

Prospects for Ending the Conflict:

A Palestinian View

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In-Depth Reports

It gives me great pleasure, and I am indeed honored, to be invited to this very important function at this very crucial time. Although it is quite risky to talk about current negotiations, I will try not to be trite and historical. I will try my best to reveal as much as I can about the negotiating process without jeopardizing the chances of the Palestinian side, and I will look at how both sides may overcome the problems that we currently face in the peace process.

But let me first reveal my weakness. I am an optimist, I have always been an optimist, and I remain an optimist. Therefore, if there is any bias in my statements and discussion, it is the bias of optimism. So please accept that bias, and discount some of my hopeful comments accordingly.

My bias was born a long time ago, long before the peace process began. I have been in dialogue with American Jews, European Jews, and finally with Israelis since 1962 very early in the game. Maybe my optimism began after I got my master's degree in business administration from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. At that time, I received a teaching assignment at the school that continued even after I received my Ph.D. there. It was an ideal opportunity to start a discussion with American Jews. Probably 70 percent of my students were Jewish, mostly sons and daughters of New York financial people stock brokers and bankers and so on. I could not possibly escape moving from stock options to peace options, and to enter into deep discussions with the faculty and the students. And since I was and I hope you will excuse a little bit of immodesty one of the most popular teachers at the Wharton School, we could not resist the opportunity to enter into political discussions, despite fear that it might bias our grading.

(Laughter)

Since then, I have been in a constant dialogue with Jews, and that dialogue escalated after the 1988 declaration in Algeria by the Palestinian National Congress (PNC). That year, the PNC adopted a peace program based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, recognized the right of Israel to exist, and denounced and renounced violence and terrorism. After that, my dialogues became a very intensive effort, even though it was illegal for my Israeli counterparts to engage in them. But Israel did not seem to impose sanctions on those who had dialogue with me. I probably would have been sanctioned, as my name was on the Abu Nidal list for ten years; I escaped, and he is in bad shape today. But when I compare where we were and where we are today in this peace process, I cannot but be optimistic about its final outcome. Today, we have the best opportunity we have ever had in the last eighty or so years of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, and Arabs and Israelis. An opportunity like this should not, and cannot, be missed.

I do not believe in historical predetermination, but the positive and the objective conditions in which the people of Palestine and the people of Israel find themselves indicate almost dictate that the two parties will go forward and make this peace process succeed. Prospects for ending this conflict must now shift from a strategic vision of interdependence and cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis to a tactical calculation of the chances for an agreement over the next six weeks. The mentality of this six week imperative is unfortunate, but I suppose the

Israelis and the Palestinians, and the major party helping them to reach an agreement, the United States, are all really constrained by time.

No doubt that Prime Minister Ehud Barak has a big challenge before him of trying to achieve an agreement very soon, supposedly because in five or six weeks he will have a Knesset to account to. The Knesset is meeting after the summer holidays, and Barak's cabinet has been battered in the last two or three months particularly in the last three or four weeks with defections from his sprawling coalition. Thus, Barak may have real difficulty in forming even a small coalition that can obtain Knesset support. This is a real problem, and I do not in any way want to belittle it.

I also understand that Bill Clinton's presidency is coming to an end, and he has done in eight years a formidable job of trying to push the peace process forward. But without President George Bush, after the Gulf War, literally pushing all of the parties to go to Madrid, kicking and screaming, and finally succeeding in getting them to start talking, this peace process probably would have been delayed for years.

So a Republican president brought the people to this peace process, and a Democratic president has done his best in the last eight years to make it work. It is important that a president who has learned so much about every detail of this peace process should finish what he started, and we should not wait until the new president is inaugurated. If we do, we will probably have to wait for the first 100 days or more for him to deal with internal matters and other issues. Thus, it is much better to have President Clinton finish what he himself set out to do. But this is not a predetermined catastrophe. The peace process has been a bipartisan issue for the last thirty years. Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon, and Bush and Clinton Republicans and Democrats alike realize the absolute necessity of making this peace process work. It is good for the parties, it is good for the Middle East, it is good for the world, and it is good for the United States.

Moreover, although I recognize that it would be very good if we could finish the peace process while Clinton is in office, and it would be even better if we could do it before he becomes a lame duck president, lame duck presidents in the last thirty years have, in fact, done amazing things. The American-Palestinian relationship began in the lame duck period of President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Schultz. They made the decision to go to Stockholm, and then to Geneva, and then to start a dialogue. Robert Pelletreau, who started that dialogue during Reagan's lame duck period, is here. Thus, lame duck presidents are not totally paralyzed. While it is important that we try to sign a peace agreement in Clinton's presidency, if it does not happen, we will not face a real catastrophe. The peace process will continue under the next president.

President Yasir Arafat also has constraints. He has delayed the declaration of his independent state for the second time, and his credibility is on the line. He does not have any more excuses as to why he does not have a peace process, and yet has not declared an independent Palestinian state. Moreover, his constituency is continually pushing him to reach a conclusion or else to declare defiance. Between reaching a conclusion and declaring defiance there is a world of difference in tactics and strategy. Arafat is under real pressure, not only from Palestinians, but also from other Arabs, Muslims, Christians, and people all around the world. He finds himself in a real dilemma about reaching a decision, but he has to do it. He is not getting any younger, and therefore he too wants to see the results the fruit of his endeavors over the years, both in struggle and in peacemaking.

