

# Panel: US Campuses Far From Near East Norms

## CONNECT

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Campus discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be stuck in the past, according to experts who visited Georgetown this week to transform talk of Middle East issues into a cooperative effort.

In Copley Formal Lounge, Middle East policy analysts Ghaith al-Omari, a Georgetown graduate, and David Makovsky presented their views about a cooperative two-state solution to Israeli-Palestinian woes, as part of "The Dialogue Initiative," sponsored

by the International Relations Club and the Georgetown Israel Alliance and nationally by the Israel on Campus Coalition.

According to both al-Omari and Makovsky, campus discussions across the country about the conflict are rooted too far in the past, not keeping pace with progress in the Middle East.

"The campus discourse, we thought, was too much about recriminations," Makovsky said. "Usually the campuses are ahead of the curve on issues, but on this one issue across the country, we felt the campuses are behind the curve. While people are talking to each other in the Middle East, why can't they talk to each other in the Northeast?"

Rather than forming factions, students should recognize that the interests of Israel and Palestine are not diametrically opposed, al-Omari said.

"You can be a pro-Palestine advocate without being anti-Israel," he said.

He illustrated the way in which campus dialogue seems focused on the "zero-sum approach," which states



MEAGAN KELLY/THE HOYA

that what is good for one nation is bad for the other and the "tribal approach," which delves into the history of both nations to justify conflict. Neither of these viewpoints, he argued, leaves room for objectivity or potential consensus.

"It's very easy to point out the bad side of the other," al-Omari said. "It is easy to get angry."

He noted that as far back as the mid-1990s, both sides expressed willingness to settle for a two-state solution, even if media coverage has tended to highlight areas of conflict.

"The loudest voices that we hear are the extreme voices on both sides," al-Omari explained. "Those who want to get along, get along quietly."

Centrist activists tend to remain quiet about their activities, Makovsky explained, in part because they do not want to upset or embarrass other members of their nation.

"The reality on the ground is far more complex than you read in the newspapers," Makovsky said. "It is based on the two sides working together. [There is] a de facto alliance that neither side talks about."

Shifting collegiate dialogue to a more centrist approach could eventually overpower extremists who now stand in the way of unity. This approach motivates al-Omari and Makovsky in their efforts to campaign across campuses.

"If we are serious people for a two-state solution, then we have to build up both sides of the two-state solution," Makovsky said. "We found that the faculty was not attuned to these developments on the ground, that their thinking was stuck in a very confrontational age. What we want to do is bring the message to the students that you've got to be forces for coexistence."

The end goal for students is to find a viable solution to the conflict, and students are keen on using dialogue now so that policy implementation can occur later on.

"For us, we hope to change the topics of the dialogue," Daphna Katz (COL '12), co-president of the Georgetown Israel Alliance, said. "We are students on college campuses, so we aren't going to be establishing peace in the Middle East here. What we can do is not go back to 1948, but have dialogue about how we can move forward."

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