

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH HONORABLE MARTTI AHTISAARI

SUBJECT: IN A SPEECH TITLED "PEACE IS A QUESTION OF WILL", PRESIDENT AHTISAARI WILL EXPLAIN HOW TO ENHANCE TRANSATLANTIC CO-OPERATION IN PEACE-BUILDING. PRESIDENT AHTISAARI WILL REFLECT ON THE CENTRAL ROLE OF THE U.S. AND TRANSATLANTIC CO-OPERATION TO SOLVE CONFLICTS AND BUILDING PEACE.

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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DONNA LEINWAND: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm a reporter for *USA Today* and I'm president of the National Press Club.

We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists. And on behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching on C-Span.

We're celebrating our 100th anniversary this year, and we've rededicated ourselves to a commitment to a future of journalism through informative programming, journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org.

We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards, I will ask as many questions as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions from the audience as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From you're right, Howard Goller from Reuters where he is editor for political and general news for the U.S. and Canada; Andrea Snyder, editor for Bloomberg; Kari Mokko, press secretary and spokesman for the Embassy of Finland and a member of the National Press Club; Jim Hoagland, associate editor and foreign affairs columnist for *The Washington Post* and a guest of our speaker.

Skipping over the podium, Angela Greiling-Keane, reporter for Bloomberg News and chair of the NPC Speakers Committee. Skipping our guest for a moment, Rick Dunham, bureau chief of the *Houston Chronicle* and past president of the National Press Club; Chester Crocker, professor of strategic studies at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service and a guest of our speaker; and finally, Eleanor Clift, contributing editor for *Newsweek*. (Applause.)

There is no shortage in the world today of places in need of peace — Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict to name just a few. Perhaps we can trouble our guest today for some advice.

Our guest, the former President of Finland, is noted for bringing some of the world's most stubborn conflicts to a peaceful end. Mr. Ahtisaari's international career has had an interesting start as a physical education trainer for the YMCA in Karachi, Pakistan. But he eventually joined the Finnish Diplomatic Corps. Among his first tasks, helping Namibia secure its independence from South Africa. He holds honorary Namibian citizenship.

As a U.N. special envoy at the Kosovo status negotiations, Martti Ahtisaari devised a plan to settle the long-running dispute about the status of Kosovo after it declared its independence from Serbia in 2008. He had negotiated there with Slobodan Milosevic in 1999 to end the fighting there.

But diplomacy doesn't always make you popular. Numerous groups at odds with his negotiations have targeted Mr. Ahtisaari, including one South African group that allegedly plotted to assault him by breaking his knuckles. As President of Finland, Mr. Ahtisaari supported the country's entry in the European Union. He also facilitated a meeting in Finland between Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton. Since leaving government service in 2000, Mr. Ahtisaari has traveled the world to resolve conflicts. He inspected IRA weapons dumps as part of the

Northern Ireland peace process. He negotiated a disarmament treaty in 2005 between the Free Aceh Movement in Sumatra and the Indonesia government.

I'd list all his awards, but we only have our guest with us until 2:00 PM. So I will mention just one. Mr. Ahtisaari's work as an international mediator and diplomat was recognized last October when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel committee cited his work on several continents over more than three decades to resolve international disputes. He was cited for his work in Namibia, Indonesia, Kosovo, and Iraq, among others. Please welcome 2008 Nobel Prize Laureate, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari. (Applause.)

HONORABLE MARTTI AHTISAARI: Thank you, Madame president, for the kind words of introduction. It's good to be back here in the National Press Club. And I thank you for the invitation.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me a great pleasure always to visit United States. I lived here for well over ten years. I was in New York and worked for United Nations on these different conflicts. During those years, I learned to appreciate the rich intellectual debate on government policies, were they on foreign security or economic policy. I have always argued in perhaps more in the European debates, that Americans, as such a vibrant society, has the ability to correct their mistakes and change their policies.

If they go in one direction and the people feel that they need to change course, they will. In Europe, we tend not to have such vigorous debates. But I think we are catching up. I, among some of my friends, was involved in the establishment of the European Council on Foreign Relations in 2007. I'm one of the co-chairs, together with Mabel von Oranje, a Dutch lady, which is the executive director for the Elders group (which includes the South African former leadership, President Mandela, Bishop Tutu, et cetera) and then Joschka Fischer, the foreign secretary of the-- Germany.

