

# An Address by the Israeli Prime Minister

May 14, 1998



Brief Analysis

**O**n May 14, 1998, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu addressed The Washington Institute at the Mayflower Hotel. Following is a full transcript of his speech and the subsequent question-and-answer session.

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Good morning. Thank you. I am very pleased, along with my wife, Sara, to acknowledge old friends -- Mike, Barbi, Rob; our ambassador, Eliahu Ben-Elissar; and many friends -- mostly old friends -- that I see here in the audience, and some new ones.

We are engaged in the quest for peace. And the question is: How do you achieve it?

We have had magnificent achievements in the fifty years of the Jewish state, struggled against impossible odds, overcome all of them, achieved transformations of the Jewish people that are nothing short of miraculous. A people that was consigned to death and destruction, a third of whose members were destroyed, would not necessarily have survived.

We were consigned to destruction because we had no vital center and we had no representation among the nations. We had no ability to defend our interest, defend our rights, defend our lives.

That process of destruction, plus the inexorable power of assimilation where destruction was not an issue, basically put the whole Jewish survival, the future of the Jewish people, born in an odyssey of travail through four millennium, at risk in our time. It was not clear fifty years ago that the Jewish people would survive. Had there not been a state of Israel, I doubt it would have survived. After the loss of European Jewry and those forces of disintegration in diaspora communities due to assimilation, there would not have been a Jewish people left.

What the state of Israel has done is two things. One, it reconstituted a Jewish center for Jewish life, both a moral and spiritual center, and a physical center that enables self-defense that was not possible. The simple thing is today we have an army. Today we have security forces. Today we have intelligence services. Today we have a diplomatic service. Today we have the power to act on the world scene.

And with all the difficulties and complexities of acting on the world scene, of becoming a nation among the nations -- and there are always risks entailed in that -- it is the one great hope for Jewish survival, the state of Israel. It is the last best hope for the Jewish people. It is also the only guarantor against those processes of loss of identity that I know many of you are concerned with, and certainly I am concerned with.

That is the central transformation of Jewish fate in our time. It is clear to me that, had the Jewish state existed before the Holocaust, the Holocaust would not have happened; but if it hadn't come to being after the Holocaust, the Jewish people would not survive.

We are celebrating, in other words, a miraculous transformation of Jewish fortunes, because 50 years after that descent into the pit of death, the Jewish people now have a thriving state. In 10 years time, certainly no more than fifteen years time, the majority of the Jewish people for the first time in two millennium will live in the Jewish land.

You don't have to be a religious person -- I am not -- to see this as the realization of prophetic dreams. You do not have to be a religious person to see the ingathering of the exiles as one of the great miracles of history, not only of Jewish history.

And of course, we have revived our ancient language, we have reconstituted our sovereignty and our capacity for self-defense in our ancient homeland, we have reunited our ancient capital. We forged -- with these deep roots into our traditions, we forged a tremendous capacity for seizing the future in a state that is transforming itself, faster than any other country and any other society on Earth, to the information economy. Israel has just crossed the per-capita income of the average Western country, Western European country.

It is very fast going to be higher than that because the number of -- I hate this word -- "information processors," the number of scientists, technologists, technicians in Israel, relative to the population -- here is another jargon word -- the number of "concept workers," the number of people who deal with conceptual products, which is the source of the new wealth, is the highest in Israel relative to any other society. And all we have to do is create degrees of freedom. That is an encapsulated description of what we're doing economically to have Israel become one of the -- I hate to do this in a Washington conference -- one of the richest societies on earth. It will be; it's fast becoming that.

And with material riches come human riches of other kinds and comes the capacity, the increased capacity, to share those riches with our neighbors and certainly to have Israel implanted both in a perception and reality of permanence in the Middle East. That permanence is dependent above all else -- above all else -- on the ability to deter war and to preserve the peace, and that is grounded in security. The last challenge, the most important challenge, facing the Jewish people at the close of the 20th century in terms of our overall relations with other nations, is to complete the circle of peace around us.

All those achievements that I have described tell me and imbue me with enormous confidence that we will be able to close, or to complete, the circle of peace, a direct circle of peace, with our neighbors. This transformation is dependent on our ability to maintain Israel's strength. The whole movement towards peace up to now, and our achievements of peace, with Jordan and with Egypt, and the first peace agreement with the Palestinians, was based on their knowledge that they had no credible war option. It is the maintenance of that knowledge, the physical defenses of Israel, that must be preserved if we are to complete that process.

We are now discussing in Washington a critical passage to complete the closing or the completion of the circle of peace around Israel. The territorial aspects of this discussion are very important; the knowledge of what land is vital and what land is less vital for our security.

Where does the process end on the interim part of it? How many redeployments are we talking about? How much -- these are all critical issues, and I'll talk about them in a minute. But you're going to have to go through a small discussion that I would like to make to understand the vital link between peace and security.

You see, we are told all the time that it's really the other way around. It's really that if Israel has peace, then it will have genuine security. But that, unfortunately, is circular reasoning for the simple reason that in the Middle East, in the unreformed, undemocratized Middle East that we live in, the only peace that can be -- that can endure is a peace that can be defended.

In the Middle East, peace is based on security and the ability to deter war. The aspects of peace that we are all so enamored of -- me too, especially me -- the idea of normalization, economic exchanges, people-to-people contacts, cultural contacts and so on, those are an added bonus. They can be taken away at any time because of the nature of the regimes around us. They are not built into a process that is irreversible. They can be reversed at any time by the whim of a ruler. Normalization is a bonus, but it is not the foundation of peace. The foundation of peace in the Middle East is security, because there is no democratic constraints on the aggressive intentions of rulers. There is no

democratic constraints on the aggressive intentions of rulers, and intentions can change as the balance of power changes.

We see that the balance of power in the world and in our region changes. Look at what is happening in the last 48 hours. We are faced with immense problems of missile proliferation, of nuclear proliferation, of chemical and biological war proliferation, of fundamentalist proliferation and of terrorist proliferation. And these create a very, very unstable area especially in our area.

