

## SJSU, David Makovsky gives insider's view of peace process

David Makovsky says if he could create a Mount Rushmore for heroes of Middle East peace, slain leaders Yitzhak Rabin of Israel and Anwar Sadat of Egypt would both have their faces chiseled on it.



Today's leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority would not.



That's because Makovsky, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a former adviser to Secretary of State John Kerry, does not see Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or PA President Mahmoud Abbas mustering the courage to defy their detractors and seal a peace deal.

Makovsky reflected on his time with the Kerry negotiating team and addressed the state of Israeli-Palestinian relations in a Feb. 5 talk at San Jose State University. It was part of a statewide tour sponsored by the Israel on Campus Coalition.

"You're never going to solve the past and these irreconcilable historical narratives," he told a packed house of 100 in the university library's lecture hall. "You want to make sure the past doesn't bury the future."

David Makovsky speaks Feb. 5 at San Jose State. photo/dan pine

Makovsky, 54, served 10 months, a period that included last summer's war between Israel and Hamas, under Martin Indyk, the Obama administration's former special envoy for Israel-Palestinian negotiations who reported to Kerry. He called himself "the map guy," as his deep knowledge of borders and potential borders between Israel and a Palestinian state earned him the sobriquet.

In San Jose, he said that despite the ceaseless public invective hurled back and forth between Israelis and Palestinians, behind closed doors both sides got tantalizingly close to a peace deal before talks collapsed last year.

"They got from here to here," Makovsky said, spreading his arms wide and then dramatically narrowing them. "But at the end they were like magnetic poles, pushing each other apart."

He attributed that to Palestinian resistance to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state, and Israeli resistance to sharing Jerusalem as a capital of a future Palestinian state.

The collapse of those talks had been widely predicted by pundits and insiders, but Makovsky said their failure was not due to any fault of his boss.

"Working for John Kerry during these peace talks was a privilege because this was in many ways the unfinished business of the Oslo handshake, to solve the toughest issues," he said.

A former journalist, Makovsky has had a front-row seat to many key developments in recent Middle East history. He sat on the White House lawn when Rabin and PLO founder Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords in 1994. He has



known and interviewed all top Israeli and Palestinian leaders of recent years. And though he is Jewish and a supporter of Israel, he is emphatic about restoring what he called “Palestinian dignity” and coming up with a fair solution.

“The only way to keep Israel Jewish and democratic is to divide the land,” he said.

Makovsky’s imagined Mount Rushmore — which also includes Danny Gold, one of the key inventors of Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system, and former Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who frequently spoke up for coexistence — does not include Netanyahu or Abbas, in large part, he said, because neither is preparing their respective constituencies for the hard compromises necessary for a lasting peace.

“Leadership is not just saying tough things to the opposing side,” he said. “It’s saying tough things to your own people. You negotiate with the other side and also with your own people.”

As for last summer’s war with Hamas, Makovsky spoke even-handedly but showed sympathy for Israel, claiming Hamas triggered hostilities with a rocket barrage and by building tunnels into Israel, presumably to carry out terror attacks on civilians.

He also decried the latest Palestinian moves to bring war crimes charges against Israel before the International Criminal Court. He called that a “distraction” likely to spark Israel counter-charges that could drag out for years. “There is no substitute for actually solving the conflict,” he said.

When asked about the spate of anti-Israel divestment measures succeeding at college campuses, Makovsky had an aphoristic response: “Invest, not divest.”

“It’s hard to get people motivated and excited for peace because they are so skeptical,” he summed up. “That’s what I want to do here, tell people not to give up hope. My whole pitch, my tone, is for coexistence.”