The Council promotes awareness of a need for a more coherent and vigorous European foreign policy, and the need to engage debate over key issues. Ladies and gentlemen, as I said in my Nobel Peace Prize lecture last December, I firmly believe that all conflicts can be solved. Peace is a question of will. My long international career has also taught me that it is very difficult to find a solution to any conflict without constructive support from The United States.

In the long process towards the Namibian independence, which was achieved in 1990, I worked with several U.S. Administrations. I want to recognize my friend, Chester Crocker here, because I have to say that had it not been his courage to introduce the linkage(?) of Cuban withdrawal from Angola, we would not have been able to implement the U.N. plan.

In the Kosovo status(?) process, the firm support of the U.S. government was crucial in finding a solution. Dear friends, I'm an ardent promoter of transatlantic cooperation. The United States and European Union enjoy an exceptionally broad and deep commonality of interests and values. Our relationship has to be such that we can remind each other if we start deviating from those values.

Multilateralism remains the legitimate and often also the most effective foundation for conflict resolution. The U.S. played an instrumental role in establishing the multilateral organizations that today work to maintain peace, stability in many emerging crisis in the world. Multilateralism strives from current(?) security. Some issues are inherently multilateral and cannot be managed without the help of other countries. This holds true for a long list of security threats — the instability of global financial markets, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, trafficking on humans and drugs, international organized crime, transnational terrorism, the spread of pandemics, and climate change.

Whether our democracies can rise to these global challenges will depend on our ability to build more ambitious transatlantic cooperation. It is in the common interest, both Europe and U.S., to promote global stability and peace. The U.S. and EU are now presented with an ideal moment to strengthen their cooperation in conflict prevention and resolution. Both sides now agree to a large extent on the major challenges facing them.

We have a common interest and challenge in integrating Russia into cooperative frameworks. The success or failure thereof will have a lasting impact on transatlantic relations as well. We all want to see a stable, democratic and prosperous Russia that is integrated with the global and European cooperative structures.

One positive outcome of the current fiscal crisis that I see is the increased willingness for cooperation between the major powers, including the U.S. and EU, China and Russia. There is a silent acknowledgment that we all need each other to survive this economic downturn. We need to use this momentum to engage all of the key players for the purposes of conflict resolution as well.

However, at this point, I would like to remind you that the fields of conflict resolution and peace building are not only the domain of government agencies. Civil society organizations also have a key contribution to make. We should foster transatlantic cooperation on these issues also at the level of think tanks and NGOs. An excellent example of this kind of cooperation was the

organization of meetings of key Iraqi political leaders in Finland, first in September of 2007 and then in April, 2008.

This process led to the signing of an Helsinki Two agreement outlining 70 principles that define a framework for future reconciliation in Iraq. This meeting was organized by a peace building organization I established after my term as President of Finland called Crisis Management Initiative, CMI. We worked together with John W. McCormack, Graduate School of Policy Studies at the University of Massachusetts, and the Institute for Global Leaders at Tufts University, Massachusetts.

The motor and drive behind this process was professor Pdraig O'Malley. But perhaps the most innovative thing in this whole exercise was that it led to inviting those who had been fighting each other in South Africa and Northern Ireland to come and tell the Iraqis what mistakes they had made in order them to avoid the same mistakes in their peace process. So we had, from ANC, Cyril Ramaphosa, who was the chief negotiator for ANC in South Africa, and from President De Klerk's team, the leader, Roelf Meyer, a distinguished lawyer, and from IRA, Northern Ireland, Martin McGuinness. And from Unionists side, their team was lead by Donaldson.

I thought this was one of the most innovative undertakings I gladly supported. I'm very pleased that the process still continues.

Today, I would like to discuss two conflicts in particular — the Middle East and Afghanistan that are at the very core of global peace and stability. I see these region as priority areas for transatlantic cooperation and conflict resolution and peace building. Progress in resolving them requires strong political will and a determined joint strategy from the international community as a whole.

We need to untie the Middle East knot. The most challenging peace building process ahead of us is finding a solution to the conflicts in the Middle East which have continued for decades. The tensions involved in the region have been going on for so long that many have come to believe that Middle East knot can never be untied. Conflicts are never fundamentally ideological or religious; they are often human-made disputes over power and resources. Therefore, conflicts can be solved by addressing the concerns and interests of both the parties in mutually satisfactory manner.