And alongside the positive movement towards peace, we constantly face the problem of an unstable sea that can change all at once, and what was seen as a positive relationship, what was seen as normalizing relationships can be swept by a huge shift in the balance of power, a huge and sudden shift. We are seeing that in fact, those who thought just a few years ago that we have here a new world order are seeing in fact a new world disorder. And much of it is placed in our area and the areas immediately adjoining us.

Therefore, I come back to the central rule, rule number one for securing peace in the Middle East, and it is this: A peace that is not secure will not endure. We need defensible borders to deter aggression and to keep stability to keep the peace. And security in our part of the world is the foundation of peace. If we're asked to sign a peace treaty or peace agreements in which we have to sacrifice our security in order to have peace treaties, pieces of paper, along with the beginnings of normalization, but we sacrifice important elements of deterrence and self-defense, that peace will not hold. That is a peace we should not sign.

We have been fortunate up to now to have avoided these pitfalls. And indeed, the peace with Egypt is a successful peace because it is a defensible peace. Normalization, by the way, has gone up and down. Exchanges between Israel and Egypt have gone up and down -- well, well before I came into office, I want you to know. I know that there's a new fad in town, but I bring to your attention that some previous prime ministers, not only of Likud persuasion, complained to me bitterly and repeatedly about the lack of normalization on Egypt's part, the fact that our trade was nil. Actually, trade in the last two years has risen to an all-time high of \$70 million. That's up from \$20 million after twenty years of peace. Normalization is fine; you just can't rely on it. And the regime can decide -- not the Israeli regime -- the regime can decide if it comes, it goes. That's the kind of peace we're going to have. We're not going to get it better. It cannot be otherwise when you have -- I don't want to use Samuel Huntington's phrase lest I engage in a debate that I don't want to enter, but when you have this friction point of civilizations, that's a realistic expectation.

But surely a cold peace, as some have described our peace with Egypt, is infinitely preferable to a hot war. And what decides that this peace will be either cold or tepid or cool -- it's immaterial. What decides whether the peace will be maintained is the ability to deter the opposite of peace.

And in the case of Egypt, we have a huge -- for Israel -- a huge territorial buffer, in the form of a demilitarized Sinai, that is the foundation of everything else. Take that away, and nothing else would necessarily hold. Keep that in place, and everything else is possible -- peace with Egypt, a successful peace, a defensible and a secure peace.

Peace with Jordan -- that's the easy peace, because it hadn't -- didn't have any territorial component. We have a secure border, a natural divide. And in fact, when we have that secure arrangement between us, the normalization is actually proceeding better. We have doubled trade with Jordan in the last year, by the way, and not because of -- I think this is not unrelated to the fact that this is our policy -- to liberalize with the Jordanians, with the Palestinians, with the Egyptians our trade.

But again, no one deludes himself that the enduring and durable elements of peace are the number of trucks that pass the borders. It is a common thought that exists that if we increase the number of exchanges, we necessarily cement the peace. We help the peace, but its foundations are -- must be and are security.

And now we come to the question, what determines Israel's security? What is this word "security"? What is it that

Israel -- what threats Israel faces that it must be able to defend itself in order to deter the possibility of future conflict and increase the likelihood of peace?

From day one of its inception, Israel has faced three threats: the threat of conventional warfare or ground attack, ground invasion that could destroy the state; the threat of non-conventional attack, which was increasing in the last decade, of missiles carrying their non-conventional warheads; and the threat of terrorism.

The most important move to peace that made peace possible came in the Six Day War, when the first threat, the most important and immediate threat, the threat of a ground invasion that would destroy the country, was removed.

Our victory in the Six-Day War created security and a buffer for peace. It moved the borders of Israel from the banks of the Yarqon River, (Ardiel ?) River, a small stream on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, across 50 kilometers of a mountain ridge that is not very wide, but it is very high. And that is, of course, the mountains of Samaria and Judea, what is commonly called the West Bank. It has made invasion of Israel practically impossible.

It was tried in 1973. But because the heart of the country was secure from any possibility of ground attack, and because the Golan on one side and the Sinai on the other side offered significant buffers against invasion from other routes, Israel effectively was able to put into the Arab mind, into the mind of the Arab governments and the Arab leaders around us, that it is impossible -- impossible -- to annihilate Israel by conventional attack. And as a result of that, peace with Egypt became possible and the other peace developments that I described. So the threat of ground invasion was removed by Israel's victory in the Six Day War. And that remains -- was and remains the foundation of peace. Remove that, you remove the whole block.

Now, I mentioned two other threats. Those two other threats merely make the importance of a territorial buffer even greater. When you have missiles overflying the country, as we have seen in the Gulf War and in other cases, those missiles can cause damage, but they cannot conquer a country. The kind of damage they can cause to Israel is that they can hit the mobilization centers, where we mobilize our reserves. They can hit our depots, where we have our reserves to protect against any potential invading force. What that does in the age of missiles, is increase the need for a territorial buffer, not diminish it.

And the third danger of terrorism -- that is still with us with the proliferation of fundamentalism and other problems; that, too, can become a strategic threat both by igniting larger conflicts and also, in the case of a larger conflict, of doing what missiles do. With terrorists, you can also paralyze vital road intersections. You can also damage depots and so on.

If we keep Israel's territorial buffer, we can do two things. We can prevent the first threat, and we can reduce significantly the second -- the third.

That is our concern today. When we're negotiating or seeking first a disengagement agreement and then a final settlement, what it is that we are seeking is first of all a western buffer, small, but necessary for a future defense against terrorism from the Palestinian entity and a larger eastern buffer, larger. It's very, very thin. You put American generals on the hills overlooking the Jordan Valley and you ask them how much defense area do you need to protect against the forces arrayed potentially on an eastern front? And they say, "Well, 150 miles or so. That's what we need in an American context." A hundred and fifty miles, ladies and gentlemen, puts in Cyprus in the middle of the sea. We don't have 150 miles. We're talking at most of about 20 kilometers. We need a western buffer against terrorism, an eastern buffer against ground attack.

