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Experts Outline Challenges, Propose Solutions for Gaza at ATFP-UNRWA Briefing

Media Mention of Ghaith al-Omari in - May 19, 2014 - 12:00am
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D7wNE1pAFI> [1]

A group of prominent experts identified a number of key challenges facing the Gaza Strip and its Palestinian residents, and ways to address them, at a briefing jointly hosted by the American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP [2]) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA [3]) in Washington, DC on May 19. Robert Turner [4], Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, said he thought the most important agenda item for improving the prospects in Gaza is access to external markets. Mara Rudman [5], a former Obama and Clinton administration national security official, now at Quorum Strategies, LLC, proposed that water resource management -- which she said could include regional partners as well as public-private initiatives -- might be best placed at the top of the agenda for improving the lives and prospects for Gaza residents.

The briefing, entitled "The Future of Gaza: Trajectories, Trends, Challenges and Opportunities, [6]" at the National Press Club looked at numerous aspects of the challenges facing Gaza, including scarce resources, overpopulation, lack of access and ability, and growing despair. However, Turner and Rudman, and panel moderator ATFP Executive Director Ghaith Al-Omari [7], also examined numerous ways in which the prospects and outcome for Gaza can be improved. Turner warned that Gaza's aquifer would be all but useless by 2020, and noted that there has been a huge spike in unemployment since the closing of the Rafah crossing for most of the past year. He also emphasized that moving goods out of Gaza was virtually impossible, especially when compared to the limited but steady flow of goods into the territory. He noted that the United States was the key aid donor to UNRWA, but expressed surprise that Israel was still enforcing a policy of separation between the West Bank and Gaza even though its technical and security requirements had already been met.

Rudman noted that pilot projects for exports from Gaza had existed in the past and may still be ongoing, but emphasized the need for a political track as well as an economic and development one. She stated that the United States has been a major beneficiary of aid to the Palestinian Authority, and that Americans, as well as Israelis and Palestinians, would feel the consequences of any cut off in aid to the PA. She therefore urged maximal caution in dealing with that question.

A video of the ATFP/UNRWA event can be viewed by [clicking here](#).

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