As for the Middle East, reaching a transatlantic understanding is especially important as the previous regional policy which was based on the cohesion and isolation of Iran, Syria, and non-state actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah, is being reworked. The transatlantic partners should find means for bridging national divides instead of deepening them. Engagement with Iran, support for

Syrian peace negotiation, and a dialogue with Hamas are all steps that require meticulous policy coordination and a joint effort to achieve the desired result.

One of the more immediate concerns is that the potential Israeli violations of human rights during the Gaza incursion are thoroughly investigated. These violations cannot be ignored by international organizations or the leading world powers. And I am confident that we will see a change of direction, regarding what comes to the blind support for Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza, policies which also I see as harmful for Israel itself.

The fact that all conflict can be solved should be remembered by those who play a role in Middle East. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict has been perceived an unsolvable within the immediate future, or at least within one term of office. Because of this, both international/regional actors have resorted to policies that aim to manage and contain the conflict instead of solving it. As a result, the conflict has become subject to the constant intermingling of national interests, interests that are often completely unrelated to that particular conflict.

Iranian, Syrian, Western, and moderate Arab governments are all guilty of this to a varying degree. This has complicated peacemaking. Any serious attempt to solve the conflict starts by untying these interests from Israel and Palestine. The concerns of both the parties in the conflict must be equally acknowledged. Otherwise, peace cannot prevail, nor can the conflict be solved if there's no dialogue with all parties who have support among population. And Hamas is no exception. Dialogue must also be supported with both sides, not only between them. Successful peace negotiations require partners who have the broadest possible coalition behind them. Otherwise, those excluded can disrupt the peace process.

It is difficult to think that this conflict could be solved unless the Palestinian side gets its act together, to find a representative coalition for the negotiation, to stop the missile attacks against Israel and suicide bombing. The violence simply leads to the escalation of the conflict. It is high time for both parties to settle the situation. The international community has the right and responsibility to demand it from both parties. I wholeheartedly support the recent initiative of Mr. Paul Walker and his friends. In the current political climate, I find it of utmost importance that the transatlantic partners press that both parties, to accept the two-state solution. I'm in full accord with President Obama; the two-state solution has been and should remain the basis for further discussion.

A broader regional approach is needed to solve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Peace on all fronts should be put on the agenda. The Syrian/Israeli peace track has been taken hostage by the Israeli/Palestinian peace track, and vice versa. Actors in the region should support it without condition. Solving the conflict of

the Golan Heights would have a beneficial impact for Israeli and Syrian security, and help to enhance Lebanese sovereignty, domestic stability, and stabilize the border area.

As has been argued several times before, a Syrian/Israeli peace agreement would also help to separate both Syrian and Iranian ambitions from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The benefits of peace are too numerous to be ignored.

A comprehensive regional approach requires dealing with Iran. Iran's drive for nuclear power is a destabilizing factor that has to be simply addressed. All countries in the region deserve to live in security. As it stands, Iranian ambitions can only be contained and managed. To change the root causes behind these nuclear ambitions, Iran security and energy deficit must be addressed. Iran also deserves to live in security. It is realistic to think that the engagement and a normalization of relations with Iran could occur simultaneous with containing Iranian nuclear and regional ambitions.

This is why the initiation of contacts between the U.S. and Iran, as well as lifting a ban on diplomatic relations, would be positive steps that pave the way for possible broader engagement.

The key to advancing regional stability in the Middle East, more generally, is acknowledging and addressing the security concerns of all parties involved. The region needs a new security architecture, one that seeks to support peace and stability. The need is acute after the failure of the isolation policy which sought to contain Iran and Syria, and only resulted in an increase of unconstructive behavior by these actors, and a deepening of divisions in the region. After the Iraq war, the balance of power in the country is still in the making.

In formulating policies regarding these two fundamental regional conflicts, external actors have the power and the responsibility to create the foundations for the new order that the region desperately needs in order to dilute differences, raise confidence, and ultimately to resolve conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen, in Afghanistan, we need to renew our long-term commitment. Afghanistan remains another key challenge for the transatlantic partnership. It presents a mixed picture with both progress and setbacks. There's clear progress in several areas. The central government's institutional and human capacity has improved. Economic growth and a more open business environment have improved the general health of the Afghan economy. Investments by the international community have enhanced social services and infrastructure. There has been a major increase in school enrollment and a significant drop in child and maternal mortality.