This doesn't not solve in any way the problem of overflying missiles, I want you to know. We need other solutions to that. But the fact that somebody can climb through the window and threaten you doesn't mean that you open the front door to robber or a murderer. And what we're trying to do is balance our desire to move for peace with those elements that must be secured in order to protect any kind of peace agreement and the life of the state in the future.

Which brings me to the Oslo process. You see, we're talking today, as we say, very -- how do you say this? -- this is a new word: tachlitic (sp). (Laughter.) It's an Americanization --

DR. SATLOFF: Substantive.

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: -- of a Yiddishization or a Hebrew word. (Laughter.) Tachlis (sp) is the main point. The main point is the relationship of the Oslo process to security, and therein lies so far, or has lied its failings. Oslo was meant to advance the peace without hurting security. And at least in the first two and a half years, it failed -- it must be stated -- it failed to do so.

The deal was we give the Palestinians land, and they fight the terrorists from within that land. And, of course, when we -- it may have been seen and is still seen by some to have been miraculously successful, but the reason I'm standing here as the prime minister of Israel was because it failed miserably -- because 250 Israelis, the equivalent of 10,000 Americans, died in terrorist actions that emanated from the areas given over to the Palestinians as part of the Oslo Accords. And that happened because the Palestinians failed or refused to fight the terrorists within their midsts. And in fact, those terrorist organizations grew and mushroomed under the Palestinian Authority.

The deal that Yitzhak Rabin signed with Yasser Arafat, the deal that he presented to the Knesset, was not kept.

And the Israeli people elected me to say: "Fix the peace. Fix the peace," because if we continue to have terrorist attacks, if we continue to suffer from a Palestinian entity that as it grows, becomes more dangerous, has demonstrations and affinities with Iran, and could turn out to be a frontal bastion for the worst impulses of aggression and anti-Zionism and anti-peace, there won't be peace.

What we have tried to do in the last two years, is to correct that imbalance. It's very, very hard to do. The perception that things were fine before we came in, is still there. But as I said, things were not fine. And we have asked and demanded, and ask and demand today, that Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority keep their promises under Oslo.

And the first thing they must do is fight the terrorists; systematically, consistently, day in, day out; not in ephemeral episodes, not when it suits them for internal purposes, for a spate of two weeks or three weeks or six weeks, but precisely as promised; day in, day out, 365 days a year.

And fighting this terrorism also means fighting it with public education. It means for one thing, annulling that covenant of hatred. We insist that the Palestine National Council will meet and shred that document to bits. We insist that it simply do a very simple action, and that is that it endorse Yasser Arafat's letter to President Clinton in which he itemized in detail actually, those provisions that have to be eliminated from the document.

We have all the legal reasons for that demand. But I am putting aside the legalistic aspect, and I am saying a very simple thing. What kind of peace is it, if the chairman of the Palestinian Authority cannot convene a group of several hundred people -- and of course they're opponents that he has there. By the way, when I convene several hundred people, I have some opponents, too. (Chuckles.) Who doesn't have opponents?

What kind of peace is it that he cannot convene the governing body of the Palestinian Authority and say to them, "It's over. Israel is no longer consigned to destruction. We have peace. The Palestinian Charter is dead"?

Well, that's an obvious demand that falls under the demands of compliance and reciprocity and falls under precisely those promises that were promised to us in Oslo. There are others. I don't think it's worth belaboring the point.

But I think that the important thing is that we want to see a change of attitude; and alas, I have to tell you that that is not -- that is not happening. In many ways, the opposite is happening. Only last week, we heard Chairman Arafat again compare the Oslo agreements to the peace agreement that the Prophet Mohammed made with the tribe of Koresh (ph). It was an agreement that the prophet broke as soon as he was strong enough to defeat the Koreshis (ph).

We've recently witnessed demonstrations in support of Saddam Hussein, rallies in which American and Israeli flags are burnt, in which we hear open exhortations to destroy the state of Israel, speeches by Palestinian Authority terrorists, or rather officials glorifying terrorists, and unbridled incitement on official Palestinian radio and television against Israel and against the peace, including, I am afraid to say, a speech by Arafat himself in the last 48 hours.

We are now witnessing demonstrations, violent demonstrations, that have now caused the deaths of some Palestinians. This is no way to bring up a new generation to accept Israel and live in peaceful coexistence with us. Perhaps the most disturbing to me is that Palestinian textbooks are laced with venomous anti-Israel material. Israel is never mentioned in Palestinian maps. Palestinian children are made to recite poems lionizing terrorism and terrorists and the suicide bombers.

This is one of the main issues that we are talking with Secretary Albright about, because all of this is in brazen violation of the Oslo Accords. It is a brazen violation of the spirit and letter of Oslo.

I want to use this occasion to repeat my call to the Palestinians to make it clear that peace is what they want, too. And I want to urge the Palestinian leadership to change direction.

Today they're talking about the tragedy, the calamity that occurred to them when the state of Israel was formed. Many calamities indeed befell them as a result of the Arab refusal to recognize the nascent Jewish state. And the Palestinians have suffered. We have suffered, and they have suffered -- a lot. And that suffering must come to an end.

But the way to bring it to an end is to bring this kind of incitement and this kind of existential opposition to the Jewish state in any form to an end as well. So our first -- an important point relating to security is the cessation of incitement towards terrorism, and the fighting against terrorism. But the second is, of course, the territorial defenses that Israel must have.

I believe that probably most of you in this hall know what the majority of the people outside of this hall do not know, namely, that the territory that we're talking about for redeployment is empty of Palestinians. Ninety-eight percent of the Palestinians now live under the Palestinian Authority in the Palestinian areas. The land that we're talking about -- land that is, of course, precious to us, in historical terms, in national terms; it is the cradle of Jewish civilization, it is where the Jewish people came from, have been attached to for thousands and thousands of years -- yet with all this attachment, we honor Oslo, the Oslo accords, and we're prepared to redeploy from some of this land.

