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## Report: Petraeus Warns Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mullen that Israel Is Jeopardizing US Security Interests

Veteran military and foreign affairs analyst and author Mark Perry reports that CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus dispatched a team of senior military officers in January to brief Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Admiral Michael Mullen on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Perry reports that the briefers told Mullen that "Israeli intransigence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was jeopardizing US standing in the region." [includes rush transcript]



Guest:

**Mark Perry**, veteran military and foreign affairs analyst and author. His latest article in *Foreign Policy* is [The Petraeus Briefing](#). He is author of the new book *Talking to Terrorists: Why America Must Engage with its Enemies*.

### RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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**ANJALI KAMAT:** The United States has affirmed its, quote, "unshakeable" and "unbreakable" bond with Israel just days after Israel's ambassador in Washington said ties between the allies were at their lowest point in thirty-five years. On Tuesday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and White House spokesman Robert Gibbs softened their tone toward Israel.

**ROBERT GIBBS:** The Vice President was in Israel to reaffirm our unwavering

commitment to the security of Israel and its people. As I said earlier, mature, bilateral relationships can have disagreements. And this is one of those disagreements. It does not—it does not break the unbreakable bond that we have with the Israeli government and with the Israeli people on their security.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** In an interview on *Meet the Press* this Sunday, Clinton had been sharply critical of Israel's announcement that it would build 1,600 new homes in the Jewish settlement of Ramat Shlomo, coming as it did during Vice President Joseph Biden's visit to the country.

**SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON:** It was not just an unfortunate incident of timing, but the substance was something that is not needed as we are attempting to move toward the resumption of negotiations. It was insulting. And it was insulting not just to the Vice President, who certainly didn't deserve that. He was there with a very clear message of commitment to the peace process, solidarity with the Israeli people, but it was an insult to the United States.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** Despite the strong words from high-level American officials, Israel's response has been to apologize over the unfortunate timing of the announcement, but refused to back down on settlement construction. Earlier this week, Netanyahu reiterated that, quote, "Building everywhere in Jerusalem will continue as it has over the past forty-two years."

**AMY GOODMAN:** Well, the pro-Israeli lobby has criticized the Obama administration for toughening its stance on Israel. But there's another powerful lobby that seems to have a different opinion: the US military. Veteran military and foreign affairs analyst and author, Mark Perry, reports at [foreignpolicy.com](http://foreignpolicy.com) that CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus is concerned America's policy on Israel might be jeopardizing US security interests in the region. Perry's piece is called "The Petraeus Briefing: Biden's Embarrassment Is Not the Whole Story." He's also author of the new book *Talking to Terrorists: Why America Must Engage with its Enemies*. Mark Perry joins us now from Washington, DC.

Welcome to *Democracy Now!*, Mark Perry. Start off by explaining what exactly General Petraeus sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. What is his stand?

**MARK PERRY:** General Petraeus sent a briefing team to talk to Admiral Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to give Admiral Mullen a briefing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the facts of the conflict. But it was also clear from the briefing that this was a central concern among David Petraeus's area of responsibility, the twenty-two Arab nations of the Central Command, and that in his travels throughout the region the leaders of these countries had made it clear to General Petraeus, the greater the Israeli intransigence on resolving the conflict with the Palestinians, the greater the erosion in American security. It was quite a—quite a blunt briefing.

**AMY GOODMAN:** How do you know that this briefing took place?

**MARK PERRY:** Because I talked to the people in the Pentagon who know about the briefing. And in fact, General Petraeus yesterday didn't take issue with it. When he made his comments in public on the Senate Armed Services Committee, his first action item in his prepared remarks was the effect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on his area of responsibility. And he made it very clear that without progress on this issue, it was going to remain a problem in his area of responsibilities. He made that very clear in his testimony.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** Yes, Mark Perry, at the Senate panel hearing yesterday, General Petraeus brought up Israeli-Palestinian tensions, and he said, quote, I believe, "The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of US favoritism [for] Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of US partnerships with governments and peoples."

But I wanted to play a clip from that hearing. In response to a question from Senator John McCain, he also denied having made a request to include Israel and the Palestinian territories under his command at CENTCOM.

**GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS:** Neither Israel nor the Palestinian territories are in the Central Command area of responsibility.

**SEN. JOHN McCAIN:** But yours is all of this—

**GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS:** Having said that, we keep a very close eye on what goes on there, because of the impact that it has, obviously, on that part of CENTCOM that is the Arab world, if you will. And, in fact, we've urged at various times that this is a critical component. It's one reason, again, we invite Senator Mitchell to brief all of the different conferences that we host and seek to support him in any way that we can when he's in the Central Command part of the region, just as we support Lieutenant General Dayton, who is supporting the training of the Palestinian security forces from a location that is in the CENTCOM AOR, as well. And, in fact, although some staff members have, various times—and I have discussed in—you know, asking for the Palestinian territories, or something like that, to be added to—we have never—I have never made that a formal recommendation for the Unified Command Plan. And that was not in what I submitted this year, nor have I sent a memo to the White House on any of this.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** Mark Perry, what's your response?