Afghanistan remains, however, an infinitely complex and fractured society. It has become one of the most dangerous places in the world, and a source for regional instability. Seven years after the start of the war in Afghanistan, there's still no solution on the horizon. In fact, the security situation appears to be regressing. Recent months have seen resurgence of the Taliban mounting tendencies(?) for the U.S.-led multinational force in Afghanistan. The rise in violent extremists operating out of Pakistan and the eroding legitimacy of the Afghan government is a dangerous combination. To save Afghanistan from the current downward spiral and counter these negative trends, a more focused effort is required.

I welcome the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is indeed a rather comprehensive civil/political effort to improve basic services, accountability, and overall governance in order to defeat the hardcore Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters at the heart of the insurgency. These emphases on the civil and political sectors is a welcome development. There has also been a steady growth in the EU contributions to the reconstruction of Afghanistan from development aid to police training. Although I have to confess, not every EU member state is yet pulling its full weight. Although there's frequent talk about importance on nonmilitary instruments, many European governments have failed to provide staff for civilian bodies like EUPOL, the Office of the EU Special Representative to Afghanistan, or the NATO civilian representative's office.

Ladies and gentlemen, we should not fool ourselves. There are no quick fixes in Afghanistan. What is needed in Afghanistan is the opening of negotiations with reconcilable Taliban insurgents, more civilian reconstruction, a development-based approach to counter-narcotics, more training for Afghan security forces to enable them to lead the counterinsurgency effort, and regional initiative that includes, not only Pakistan, but also India and China. It is also vital to engage Afghanistan's neighbors, including Russia and Iran to help stabilize Afghanistan.

Even if we all acknowledge that there's no military solution, we have to be equally clear that from a transatlantic perspective, we cannot afford to let NATO fail in Afghanistan. NATO is the embodiment of transatlantic cooperation and peacekeeping. The failure of its first ever deployment beyond its immediate parameter would seriously undermine the organization.

I believe this has been acknowledged now on both sides of the Atlantic. The United States is not alone. The last few years have seen something of a European troop surge in Afghanistan. Since late 2006, 18 of the 25 EU countries participating in the international security assistance force, NATO's Afghan

mission, have increased their troop contributions. As a result, EU member states now account for 43% of these forces total deployment.

Despite slow progress, the international community needs to remain committed to Afghanistan. Failure to do so would cause this country to slide backwards with disastrous consequences for the region. Afghanistan is a place that needs time, patience, and relentless effort. This is not a time to give up. It is a time to remain fully engaged so that existing positive developments can be built upon and produce long-term results.

The core transatlantic long-term commitment in Afghanistan should be an increased focus and resources on state building and rule of law by ensuring adequate military support, addressing the regional dimension of the instability and engaging Afghanistan's neighbors including Iran and Russia.

Ladies and gentlemen, these multiple near-term emergencies cannot however occupy all the attention of the transatlantic community. Transatlantic cooperation must also cover shared strategies and preparedness for long-term challenges that are unconfined by political geography. These challenges include climate change, environmental degradation, fighting(?) regional conflicts rooted in ethnic, religious divides, and competition over resources, organized crime and trafficking, terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

However, the problem with the greatest impact is the growing rich/poor gap. It has grown even worse. Three billion people now live on less than \$2 dollars a day. The physical, political, and psychological and moral consequences of this disparity are enormous. The current global financial crisis has further increased the risk of growing inequality. Many of the regions and countries most affected by the withdrawal of capital from emerging markets and the collapse of international trade are already fragile. And many are only just emerging from years of conflict. Growing inequality between countries and within society exasperates existing grievances. The loss of welfare and employment opportunities easily leads to a loss of hope and faith in the future among the most vulnerable. This, in turn, fosters the rise of fundamentalism and violence and creates breeding grounds for crime, terrorism, and war.

We risk losing a generation to this fiscal crisis. And with globalization and increased interdependence among countries, violence in one region will have an impact in another part of the world. I'm gravely concerned, ladies and gentlemen, with the lack of human development in both of the Middle East and Afghanistan. They are held hostage by conflicts and short-term national and societal interests. In particular, the world should pay attention to the potentially explosive unemployment rates in the Arab countries.

Over the next decade, the International Labor Organization expects 1.2 billion young people to enter the global labor market. By traditional means, we can employ only 300 million of them. The inability to support oneself and care for one's family, to see a future with prospects and opportunities will prove costly, not only for these youths, but for their societies and the entire region as well. We should also make better use of economic, social, and environmental indicators to assess possible future conflict so that in the long-term, we can plan how to prevent them.