And in terms of the Palestinians, this is not a question of human rights; this is not a question of transferring from Israeli rule to Palestinian rule additional Palestinians. The main implication of this territory is for the defense of the Jewish state.

Some of this land, I believe -- some of it -- is less than vital than others. We have gone through enormous deliberations, detailed deliberations, with our military chiefs, our security experts, about what can be handed over. This is not an arbitrary number that we chose. In fact, we didn't name a number. But we know more or less the range of what is possible in an interim settlement before there is a final peace agreement and before the kind of arrangements that could be done in a permanent settlement, such as the relocation of military camps or such as the bypass roads or tunnels or bridges or other kind of investments, which take time and can only be part of a final settlement. Before all of that is done, we know what is the final amount of land that we have. We also know what we need to have in order to have assets for final settlement negotiations.

We're prepared to engage in this process of redeployment, assuming there is Palestinian compliance to our basic demands. We're prepared to redeploy from additional land. But we cannot do so while compromising our security,

because we know that if we compromise our security, the peace will collapse.

We are, after all, responsible for that result. We have to live with the consequences.

We have to live and protect our future, our people, our children, our grandchildren, our lives. And we know what is required. We know which land is required to protect our airfields, to protect our aquifers, to protect our early warning installations, to protect those roads on which 40,000 children travel each day. We have made a meticulous, careful analysis of what is possible in an interim settlement.

And it's very, very important for us to know -- when we are asked to give additional land, we want to know two things: one, that those lands that we hand over will not be used for additional -- as additional bases of future terrorism; and two, we want to know if we're going to be asked to give more land and how much more land in a future redeployment, perhaps a third redeployment. These are crucial considerations for us.

I think that this is what we must answer in these deliberations today in Washington. And I hope we'll get satisfactory answers, because in many ways they will determine our response.

We've been talking to the United States based on the agreements that we have fashioned with them, and the United States has made very clear, time and time again, that Israel and Israel alone must determine its security needs. That is so not only because of the realities of security that I described; it's so because of common sense, because we live there and because you live there, because with all of our friendship -- and it is unique in the world -- you recognize that ultimately we have to live with the consequences. This has been the mainstay of our relationship through many, many decades, and it is a mainstay of our relationship today.

It is very tempting, especially for journalists, to dramatize the differences of view that Israel and the United States have on this issue. I want to dampen your enthusiasm. For 50 years, Israeli prime ministers and American presidents have had disagreements on the question of security. That is natural. These are disagreements around the dinner table in a family. Israel and the United States are the quintessential members of a family, a family of democratic nations with enormously profound common values.

This is not a shibboleth. It is not a slogan. It is a bond of the heart. And it remains so today. Ben-Gurion had his problems with Eisenhower, and Yitzhak Rabin had his problems with Gerald Ford, and Menachem Begin in the time of Lebanon had problems with Ronald Reagan, and Yitzhak Rabin had one or two problems with President Bush and Mr. Baker. And we have today some disagreement. Sure. I think we are going to try -- we are trying -- to resolve that disagreement in the spirit of friendship, in the spirit of family, and in a spirit of understanding that Israel must safeguard its security, because security is the foundation of peace.

Well, I would like to hope, working towards achieving this hope, that in the coming days, perhaps in the coming weeks, we will achieve the breakthrough that we desire, a breakthrough that will bring Israel to the verge of completing this great task that has still eluded us half a century after the creation of the Jewish state that will allow us to move rapidly into peace negotiations for a final and permanent settlement of peace with our Palestinian neighbors and, perhaps -- I don't exclude that possibility -- for a peace agreement, a secure peace agreement with our northern neighbors Lebanon and Syria. It is my deepest wish. It is my most important obligation. It is the reason why I ran for the post of prime minister, it is the reason why I am serving in it: to bring about the fulfillment of a wish that unites all the people of Israel and all the friends of Israel, Jews and non-Jews alike, throughout the world, that finally -- and soon -- Israel will achieve a peace based on the fulfillment of mutual obligations, a peace that will last, a peace based on security.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

DR. ROBERT SATLOFF (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY): Mr. Prime

Minister, thank you very much for what is perhaps the most comprehensive assessment that we've heard in Washington of Israel's view on the peace process. The prime minister has agreed to answer a number of questions.

We have a tradition at the institute that I get to lob the first one.

Mr. Prime Minister, today is indeed the 50th anniversary of your state's founding, which also means that it's the 50th anniversary of American recognition of Israel. So I'd like to ask you about America and Israel.

When the Oslo accords were signed, America was very, very far away, and it was a deal consummated between, directly, Israel and the PLO. Today, America is very much inside the room in the negotiations. Why do you feel that this is a positive development in the negotiating process? And how you evaluate the evolution in America's role since Oslo, until today?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: I don't think that any difficult peace agreement or any passage through difficult terrain in the achievement of peace in the last 50 years has been achieved without American participation and involvement. This is true if you examine each -- even the first agreement, the Rhodes agreement at the time of the establishment of the Jewish state. It's been true ever since.

It seems to me that the role of the United States because of its unique position, should be a role of a facilitator, one with obvious and evidence sympathies and connections to Israel, but one in which it assumes the role of facilitator and sometimes a mediator, but certainly not a role in which it assumes or takes over the responsibility of trying to establish a position of itself either in an interim settlement or in the final settlement, not because the United States does not have opinions -- who doesn't have opinions when it comes to the Middle East? -- but because both the moral and practical considerations of achieving a durable settlement, says that the parties themselves must come to an agreement from and within themselves. That is the only kind of an agreement that sticks and that makes any sense over time. I think this is what I would like to see the U.S. role, over the coming years because we have other peace agreements to sign as well, as you know, and it is one that the U.S. is also expressly committed to.

