another 10% of the West Bank territory—an area including many more Jewish settlements. At the Camp David Summit, Arafat rejected the treaty but surprisingly made no counter proposals. Thus, the raised symbolic peace process and ongoing discourse between the Israelis and Palestinians was once again halted. It might be called a "discourse of silence."

Although Israel unilaterally withdrew troops from southern Lebanon, Prime Minister Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount initiated the second Intifada which temporarily ended negotiations between the PLO Fahtah leadership and Israel, causing most of the earlier supportive. Israelis to lose confidence in much of the on and off again Israeli-Palestinian peace process. At the Beirut Arab Summit Endorsement of Arab Peace Initiative, March, 2002, a comprehensive peace initiative, first proposed in 2002 at the Beirut Summit of the Arab League by then-Crown Prince, and later King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, and re-endorsed at the Riyadh Summit in 2007, to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, which meant normalizing relations between the entire Arab region and Israel, in exchange for a complete withdrawal from occupied territories (including East Jerusalem) and a ''just settlement'' of the Palestinian refugee crisis

based on UN Resolution 194. At this time, Israel was not willing to negotiate with this major Arab initiative for the Middle East peace process.

In June 2002, the "Roadmap for Peace" was articulated by President George W Bush, to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and proposed by the ''quartet": the US, EU, Russia, and UN. It was considered a new starting point for a "Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in Peace". Although this "roadmap" is still an aspect of the rhetorical and discursive framework, to date it has produced no concrete results. After suicide bomb attacks, ending in the ''Passover massacre" in 2003 Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield and Prime Minister Sharon began constructing tall barriers around the West Bank, segmenting Palestinian settlements from each other. When the January 2003 elections were held for the Knesset, the right-wing Likud Party won the most seats (27). In December 2003, Prime Minister Sharon announced that he would consider a unilateral withdrawal from parts of the occupied territories. Disengagement from the Gaza Strip was completed on September 12, 2005. Most Israelis and Palestinians agreed on a two-state solution.

President Bush hosted the Annapolis Middle East Peace Conference on November 27, 2007, at the US Naval Academy. Forty countries were invited including China, Middle Eastern states, the Arab League, Russia, the EU, and the UN. This conference marked first time that the reality of a two-state solution was internationally articulated in an agreed upon outline to address the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict based on the "Roadmap for Peace." Palestinian leader Mamoud Abbas' major quotes over several years suggest his contrasting visions of the ongoing discourse: in 2003, ''There is absolutely no substitution for dialogue," In 2005, "The little jihad is over, and now we have the bigger jihad – the bigger battle is achieving security and economic growth," and 2005: ''I renew my commitment to continuing the road he [Arafat] began and for which he made a lot of sacrifices, until the Palestinian flag flies from the walls, minarets and churches of Jerusalem.'' Although Israel had unilaterally withdrawn from Gaza in 2005, a major event occurred when because

of ongoing rocket strikes into southern Israel from Gaza, Israel engaged in an "Unrelenting/uncompromizing War" toward the Gaza leadership and population. In a surprise air attack by the Israel Air Force against Gaza. Israel was widely criticized by many human rights groups for using heavy firepower and dropping prosperous on the population from the air. Israel's aggressive part in the conflict echoed criticism through both the Israeli NGO "Breaking the Silence" and a special report by Israeli filmmaker Nurit Kedar shown on Israel's Channel on January 4, 2011.

In April 2009, President Barack Obama gave a major Middle East address in Turkey, and then on June 4, 2009 he delivered his major Cairo address to the Middle East: "A New Beginning" in which he called for improved mutual understanding and relations between the Islamic world and the West and said that both the Muslim world and the west should do more to confront violent extremism. However, it was Obama's call for peace between Israel and Palestinians that provided the highest profile. Obama reaffirmed America's alliance with Israel, calling their mutual bond ''unbreakable'', but also described Palestinian statelessness as ''intolerable'' and recognizing their aspirations for statehood and dignity as legitimate—just as legitimate as Israel's desire for a Jewish homeland. The speech had 7 parts: violent extremism, the Israeli/Palestinian dispute, nuclear weapons (with a reference to Iran), democracy, religious freedom, rights of women, and economic development.

Benjamin Netanyahu had been the Israeli Prime Minister in 1996-99; and was elected again in 2009. On June 14, 2009, Netanyahu gave a seminal address, broadcast live in Israel and across parts of Arab world, on the topic of the Middle East peace process. He endorsed for the first time the notion of a Palestinian state along side Israel. This was a remarkable discursive development in the long and seemingly unending discourse about a sustainable Middle East peace process. In 2010, the British magazine, *New Statesman*, listed him as the eleventh among the most influential world figures in 2010."

Roger Cohen, writing in the *New York Times* on May 3, 2011, about the capture and death of Osama Bin Laden, made the following

points: "From Bin Laden to the transformation and fast-forwarding of the Arab world toward pluralism and self-expression, we need to make America's closest regional ally, Israel, understand that a changed Middle East cannot be met with unchanging Israeli policies. Palestine, like Israel, must rise to the region's dawning post-Osama era of responsibility and representation." As Cohen says, only when the" dialogue among civilizations" places discourse and not conflict and war as the first priority, can a greater intercultural and international understanding be developed.

As a discursive initiative, even before the Egyptian, Lybian, Jordanian, and Syrian protests, social media began to play an important role discursively. Facebook appears to have had a pivotal role in engaging young Middle Easterners to call for a change to the decades long leadership in the region, to be replaced by "power to the people." In the autumn of 2011, a major rhetorical proposition gaining traction among UN delegations is to declare Palestine a state, something which Arafat contemplated but never achieved. Prime Minister Netanyahu is facing his own form of social networking protests in Israel. So we have potential positive discourse between Israel and Palestine, a potential symbolic announcement of Palestine as a new state, and clashing discourses throughout the Middle East away from decades long rule in the Arab states moving toward their own uncertain patterns of democracy, and within Israel an increasingly divided population over many social issues. Will the ongoing rhetoric lead toward pragmatic solutions or a communication breakdown? It is presently slightly too early to tell, but many changes can be anticipated in a matter of months rather than years now: leading to more "clash of civilizations" or "a dialogue among civilizations."