I am participating in Qatar, Doha in an organization called Silatech, which started slightly over a year ago. The idea is to improve the employment possibilities for young people in Middle East and North Africa. It started with the generous support of the Emir of Qatar when he gave \$100 million U.S. dollars for this undertaking. These things can be done. I think we should address this issue and give a hope for the young generation, and make, by the way, as many as possible of them into entrepreneurs.

United States and Europe, ladies and gentlemen, carry enormous responsibility for the global peace and human security. We are responsible both for our citizens and the citizens of the volatile countries. It is our responsibility to act, to prevent violence, to resolve conflicts, and to help rebuild societies. This responsibility means commitment. We cannot choose to come and go based on international interests or economic considerations. What we need is staying power, the ability to commit to and guide war shattered countries in the long-term through the rebuilding and reconciliation process.

Ladies and gentlemen, peace needs everybody. We cannot pick and choose our partners for peace. We have to speak with all parties that have popular support, whether it is Hamas in Palestine or Taliban in Afghanistan. In this respect, national interests would not intervene in the sensitive process of peace building, for peace is the supreme national interest.

Peace requires compromise, also from external actors for the benefit of common interests. Conflict zones are no place for competition. Otherwise, peace will fail. Peace in conflict zones should be a primary call for the transatlantic partnership. Quite logically, peace also has the power to secure the interests of other powerful nations. Raising the necessary consensus for peace however is the task of all member states of the United Nations, and particularly that of the main actors.

For our long-term benefit, we need to get serious about preventive action. Preventive action on key challenges, such as the ever widening gap between the rich and poor requires commitment. Commitment requires resources. We have to

stay committed to development, cooperation through the economic downturn as well. Conflicts do not cease because of downturns.

Let me end by concluding, ladies and gentlemen, this is a question of will. The transatlantic partners has a major role in creating that will and transforming it into action. I thank you for your patience. (Applause.)

MS. LEINWAND: We have a number of questions from the audience. First, let's start with, do you consider any current world leaders particularly well positioned and well skilled to help resolve tensions in their regions?

MR. AHTISAARI: In *their* regions...? I think you have just elected a President who I put a lot of faith. As I said in my speech, I have always defended United States, because I think you have the capacity to make changes if you need to. And I have actually followed, like so many others. But in other regions as well, I can see people who can be of assistance.

The cooperation I got from the leaders in Indonesia, for instance, was absolutely vital to President Yudhoyono and Vice President Kalla. And I hope that the forthcoming elections on the ninth of this month in Aceh Province and in the whole of Indonesia will prove that we can move forward in a peaceful manner.

Yes, there are. And of course the task of civil activists, I'm not a president. I don't hold any political office. I don't even belong to any political party, which give me an absolute freedom which I love. So that's why, with my friends, I established the European Council on Foreign Relations, because we want to remind our leaders in Europe that they have to show more unity and determination in solving, and also cooperating in transatlantic relations.

But to answer your question honestly, I think we would need more, those type of leaders.

MS. LEINWAND: Which leaders do you think are most likely to stir up conflict? And how should the international community address that?

MR. AHTISAARI: Is that the same person asking the same-- (Laughter.) Or is it your handwriting?

I would hesitate to start pointing out any leaders. I very often remind my audiences that I make my career in talking to people who have been branded at one state(?) another, to terrorists. That's why I like the idea of bringing those who had been branded terrorists to tell how to make peace in Iraq when we had the friends from Northern Ireland and South Africa there.

I can't see anyone-- If you would ask me to name somebody who mostly will cause the next problem on the agenda, I would find it difficult to do. But what I have been saying, that is very sad reflection on our capacity as an international community, that we have many frozen conflicts today — Cyprus, Middle East. I could continue for a long time. I think in Africa I would sincerely hope that the major actors whom I mentioned could get their act together and, for instance, prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan, and Darfur particularly.

I'm, bit optimistic that non-traditional actors can have an influence in Africa, China for instance. And I know that they have been encouraging the government to let the humanitarian assistance programs continue. And we have to encourage people to do that sort of things.

MS. LEINWAND: Since you mention Africa, can you comment on the effect that the international criminal court's indictment of President Bashir of Sudan will have on the peace negotiations in Sudan?