You know that when we signed the Hebron accords, the United States assured us that it is Israel, and Israel alone, that would make the determinations on withdrawal. We received a letter at the time of the cabinet meeting, as we were deliberating, whether to hand over 80 percent of Hebron, from our good friend Ambassador Martin Indyk, on behalf of the government of the United States to the cabinet secretary, in the course of the deliberations that we were making on the Hebron agreement.

Ambassador Indyk writes the following: "The note for the record prepared by the United States at the request of the parties" -- this is the note for the record which is the agreement on Hebron specifying our responsibilities and Palestinian responsibilities -- the note for the record "makes clear that further redeployment phases are issues for implementation by Israel rather than issues for negotiation with the Palestinians. The letter of assurance which Secretary Christopher intends to provide to both parties" -- which he subsequently did the next day -- "also refers to the process of further redeployments as an Israeli responsibility, which includes its designating" -- namely, Israel designating -- "specified military locations.

The United States can assist, should assist, we want it to assist, and in fact, I'm talking to Secretary Albright and her team on how to assist moving this process forward. But it must be within the context of this specific American commitment which leaves the question of designating Israel's security needs -- and from it, designating the redeployment -- that must be left to Israel.

DR. SATLOFF: Thank you. First, Nora Boustani from the Washington Post.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, do you consider Yasser Arafat your partner in peace or your undeclared adversary?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: I've been asked that many times and I've answered many times. He is the only

partner we have in the Palestinians. We're not going to determine who leads Palestinian society. Unlike some of the others, who look into our society, we have no claims to interfere in their politics and determine their leadership.

DR. SATLOFF: Shibly Telhami from the University of Maryland.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, you said that Israel will certainly not withdraw from territories that it sees to be essential for its security. Is the opposite true? Will you withdraw from territories if they're not essential for security? And assuming that you conclude an agreement in the next two weeks that satisfy your concern for security, can you conceive of changes in the security environment between now and final status that would allow Israel to withdraw from additional territories?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Well, I've said that we are prepared to withdraw from those territories which are deemed less vital by us, by our security experts, and we're prepared to do it.

In fact, two weeks after Hebron, we fulfilled another commitment in the Hebron accords in addition to withdrawing from the -- or redeploying from 80 percent of Hebron. We also made a decision in the cabinet on the first redeployment that involved transfer of 2 percent from areas from C to A, across C to A, and about 7 percent from B to A, which is a full transference of security control to Palestinians. We were prepared to do it on the spot. The Palestinians were the ones who rejected it even though they received this same letter of assurance by Secretary Christopher that says that it's an Israeli decision.

So if you want to -- if you want indications of our willingness to redeploy from a land that we don't consider vital, you've got a clear indication there. And I've given you another one right now. That is not an issue for us.

The issue for us is exactly how much do you redeploy in such a way that we don't leave vital interests, lives, unprotected, roads that can be closed in by both sides, by snipers who fire from areas that we cannot, for example, go into. The minute you have a gaping hole, somebody will come into it. It is a -- there a Talmudic expression: "Don't blame the mouse. Blame the hole." It's true. We don't want to blame the mice. We want to plug the holes as much as we can, or at least not create gaping holes. And that is what we're about.

But the answer to your question is yes, we're prepared to redeploy. We want to know. It's very important to us. Everybody's focused right now on the extent of the second redeployment. That's the hot issue. For us, there are two other hot issues. One is reciprocity, namely, Palestinian compliance with commitments that they've given us to fight terrorism and annul the covenant, that they haven't done. And the second thing is to know is there another redeployment after this one, because we have a finite amount of area that we have designated for this process that we know will not jeopardize our security. And we must know the end of this interim process. How do we enter the final-status negotiations. That is at least as serious an issue for us as the second redeployment. We are looking at the entire redeployment process, first, second and, most importantly, third. And it is answers to that, it is an agreement on that that we seek to have even though, frankly, according to the American commitment, we don't need to seek agreements. Nevertheless, we're talking among friends around the dinner table, trying to secure that agreement.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, just to follow up -- (audio break from source) -- I think heretofore, certain government spokesmen have ruled out equivocally the third redeployment.

PRIME MIN. NETANYAHU: That's not true. It's very confusing because for us, there is no problem of doing the first, second and third by whatever date we can agree on. That's not important.

The issue for us is not how many slices we have but the total amount that we're slicing. So when people ask us, "Well, will you do a third redeployment?" we say: "Sure. All we have to do is take away some land, or reserve some land, from the second phase of redeployment, and we'll have enough for the third."

Therefore, for us, when people ask us, "What will be the process?" we say, "Let's talk about the first, second" --

usually they're combined, what is called the second redeployment -- "and the third. And let's know in advance how much terrain Israel can hand over without jeopardizing its security." And if we know that, we can give an answer.

If we're only asked: "We'll give so much in a second redeployment, but more is coming, and we're not going to tell you how much more. And we are still going to challenge your right to decide the third redeployment," then all we're doing is straining ourselves beyond our capacities only to invite another crisis, two, three, four months down the line. That's not very good statesmanship.

If we want to get a resolution right now that is stable, that allows us to enter final settlement negotiations, talks about a final peace agreement between us and the Palestinians, then the right thing to do is to resolve this interim agreement, this disengagement agreement, by knowing how much Israel redeploys from in all three stages.

DR. SATLOFF: Thank you. Barry Schweid, the Associated Press.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, every now and then you hear a grim tight-lipped warnings from administration officials, sometimes very senior ones, that in effect say, "If things don't go our way, there will be a reassessment." Twenty years ago, Henry Kissinger did the same thing.

How do you react? How do you respond? Does this make you quiver? Does this make you more inclined to make concessions? Do you think it's an empty threat? What do you think might happen if you simply can get the administration to take "no" for an answer?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Look, I hope we have an agreement with the United States. I am working very hard towards that.