**MARK PERRY:** Well, General Petraeus is exactly right. After I published my piece, I received a call from a senior officer in the Pentagon, who said General Petraeus has never given the request that you mentioned to the White House, but he did give it to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I went back into my piece and changed it, despite the fact that three senior officers in CENTCOM had said it was true. I'm not arguing with General Petraeus. He's made the claim. He's not a man who lies. I made the correction. He's absolutely right.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** And Mark, I have a question in terms of the broader picture of what's going on right now. Is this a big rift in US policy toward Israel? You talk about the Petraeus briefing. There's been the flap created with Vice President Biden's visit, strong words from Secretary of State Clinton. There seems to be a slight toning down of the rhetoric right now. What's happening right now? Is this just rhetoric, or is there going to be a real change?

**MARK PERRY:** Well, you're absolutely right. There has been a toning down in rhetoric. However, watching the Secretary of State on Sunday, in particular, I don't think I've ever seen her so angry about something. And, you know, this is more than a hiccup. Is it a crisis? No, it's not a crisis. But the United States has made it very clear to the Israeli government what needs to be done here, that this building project in East Jerusalem needs to stop, that there have to be confidence-building measures, and that the Israelis have to go to the peace table in good faith. And I think that's the expectation. Those requirements have not changed. And we're waiting for Israel's answer. This is not a crisis. We're not going to end our relationship with Israel. But this is certainly more than a hiccup in our relationship. This is an important break.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And this issue, going back to General Petraeus talking about the US relationship with Israel actually jeopardizing US lives, take that a little further.

**MARK PERRY:** Well, Israel is not our only ally in the region. We have very close and strong ties with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, with all of these Arab countries. And we have troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. And if you go on the ground in these countries and you talk to the people in Iraq and Afghanistan, they're concerned about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I mean, it's really—it's hard for us to believe, but if you spend any time in the region—I spent twenty years there—this is number one on everyone's agenda. Not the war on terror, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

So it's true. If we can solve this problem, if we can push both sides to the table, if we can come up with some kind of a solution, this helps us immensely on the war on terror. If it doesn't, it's another excuse for the terrorists, the Jacobins, the hardliners, the let's-burn-it-down-and-start-over crowd to really go up against us. This is an arrow in their quiver, and we should be able to take it away.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** Mark Perry, your book is *Talking to Terrorists: Why America Must Engage with its Enemies*. What's your assessment of the prospect for a peace process

that does not include Hamas?

**MARK PERRY:** I think it will fail. Hamas won the January 2000 elections in the Palestinian Authority, the most transparent, honest, fair, open elections in the history of the Middle East. They didn't win by a little bit. They won by a lot. They retain enormous credibility inside the Palestinian territories. And they can disrupt a peace process that only includes one group of Palestinians. They're not—this isn't a group of graduates from a charm school. These are tough-minded political people. But they're committed to their people, they are committed to their cause, they're committed to democracy. We should bring them into the peace process. We should induce them to sit down honestly. They're willing to do that. They've expressed it many times. I don't think, without them, that there's much prospect for success.

**AMY GOODMAN:** You were once an adviser to Yasser Arafat. How have things changed or not changed since then?

**MARK PERRY:** That's a good question. It's interesting. You know, Yasser Arafat had enormous prestige and stature among his own people. He's the one man who could have brought a peace process home, with a willing partner, like Yitzhak Rabin. If Rabin had lived and if Rabin had remained prime minister, with Arafat, I think that this would have been done by now. I know we had a problem at Camp David, but that was with Ehud Barak. With Yitzhak Rabin and with Yasser Arafat, this problem wouldn't be there. I just—I have that confidence. He had—he could make compromises that no other Palestinian leader could, and he was willing to do it if he got his minimal requirements met. At Camp David, he didn't. It's a tragedy that we were so close and weren't able to really bring this thing home. And it's going to be more difficult now, and it'll be more difficult as time goes on, if we don't press both parties right now.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** But both parties in Israel, including under Rabin's government, continue to build settlements. As Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said, building—every government since 1967 has built settlements around Jerusalem and in the West Bank.

**MARK PERRY:** Yes, but Rabin had some principles that Arafat and the American administration agreed to. And that was no surprises. When the Vice President of the United States lands in Israel for a visit of friendship, don't surprise him with 1,600 units. Make a phone call. That's all Arafat and the administration here in Washington at the time required: no surprises. You know, when you have a person of Vice President Biden's prestige and stature from an ally, your strongest and best friend in the world, and you insult him and humiliate him like this, it causes enormous problems. We have enemies in the world who don't like us who don't do this. This is supposed to be an ally of ours. I think that this is—there's a sense that the tenor has changed here, that Israel believes it can push back on us, that we're an ally of theirs, not the other way around. And that fundamental formula has to change. This was really a shocking thing that happened, and I think it has to be rolled back.

**ANJALI KAMAT:** Finally, how hard do you think the US can push? Just a few months ago, the Obama administration basically agreed that the Palestinians should agree to continued expansion of settlements in East Jerusalem as a precondition for talks.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave that question, Anjali, for the next time we speak with Mark Perry, because we've just lost the satellite feed. But we're going to go to a break, and we're going to wrap up in a very different place, in New Orleans just after Hurricane Katrina. But our guest was Mark Perry, veteran foreign affairs analyst and author, his latest book, *Talking to Terrorists: Why America Must Engage with its Enemies*.

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