MR. AHTISAARI: I have experienced this international court's indictment on the Balkan case already when we were trying to prepare for negotiations in '99 with Strobe Talbot and Chernomyrdin, from(?) Prime Minister, Russia, and myself with Milosevic. He was indicted couple of days before we went to Belgrade to see him. He never raised the issue. I thought then that this would make our life even more miserable. But this issue was never mentioned in our discussions. And we managed to get what we went to Belgrade, and got a stop of the war. And U.N. started its presence in Kosovo.

I think it is important that international community stands for its principles, despite the criticism we have heard. But it is also important that these things are done in a manner, that those organizations that are carrying out humanitarian work can continue doing so. And they are not mixed with the political decisions. That's very, very important.

Because I remember when I-- Somebody reminded me in my famous report when I was asked by Secretary General Perez de Cuellar to go Iraq in January 1991 and produce a report on the need for humanitarian in assistance in Iraq and Kuwait. I was not particularly liked in this country for the report I produced. But we had to say certain things in order to get some sympathy for humanitarian action. Because had I written a sort of normal U.N. report, I don't think we would have got enough funding to help those who were suffering in Iraq after the war.

And my view has always been that whatever mistakes the political leaders make, the ordinary citizens should not suffer. We have to make that difference.

And even difficult situations, assist those. And I must say that the government of Kuwait showed great leadership. And I wanted to go there first. They said, “No. Go to Iraq. These people need you more than we need you,” because their reconstruction had already started. I’m in favor that if somebody commits the type of criminal acts, then the ICC(?) is there and we have to support it.

MS. LEINWAND: Is either Zimbabwe or Darfur or both capable of being resolved by humanitarian intervention as was Kosovo, Bosnia, and East Timor?

MR. AHTISAARI: We are not talking anymore about so much of humanitarian intervention, because in 2005, the ...(inaudible) had simply approved the report which was prepared by two friends of mine, Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun. It was a Canadian foreign minister ... (inaudible) initiative. And the report was named, “Responsibility to Protect.” It sent a very clear message that leaders in every country have a responsibility to protect their citizens. It’s only an advisory opinion like general assembly decisions are. But it was extremely important. Because it also implied that if the local leadership fails in that duty, then international community has a secondary responsibility to intervene.

Can this be done in Zimbabwe? I think I said already that it’s important that humanitarian aid continues. And I think we have to concentrate in Sudan particularly to look for political settlement. In Zimbabwe, you may not perhaps necessary like what I say now. But I say it nevertheless, because I recently met a South African friend who lived in my part of the world, in Norway, during the Apartheid years.

And he visited my country and came to see me because we know each other for a long, long time. I told him that if people from Europe and North America come to South Africa and start lecturing you, how badly you have dealt with Mugabe and Zimbabwe issue, if I were you, I would tell the visitors that, “Thank you very much for your advice, but could we continue this discussion after you people have solved the Middle East crisis?”

And I think that our model authority is suffering if we don’t tackle those questions that we have allowed to fester so many years.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, moving onto the Middle East crisis, first of all, how would you assess President Obama’s first foray into the Islamic world yesterday and his speech in Turkey? And do you expect the tension between the U.S. and Islamic countries to ease?

MR. AHTISAARI: I had a chance. My staff made sure that before I come here that I read what President said yesterday. When I looked at it this morning, I must say that I nearly thought that it would be good to be American. And I think I said to my friend, Chester Crocker and Jim Hoagland that I wish I would have made that speech. It was first-class. I must say that I am proud as a transatlantist and Democrat to see that sort of speech is made.

I'm perhaps particularly happy because I'm the chairman of a civic initiative, it started in 2004. I'm a chairman of an independent commission on Turkey, which is a group that consists of former statesmen and women in Europe, Anthony Giddens from U.K., Hans van den Broek from Netherlands, Michel Rocard from France, former prime minister. Hans van den Broek was foreign minister and commissioner. Marcelino Oreja from Spain, again, former foreign minister, Emma Bonino, former minister now, vice president of the Italian parliament, Dr. Biedenkopf from Germany, former president of Hessen. And then we had foreign minister Geremek, former foreign minister Geremek, who unfortunately died.

This is a group. I was president of my country, when, in '99, Turkey got the candidate status, vis-à-vis European Union. We produced a report in September, 2004 where we urged the EU to start negotiations with Turkey. And so was decided. I visited Turkey now in the middle of January with my colleagues, and we are producing a new report. It's five years now in September. And we hope to come up with a new report where we look, honestly what has happened in Turkey since our last report, and how also the EU member states have behaved, vis-à-vis these negotiations. You will see an interesting report. I recommend it.