I think the relationship with the United States is such that no one seriously expects Israel to defer the decisions on vital security concerns that affect the life of the state and the Israeli future, to the United States. That is not part of the equation and never was.

And that is why despite these differences that we've had over the years, the relationship continued smoothly, despite those disagreements, because deep down and at bottom everybody in Washington understands that it's Israel's prerogative and responsibility to make those determinations.

Do my feet quiver? Well, you see the upper part of my body. You can come here and check for yourself -- pretty solid. Yeah.

MR. SATLOFF: Thank you. Matt Dorff, Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, you just acknowledged that the United States has said that Israel would determine its own security. However, Secretary Albright as recently as yesterday said that she would not water down the American ideas. Do you believe, then, that the U.S. reaction to your opposition to the size of the plan is based on an assessment that your concerns are over politics as opposed to security?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: My concerns are not over politics. I have said, and I'm saying again today, that if I am satisfied that the Palestinians have committed to a concrete program of fulfilling their obligations -- and I stress the word "concrete" -- then I would look at the question of what it is, that we redeploy, and if I'm satisfied, what we redeploy from, and if I'm satisfied with that. And based solely on those considerations that I gave her today, then I wouldn't hesitate a single minute to present this to the cabinet and to present it to the Knesset. I think this is simply -- well, it's a typical myopic view and an incorrect view of Israeli politics that permeates some circles. It's not the first time that people were wrong about Israeli politics and about me. And if they think that coalition considerations will play a part here, they're absolutely wrong.

If we arrive at an agreement, at a deal, if you will, of satisfactory Palestinian compliance and satisfactory Israeli

redeployment that does not endanger our vital security concerns, I will have absolutely no hesitation to present it to the cabinet, regardless of the political consequences. I think this is one of those points where leadership would tell you it's tested. You bring something you deeply believe in and you put it forth. This is what you're here for. And at the same time, that is exactly what I'm doing here in Washington.

What I'm saying here is not something that I'm using for external consumption, it reflects a deep responsibility and a deep conviction that I have that we should move forward with a peace that can be defended. And it is ensuring those minimal defenses of peace that we're talking about here. But if I have those assurances, then I will move forward. And you will see that if that -- if those terms are satisfied, you will see it very, very soon.

MR. SATLOFF: Mr. Ensor from ABC. Q: Mr. Prime Minister, one of the points that the president and the secretary of state have been making with a lot of frequency in the last week or so is that time is running out for peace. Do you share the sense of urgency that the Clinton administration seems to have about that? Or do you feel there is time still -- plenty of it?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: I don't think we should waste time. I don't think we should squander it. I think we should use it. We could have used the last year for final settlement negotiations, as I've suggested. We certainly could have used it for the Palestinian fulfillment of all those items in the note for the record -- the Hebron agreement -- that they haven't carried out. We carried out every item of that agreement, including the item of the first redeployment under the Christopher letter. They haven't kept any of theirs. Now they're asking us, "Do the other two redeployments," while they still haven't done any of their -- fulfilled any of their commitments. So time was wasted there by the failure of the Palestinians to keep their side of the bargain.

And time is probably being wasted now by trying to somehow go around a very clear principle that Israel should determine its own security needs. I think that it would be useful, from my point of view, to come to a speedy agreement with the United States, as speedy as possible, and move the process forward. I have no desire to delay anything. This is another misconception -- a very common one. What for? What do we gain by delay? Nothing.

In fact, I would have said the problem here is not time; the problem is the content of the agreement. It doesn't take very long to complete an agreement if there is goodwill. There's certainly goodwill on my part. I was impressed yesterday that there's goodwill on the American side as well. And if there is goodwill, then we should be able to do this very rapidly and move forward rapidly, and that is what I want. Delay is useless. It doesn't do any good.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, on the question of time, people have raised not just the issue of the next two weeks, but also the next 12 months, in that the expiration of the interim period is due less than one year from today.

At some point over the next 12 months, if you make a determination that reaching a final deal is not possible by May 4th, '99, will you suggest to the Palestinians and the Americans perhaps an extension of the interim period? Or will you press ahead and insist that by May 4th, '99, there will be a final deal with the Palestinians?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Well, I hope we have a disengagement agreement now, so we can move into final status negotiations. I hope those final status negotiations are completed by May of 1999. But Yitzhak Rabin used to say that no dates are sacred, and at least in the Oslo accords, that was true. None of the dates -- certainly under the previous government, none of the dates were kept -- none of them.

Is it possible that we will not complete the negotiations by May 5th, 1999? Yes, it's possible. Does this mean that the Palestinians have a right to unilaterally declare a state? The answer is no. That would be a gross violation of Oslo. It would effectively collapse the agreement. And it would absolve Israel of any responsibilities under the agreement. It is the worst thing that could happen.

It would shatter all the work that's been done. We prefer and we call and we urge the Palestinians to go into a

negotiated solution. I call for accelerating, bringing forward that negotiation. And it remains our preference to achieve a negotiated permanent settlement of peace with the Palestinians. And a unilateral declaration will wreck that possibility and will wreck the peace, certainly will wreck the Oslo agreements, will leave nothing in them.

I want to say something about a Palestinian state, not only the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state, which is a violation of Oslo, but the reason that we are opposed to a Palestinian state. It is not because we wish to govern the Palestinians. As I explained earlier, we no longer govern them today. They govern themselves, period. It is not because we want to run their lives. We don't run their lives; they run their lives. It is because we are concerned with our life. It is because we are aware of the dangers of unbridled self-determination, or what we call a fully sovereign independent state.

I want to say that such a state would pose a mortal danger to Israel, and these dangers consist not of the Palestinians arranging their economic life, their education, their welfare, which they're doing anyway. They don't need a state for that. Not because they don't have a legislature or an executive or judiciary. They don't need a state for that, they already have it. Not because they will not have a flag or a passport, the symbols or emblems of identity. They already have that. They don't need a state for that.

