

Breaking the Deadlock:

Options for the Future

May 20, 1998



Brief Analysis

The Interim Period and Final Status. There is a real crisis; we should recognize it. And I would like here to say that the American administration has tried since a long time to put an end to this crisis. . . . They are doing all their best efforts, but unfortunately, the last meeting, in London, was not successful. I don't want to say that it was a failure, but I want to say that it was not successful.

There is a real negotiation that should start, which is the permanent status negotiation. The delay in building the bridge toward the permanent status negotiation will delay the process of peace, and nobody knows what's the result. To get to permanent status, we should have the bridge. The bridge, according [to] Oslo, was designed to be the interim agreement, to respect the implementation of the interim agreement.

I would like to thank Mr. [Ariel] Sharon. When he said that Oslo is the only agreement that we have, that's true. Therefore, we should pay a lot of attention and respect to this agreement, because it is the only agreement. You may not like it. We may not like it. But . . . this is the compromise, this is the bridge. Without it, I think, we will not be able to sit together.

We are looking for a comprehensive and lasting peace. We are not looking for another interim period or a transitional period. If you want to maintain security and stability, we should work very seriously [toward] a comprehensive and lasting peace, whether on the Palestinian-Israeli track, or on the Syrian-Israeli track, the Lebanese-Israeli track. One other principle which I want to emphasize is that the principle of the peace process since it started in Madrid was "land for peace," and Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. . . .

Madrid and Beyond. The Madrid peace process was started, in my point of view, in a very genuine design. It's a great design, one that's been designed into two tracks—one track for the bilaterals, which work to solve a problem of the past, and one track [the multilaterals] future that will design the cooperation and the future of the coexistence and cooperation between the parties. If you go back to the multilaterals, I think we all have to appreciate what has been done. . . . The issues that have been left for the multilaterals are the important issues—refugees, economic cooperation, arms control and security, environment, water. These are very important. . . .

I remember also that one of the most important events in the region was the Casablanca conference, when all the leaders of the region and [virtually] all the Israeli cabinet and all the leaders of the Jewish community in the world were all together . . . in one conference thinking about tomorrow, how to go together tomorrow to make joint projects, joint efforts, to maintain and security. Please don't underestimate that. Unfortunately now, after this conference moved from Casablanca to Amman, Jordan, and then to Cairo; and finally, everybody remembers how it was in Qatar—and now it's been postponed.

Oslo's Step-By-Step Approach. It is not the Palestinian request to have a transitional period, an interim period, and the gradual withdrawal. . . . No. Our intention was to sit at the table, to discuss the issue from all its aspects, and to find a solution once and forever. Unfortunately, it was not possible. I know that it is the Israeli position—from even

before Madrid, even before Camp David—that they say that "We don't have trust. We need a transition period." That concession we made; okay, we are ready for a transitional period. Let's build trust; we are for it.

And then the process started. What is the philosophy of the Oslo agreement? The Oslo agreement in my point of view, was built on three main principles. One is the gradual withdrawal leading to the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 and 338. This is the first pillar of this agreement: a gradual withdrawal from the Occupied Territories of 1967. And what has been achieved until now is good. But unfortunately now, we are stopped. What has been achieved? The first phase was Gaza, Jericho. It was not easy. I remember how it was implemented, what difficulties. . . . And then we came to another phase of the withdrawal. It was the populated area. I remember that we spent nine months negotiating the comprehensive agreement for all the interim period—it's about 410 pages. It is necessary. It can give answers about any problem that we may face in the interim period. Go there; you will find answers about any question, about any problem that can face us during the implementation of the interim period.

And then we come to the another phase of the agreement—the gradual withdrawal, which we called in the agreement "further redeployment", from Area C to Area B and from Area B to Area A, after a period of trust-building and confidence-building. Unfortunately, here we are facing the crisis, and here is the problem. For us, the Palestinians, this is the bridge. . . . We cannot go back to say, "Okay, leave this behind you, and go to the permanent status talks." We are not against the permanent status talks. We want the permanent status yesterday, not tomorrow. But unfortunately, this is the fact, this is the real. And therefore, here is the real crisis.