MS. LEINWAND: How will EU members see President Obama's strong endorsement of Turkish membership in the European Union?

MR. AHTISAARI: No, I remember in the past when everyone in Europe knows that U.S. strongly believes that Turkey should join the European Union. And I have no problem with that position. But of course in the past debate, sometimes some of us started thinking that, and saying that the Americans are selling their neighbor's house. But I would encourage President and all of you to speak on this issue, that we live in democratic societies and this sort of debate has to be there.

And there's a lot of debate still needed in Europe in order to pave the way for negotiations. I have never argued that Turkey should get in easier than anybody else. We all have to go through the routines, the negotiations, the different chapters. But no one should block those discussions either. And I see Turkey's role so important. And I would hate to live in Europe personally that

doesn't include Turkey. I feel very strongly on this issue and therefore I welcome what President Obama has said.

MS. LEINWAND: You mentioned in your speech that world leaders need to speak to all parties that have popular support. In that, you include Hamas. Why should world leaders talk to Hamas? And how do you get the political will to do that?

MR. AHTISAARI: It's very simple. There's not much point of talking to elements in any society who don't have that much support. Because if you make peace, I have to be sure-- I give you an example of my negotiations in Aceh. The movement that had fought for 30 years wanted independence. Indonesian government offered special autonomy.

So the negotiations were only dealing, how does the special autonomy look like? Would it be good enough for the party, that they could accept it? This is, to my mind, important. Where did you put, actually, the question.

And I had to make sure also that, how representative was the Free Aceh Movement? Because they wanted to discuss many issues. I said, "Sorry, I don't allow that sort of discussion to take place." When you have participated in the elections, then you can. This is an important and good issue, but you can only advance it when we see how much support you have in the elections.

We were discussing only, what is the framework in which a more democratic society could be created? Everyone knows that Hamas won the elections, which we generally regarded as free and fair, those who were monitoring that. So if we want to have any credibility in the world, all of us, not only Americans but we Europeans as well, despite what we think about the opinions and policies of Hamas, somehow we have to engage them. Because how can we be saying that we are democrats if we say that, "Yes, election was free and fair, but the wrong people won"? Should you have actually reversed your presidential elections here in U.S?

So I have learned that the best way to make difficult customers responsible is to engage them and give them responsibility. I have seen it in my own country after the Second World War where some of the political parties had enormous support in the society. They were brought by my predecessors to the government. Now their support is one-third of what it was at that time. But they are firm supporters of social market ... (inaudible) society and responsible actors in a society. I hate to think if they had been excluded what the outcome would have been.

So it's a very basic principle. And you need lot of patience to talk to people. There's lot of anger when people have been side-passed. But if we want to advance democracy in the world, I don't see any other alternative but talking to those who win and try to make the best out of it, and lay down the ground rules on which the things have to go forward. And it can be. I know that there have been meetings.

I'm still a chairman for few months perhaps of a Swiss organization called Interpeace. Look at the website. It's called Interpeace. And we organize meetings. I wasn't involved, but the staff was, organizing meetings with some people from Hamas and Swiss government. And I think one-- And this was years ago now. And I think we understood that they knew what was expected of them. So you have to engage them in a process that then produces the desired outcome. But I have no hesitation to talk basically to anybody.

MS. LEINWAND: Some experts seem to define the Israeli/Palestinian issue as more of an ethnic one rather than an issue related to borders. What is your position?

MR. AHTISAARI: I think there are many elements in this issue. But I think in today's world, I think Palestine/Israel issue reminds me a little bit like the reforms in the U.N. system. Everyone knows what needs to be done and no one is doing a damn thing about it. I don't attend anymore, any meetings on U.N. reforms because if they don't say that we are discussing when these reforms are carried out, then I go. My staff has strict instructions that I don't waste my time. I'm 71 and I don't have time for that sort of nonsense.

And I think it's the same thing. We know what sort of guarantees need to be there. And anyone who argues, like myself, for the peace in Middle East starts from the fact that we have to be sure that the safety of the citizens of Israel can be guaranteed in this arrangement. And that means international, most probably international presence in the borders there somehow. But we have enough plans.

There's a basket full of plans. And the main elements are more or less the same. So that should not be a major problem. It's a political will on the parties and their supporters, as simple as that.

MS. LEINWAND: Should the U.N. have a greater role and NATO less of a role in Afghanistan and in Iraq?