What they need a state for is to field a large army. It's to import weapons. They can't do that because right now the international passages are jointly controlled, with overriding responsibility by Israel. What they need a state for is to make military pacts with such regimes as Iraq or Iran. They can't do that because under the present circumstances, that is simply not possible.

So these dangers, of having a large army, including volunteers from Arab countries. The Palestine Liberation Army now trains in Libya. The possibility of the heavy importations -- the importation of heavy arms and non-conventional weapons such as shoulder-fired missiles that could endanger our airspace, that could endanger our aircraft, the arm -- the strategic arm of Israel, which is the Israeli Air Force, that could be in range of missiles launched from the hills of this Palestinian state if we have no control of what comes in and who comes in.

The danger to our water resources -- 40 percent of our water resources are in underwater tables sitting directly in areas that the Palestinians would claim under such a state. The possibility of alliances with radical regimes. These are great dangers.

Imagine the -- you can tell me that you surely can have defenses like demilitarization. But we have seen in the 20th century that any time that demilitarization competed with sovereignty, usually, not always, but usually sovereignty won. There a great danger there.

In any case, we haven't seen a fully demilitarized state, and that is what would be needed in the small distances that are spoken about here. We don't, in short, want another Iran or another Iraq at our doorstep. And that is why we seek an arrangement that would give the Palestinians every ability to conduct every aspect of their lives with the exception of those few powers that could threaten the life of the Jewish state. That is not commensurate with a Palestinian state.

I don't discount the claim or the right of the Palestinians to raise that claim for Palestinian statehood in final-settlement negotiations. I'm telling you what our position would be, to seek a functional solution where we would have the powers of security, especially external security. And they would have the powers for everything else, virtually everything else, those powers that are needed for self-government absent those that could threaten Israel.

I'm not talking now about the differing views on this subject that would be legitimately raised around the negotiating table. But I am saying that a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state would be a gross violation of the Oslo Accords and would be treated as such by Israel. DR. SATLOFF: Thank you. On the far right, if you could please identify yourself first when you get the microphone. Q: Crystal Wright with the Fox Newschannel. Mr. Prime

Minister, you said earlier in your remarks, in fact you belabored this issue very much in your remarks and it's come up over the last several weeks about security and the amount of land that Israel is able to hand over to the Palestinians. And you said, or rather you suggested that Israel would not hand over any more land unless you could get a guarantee from the Palestinians that the land would not be used as a terrorist haven of sorts.

Do you think that in light of your comments today, your comments in recent weeks, that you will ever be able to get a credible commitment from Chairman Arafat that any land, additional land you hand over to him will not be used for terrorist acts? Is that a realistic proposition?

PRIME MIN. NETANYAHU: Well, you point to something that is very difficult for us, and that is that when Israel fulfills its commitments under the Oslo Accords; namely, when it hands over territory to the Palestinians, that is, in practical terms, an irreversible process. You give up Jenin, you're not likely to go back and take -- retake Jenin or Tul Karem or Qalquilya or the other Palestinian towns. You forfeit control there; it's now in Palestinian hands and it's not going to revert to you.

But when the Palestinians take action against terrorist cells, tomorrow -- for example, by jailing terrorists, then the next day, after the land is handed over to them, they could equally reverse that process by simply opening the jail doors and letting the terrorists free. That is in fact exactly what we saw in the few instances when they jailed terrorists; they employed what is called in American jargon "the revolving door." That is an American term, because we don't have that many revolving doors in Israel; our climate is warmer. They go in and they go out as soon as the pressure, external American pressure declines.

And therefore, there is an innate asymmetry in this fulfillment of obligations. Palestinian obligations, if fulfilled, are reversible; Israeli obligations, if fulfilled, are not. I recognize that asymmetry, and for lack of choice, I work within it. So we have designated the compliance, Palestinian compliance, we have said that we would, with all the limitations that I've just described, designate a period of several months in which the Palestinians demonstrate, even for those few months, that they are jailing the terrorists, that they are dismantling the terrorist infrastructure, that they are ceasing the propaganda, the incitement propaganda that we see in these very days; that they will assemble their Palestine National Council and amend, or if you will, authorize the deletion of those items calling for Israel's destruction, and so on.

These are all -- just about all of them are reversible aspects. But it's the best we can do. And it's a very minimal demand by Israel, not a new demand, just that the Palestinians keep the old demands under Oslo and under Hebron.

Q: Just -- I just want to follow up. Secretary Albright made a speech a few days ago I'm sure you're aware of, and she basically -- she suggested that the Palestinians have been fighting against terrorism and Arafat has been doing a fairly good job since she had a call for a crisis of confidence last September, and that at the same time Israel has asked for more time and more time and more time, and perhaps now is the time for the Palestinians to be rewarded for their efforts.

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Well, two corrects.

Number one, I'm not asking for more time. It's not time that I need. It's content, the content of an agreement. Time was never an issue for me. Location, time, venue, all these things are immaterial to me. I was asked if I'd come to London, I said yes. I was asked if I'd come to Washington, I said yes. We could equally meet in the North Pole or in Gaza or in Jerusalem. It doesn't make any difference for me. What is important for me is that the Palestinians, indeed, carry out their commitments, and the answer is they haven't.

When it comes to terrorism, throughout the last two years, throughout the four and a half years of Oslo there were probably a period of about one batch of six weeks after the bombings in Tel Aviv, right before the elections, in which they actually did what they promised to do under the Oslo agreement, in which they systematically fought the

terrorists, and then stopped right about August of 1996. They simply stopped and started releasing the terrorists and basically doing away with everything else that they did. And most recently, because of the death of Muhyideen Sharif, they feared, I gather, some challenge from Hamas and they acted on some aspects for about a period of four weeks or five weeks. They did some activity, which is important, by the way. I don't think it's unimportant activity. It's good. What it tells us is that they could be doing this all the time, that it's a matter of choice on their part.