Security and Peace. I know that there are many other issues that may be raised regarding security and other issues, but believe me, we are doing 100 percent of the efforts. But we cannot guarantee 100 percent of the results. And I don't think that there is any country in the world who can guarantee 100 percent of the results for security.

We understand carefully the needs of the Israeli for security. I told many Israeli officials that if it is a matter of security, we are ready to give you the roof of our houses, to monitor the situation. But what about the territory? When we say, "Land for peace," we are ready for security. But what about the land? If the conflict . . . is a dispute about the land, I can say that there's a very serious problem. We are not ready to compromise about the issue of the land. But we are ready to cooperate as long as possible for the security and to maintain security, because this is the future.

I know that there are two schools, one Israeli school which says, "Okay, we have land; keep it" and one Palestinian school which says, "Okay, forget everything; let's go for armed struggle 100 or 200 years." No, we are realistic enough to take brave decisions, as President Arafat says. Really, it is the peace of the brave to take the difficult decisions. Everybody knows we used to claim all historical Palestine. . . . But the concession has being taken and decided by the [Palestine National Council] and from all the Palestinian institutions and the institutions of the PLO that there are two states on one land. This is the Palestinian concession. Unfortunately, it has not been appreciated as yet, but I'm sure that later we will be able to reach it.

How we can overcome the problem of today? In my point of view, there is a package that should deal with the first and second "further redeployment." We accepted the American proposals. It was not our request. And I can say honestly that the American proposal was nearer to the Israeli request more than it was to the Palestinian request. We claimed 40 percent, and then we came to 13 percent because it lets the process go forward. . . .

Final Status. My understanding is that final status is not [a set of] issues; it is not Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, state/non-state. It is not that. Rather, it is a framework that manages and designs the future of two people in one land. How will it be designed? Inside this framework, there are issues, which we assume that it is difficult, but if we'll take it seriously, it is not too difficult.

When we come to Jerusalem, I believe we will recognize the special importance of the city for the three monotheistic religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity. International law and a large number of resolutions and conventions

issued since the occupation of east Jerusalem all affirm its status as an integral part of the Arab territories occupied in 1967. And it is on this consensus that any future solution must be based, clearly acknowledging the Palestinian rights in Jerusalem and refusing Israeli claim to exclusive rule of governance. The Palestinian leadership, recognizing the sensitivity of the Jerusalem question, made a big concession by accepting to postpone it to the final status negotiations. This in no way means that we have given up occupation.

The PLO Charter. The Palestinian Covenant has been amended. It was amended as of the date we recognized 242 and 338. And it has been amended as of the date we signed the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO. If this was not enough, it was amended again by the Executive Committee of the PLO, and then approved in the Central Council. And they told us it's still not enough. And then we agreed together with the Israeli government to invite the PNC to look at the covenant. . . . It was coordinated completely with the Israeli government. And the United States at that time was aware about what kind of decision should be taken and the fact that it has been amended. Then the new Israeli government came said, "It's not enough." Therefore, we agreed to send a letter to President Clinton, a copy of which was sent to Mr. Netanyahu and to the European presidency, about the [specific] articles that have been amended, and that's been done, too.

In my point of view, procedurally, it's been completed. . . . But the most important amendment is not the text or the paper; it is the psychological breakthrough that's been made. Here is the real amendment, and the Palestinian people supported that. And therefore, I don't know why it's being raised now; I think it's quite enough.

On Palestinian Police. The Palestinian police are armed with pistols. They maintain security, and I can't see the contradiction between the pressure to maintain security and the pressure to decrease the number of police. I can't understand it. And I will be honest and free with you; please allow me to say also, part of the [number of] police—it's a kind of employment.

You know the very harsh and difficult economical situation. I'll give you an example. When we came to West Bank and Gaza. . . there were about 120,000 Palestinian workers working in Israel. A year after, the number declined to 40,000. And sometimes with the closures imposed, none of the Palestinians are able to work.

President Arafat found a solution for that. And he employed under the name of the police, a number—I don't want to say how much there is, whether one of 5,000 or 10,000—that is part of the police. The Palestinian Police showed that they are efficient and capable. . . . They have made a lot of mistakes, but they learned. Each day they are learning. It is a police; it is not an army.

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