MR. AHTISAARI: I think both have a role. I have known many of the special representatives of the U.N. who have served there, and their deputies. Competent men from the U.N. side. I think it would perhaps be difficult to get the U.N. in the peacekeeping side of it all. I think we can easily see that both of them

can play a role. And now when-- we across the ocean, see very much eye to eye how we should look for solution in Afghanistan and I think in Iraq, too. So I have no problem with how the things are at the moment.

And I, by the way, come from a country that is not the member, NATO. Though we cooperate very closely with NATO. And my personal views are well known. I support the Finnish membership in NATO. I don't hide that.

MS. LEINWAND: How do you see the recent situation between Croatia and Slovenia?

MR. AHTISAARI: I think I have had enough Balkan problems on my plate. Because I was chairman in Yugoslav conference in Geneva in the early '90s under Cy Vance, whom I highly respect, and worked together with David Owen, Lord David Owen then. And very often-- And now I was involved from '99 and even earlier on Kosovo issue. And then I dealt with Bosnia-Herzegovina there. I was chairman of the Bosnia-Herzegovina working group.

And sometimes when I look at my own continent, I said that I'm warmly thinking of my days in dealing with the Namibia issue. And I miss the, not gentlemen, but the gentlemen and gentle ladies of Africa who were extremely forgiving in difficult times — in South Africa, in Namibia, and in many other places. I wish I would have seen the same in the Balkans. But unfortunately, that's not the case.

But you asked about Croatia and Slovenia. I'm getting these questions, is that my name has been associated with the efforts to try to find a way, how to solve the border disputes between Slovenia and Croatia, because this is now preventing the Croatian negotiations and enlargement negotiations going forward.

But the matter is entirely with the Commission, and enlargement commission of my friend, Dr. Olli Rehn. He, at one stage, asked me if could be prepared to chair a group if the terms of references were such that I could play a useful role in helping to find a solution for those border issues that are still pestering these two countries.

And I said, if it comes to it, and you need me, I'm prepared to help you. But the things have moved in such a fashion that-- I'm not a lawyer. And it's not enough to have an honorary degree from legal faculty at some major universities in this country. So I told him that, feel free to look, what is the most suitable combination of people that are needed if these two countries agree, first of all, whether you call it mediation or arbitration.

But I sincerely hope that we could somehow solve this. And I wish good luck for my countryman, Dr. Rehn, Commissioner Rehn, and the two friendly countries (I'm very fond with both, Slovenia and Croatia) so that we can move forward with the enlargement process for Croatia.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, we are almost out of time. But before I ask the last question, I have a few matters to remind our members of. We have our future speakers. On April 13th, Douglas Shulman, commissioner of the IRS, will discuss, "Tax Time Amid Hard Times". On April 14th, Fran Drescher, actress from *The Nanny*, and president and founder of the Cancer Schmancer Movement, will discuss, "The Best Gifts Come in the Ugliest Packages: My Journey from Cancer to U.S. Diplomat". And on April 16th, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, will deliver a special address regarding world economic recession.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with the coveted NPC mug. Okay. And for our last question — do you think the U.S. media do an adequate job of presenting varied information to the U.S. public on world events?

MR. AHTISAARI: The Finnish radio and TV has a program which I have in my computer where I can have an access to 1,500 newspapers in the world. And I have to confess to you that I read many of the newspapers and magazines in this country, not to say anything about publications, scholarly publications that-- or semi-scholarly publications on the issues that are of interest to me.

And I try to follow what my friends, like Jim Hoagland, are writing. Perhaps the fact that I was 13 years having my address here in New York-- ...(inaudible) New York basically. When I was trying to run for presidency in my country, one farmer on the West Coast in Finland during my campaign said, "But Mr. Ahtisaari, you are not even a Finn." I said, "I am as much Finn as you are. Sit down." And I'm still surprised that he sat down.

Look — the question is, do you have the interest? Do you want actually to have that information? If you want to have that information, it is available in your media. It's as simple as that, perhaps better than in most cases. But it doesn't necessarily come if you don't have a little bit of-- take a little bit of trouble in going after those sources. But as I said, the intellectual debate in this country is something that I have always enjoyed. I have good contacts with different universities. I look at the studies that have been done. And I would be lost in understanding the world if I wouldn't follow your media.

MS. LEINWAND: I'd like to thank you very much for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members, Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson,

JoAnn Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the NPC Library for its research.

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Thank you very much and we are adjourned. (Gavel sounds.)

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