People often ask me does Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have the ability, and answer is of course they do. What they must summon is the will to do this and the understanding that they are obliged to do this by the agreement. In fact, they've taken, including in the last month or so, they've taken partial steps. They can do more, and they can do it all the time and consistently as they promised to do. And this is all that we ask. We ask nothing new. We ask that all old commitments be kept.

DR. SATLOFF: Marty Gross, trustee of the Washington Institute.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, in your speech, you described a continuous flow of hostile propaganda or hate speech emanating from the Palestinian Authority. Are you making it a condition of entering into final-status negotiations that this hostile propaganda cease?

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: No, I am making it a condition for the interim-agreement negotiations to be completed. And we have suggested a mechanism to monitor this.

Now you see, you've got a real problem. Right? Can you define "hostile propaganda"? Can you cite "incitement to violence"? And the answer is, "Yes, you can." And you certainly recognize when you see it, to (codify ?) the something else. Of course, you recognize it.

So we have suggested in fact, a mechanism, if you will a tripartite committee of American, Palestinian and Israeli officials, to sit together and recognize it for what it is. You might think that doesn't work. We have found that in some cases, especially in cases like this, it works. It certainly works in Lebanon. A committee that was established there; it's not bad. And it would work here.

I have suggested that we include legislatures from all sides. Now legislatures, at least in Israel and in the United States -- I would hope in the Palestinian Authority as well -- have an independent streak to them. And they could certainly independently judge if the Palestinians are keeping or not keeping their promise to stop "incitement to violence." If there is a line forming for candidates, let me now.

Yes?

DR. SATLOFF: We will close with two very brief questions, one from Jim Schreiber, trustee of the institute, and Ehud Ya'ari, Israel Television. If we can take them both together; and then you can, Mr. Prime Minister, have the last word.

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, a common or popular view presently is that the difference between the United States's ideas and the Israeli position seems to be over the percentage of land from which Israel would deploy. The bid is reported at 13.1 percent, and the "ask" is 9, or possibly 11, percent.

First, is this accurate that the difference is simply 2.1 percent? And if it is, why is such a difference so significant?

DR. SATLOFF: Ehud?

Q: Mr. Prime Minister, I just wonder whether you have any comment on the serious outbreak of violence today in the territories.

As we understand it, we have about half a dozen people killed. I'm sure you were informed about that.

Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Well, I was informed just before I came here, and earlier this morning I've been receiving current reports about the developments. And indeed, we see a disturbing pattern where there was incitement on the official Palestinian media. We're trying to work now with the Palestinian security forces to try to calm the situation. I'm not sure that the number that you described is accurate, the number of casualties. We're trying to find out.

But it's very simple and very easy to whip up a frenzy of hatred and to whip up violence. It is important for the Palestinians to understand that we will not countenance that. This is not a pressure tactic that we can accept. And it tells us that all agreements are hostage to Palestinian satisfaction. If they are not satisfied, they can always break the spirit and letter of peace by inciting violence. So, effectively, I would say if they think that this is advancing their cause in Israel or in the United States, I think the opposite happens. People ask themselves what kind of peace is this; every time you have a difficulty or an impasse, Palestinians turn on the spigot of violence or even terror? That, I would say, puts the Palestinian cause backward and doesn't move it forward.

In any case, Israel will not accept and will not countenance these outbreaks of violence that are aimed at doing damage to Israel, killing Israelis, and ultimately killing the peace. I think it is something that should stop. It should stop immediately.

As to the question that you asked, well, how could a few percent make a difference, I wouldn't ask you if you invest in the stock market.

Q: (I do ?).

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Do you? Yeah. You follow the interest rates?

Q: (Off mike.)

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Do you? Yeah. One percent, two percent, does that make a difference there? (Laughter.) So there are some areas in which a few percent could make a difference -- right? -- to your pocket, what's in your pocket, what comes out of your pocket. Now, that's important. You know, I'm a free marketeer. I take enormous interest in these things. But you can imagine that if a few percent makes a difference for our lives, the ability to protect children, the ability to protect aircraft and so on, that makes a big difference.

Every one percent is slightly larger than the city of Tel Aviv, just to give you an idea. You can put a lot of destructive things in an area that size.

But the only way that I can explain what we're doing is this: We didn't start with the numbers that you had alluded to, and I'm not confirming any of them here.

Q: (Laughs.) (Off mike.)

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: I want to make that clear, with all the cameras pointed at me. We began with lower numbers. And we began to stretch them and stretch them and stretch them, to the point where people are now talking as you're talking, but we didn't say that.

The only analogy that I can give you -- and I've used this before, so if any of you have heard this, I apologize -- but hear it again, because it's important -- is the analogy of a paratrooper who is challenged by the pilot to jump out of the aircraft and not open his chute for a while.

And as he jumps out, he asks the pilot, "Well, can I open the chute now?" And the pilot, who has a radio connection to the paratrooper, "No, you're two kilometers up. You don't need a chute."

And as he gets to one kilometer, the paratrooper asks, "Can I open the chute now?" And the pilot says, "Well, you're one kilometer up. You don't need the chute."

And as he gets to 300 meters above the ground, he asks the pilot, "Can I open the chute now?" He says, "Well, you're 300 meters above the ground. You can still go. You don't have to open the chute."

And finally, when he gets to three meters above the ground, he asks the pilot, pleading, asking, "Can I open the chute now?" And the pilot responds, "Well, what kind of paratrooper are you that you can't jump three meters without a parachute?" (Laughter.)

So we have to open a parachute somewhere, or we crash. We crash without the ability to safeguard and secure our most vital interests. And that is essentially what we're in the process of.

The one proviso that I give you is this: We have an agreement, a written agreement with the United States, that we determine when to open the chute, that in this process, Israel opens the chute, Israel decides when to open the parachute. And if you think about it, since we're the ones who are, if you will, jumping out of a plane, that makes sense.

I thank you very much for patience and your attention. Thank you. (Applause.)

DR. SATLOFF: Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

Ladies and gentlemen, we trust that has helped to illuminate some issues for you. This meeting is adjourned. ❖

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