For those reasons, time is constraining for the three parties. I will therefore discuss the kinds of things that can be done to get the two sides closer to an agreement within these six weeks, if possible. But I hate historical determinism, so I repeat that even if we do not succeed in signing a peace agreement in the coming six weeks, it is still doable afterward. Peace is still good for all the parties, and it is still crucial that we do everything possible to make it happen. There are no alternatives to peace that are not catastrophic. Without it, the Palestinians, the Israelis, and the Americans would be worse off, and the world would be worse off. It is therefore in the interest of all the parties that we try our best to achieve peace, and as fast as possible.

Now, as I am an old professor, I have to present some analysis. I mean, I cannot just relay facts and wishes and without engaging in some academic analysis. I was not here during Shimon Peres's speech, but it has been relayed to me, and I like it. I like Shimon Peres; he has been a very good peacemaking partner with the Palestinians. I will use what I heard about his speech as a starting point for my analysis about why it is now possible to make an agreement, and what conditions will actually make that agreement succeed. As I did not see the written text, however, I apologize ahead of time for possibly misinterpreting something he said.

I understand that he presented some reasons as to why it is important to succeed now. He started with this idea that Israelis have finally realized they cannot dominate another people and occupy their land. I have heard that idea from Shimon before; it is a very important realization. A realization by Israelis that, within the context of an Israeli-Palestinian solution, they cannot and morally should not dominate another people and occupy their land is a very important prerequisite, and I will show you the Palestinian equivalent.

Second, Shimon apparently said that we have a new world, with a new economy, and that the Israelis have been successful in joining that new economy. Joining that new economy of high technology and globalization makes borders less important, and the amount of territory a state has less important. I would say that, similarly, the advances in modern methods of war also make territorial borders much less important than before with all of the missile technology, and so on. Therefore, with both sides faced by a new world economy and new world technology, borders and territory take on much less importance than they did before. Political stability is much more important. Specifically, political stability based on long-term solutions of conflicts is crucial to being able to take advantage of the new world economy with its globalization and high technology components. I therefore agree that making peace between the parties a peace that can last, a peace that is at least minimally acceptable to the parties and to their neighbors is very important to creating political stability that leads to a proper entry into the new world and the new market.

Third, the two parties but in this case, the Israelis have accepted that political stability, based on political peace, is to be based on simple rules of the game, Resolutions 242 and 338 of the United Nations Security Council. Those resolutions deal with the borders of 1967, territory, security, recognition, and a just resolution of the refugee problem. Israel has applied to the letter to the centimeter, in fact Resolution 242, in withdrawing to the borders of 1967 with Egypt and Jordan as a negotiated result, and with Lebanon, unilaterally. In these three cases and we know that is going to be the case with the Syrian peace process Israel has dedicated itself and honestly implemented the return to the 1967 border as the basic price for peace with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and I believe eventually with Syria. It is very important that this also be the case with the Palestinian peace process.

Fourth, the challenges of the new world require new modes of production, distribution, and cooperation. And these modes of cooperation cannot exist without peace. The move from dependence and hegemony to interdependence and a win-win situation cannot be accomplished in our new economy unless borders are open and fluid and people and goods are free to move from one country to another. This cannot work unless you have peace and security.

Now, Palestinians also share to reciprocate what I understood from Shimon's text these same tenets, from their own point of view. On one hand, Palestinians fully accept that what they are facing with the occupation and with their Israeli opponents is not a typical colonial situation in which they can simply ask the colonial occupation army to leave, as in the cases of Egypt, Ghana, India, and Algeria. They are facing a totally different situation. They are facing a people who have been a traditional international victim of racist attempts at ethnic cleansing and the destruction of their very communities in the Holocaust the likes of which our world, and history, has never seen before. You cannot simply achieve peace by negotiating the end of the occupying party's existence; you have to find a way of living with that other party a party that has an emotional attachment and commitment to your land, from their point of view one that is no less strong than your own. Both parties are historical victims and both are related to this holy

land. Therefore, the solution has to be totally different from the solutions that were sought by Egypt from British occupation, and by Algeria from French occupation.

The Palestinians also accept the reality of Israel. They accept that the only way they can have peace, prosperity, and independence and move toward this new economy to make use of it is by achieving real peace with Israel that puts an end to the conflict and that substitutes war with a new Middle Eastern order based on peace and harmony and security and that also recognizes independence and freedom for each of the parties, as well as free movement of goods and services. All this has fully been accepted by the Palestinian people as the end result of this peace process.

Third, the Palestinians accept many people tend to forget that their claim to 27,000 square kilometers of Palestine of 1948 has not only dwindled down to their claim based on the partition resolution of 12,000 square kilometers for the Palestine state, and 15,000 square kilometers for the Israeli state, but they are now negotiating just 6,000 square kilometers. One of the most creative ideas that we have had during these negotiations is the idea of changing the commitment to the border of 1967 which has been what Israel has implemented with Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan, and probably Syria to at least the surface area occupied in 1967, which would allow some swaps of territory between the two parties swaps that are not based on the greed of annexing just one or two more percentage points to Israel, but on accommodating the absolute needs of the two parties. That has been one of the most significant, creative ideas to come out of Camp David. We are talking, if not about the exact borders of 1967, then to the exact surface area of 1967, with minor border rectifications on both sides.

And finally, the Palestinians also accept that this new economy requires new models for the exploitation of resources. These models should highlight the sustainable comparative advantages that Palestinians and Israelis have, with very little land, very little water, and very little minerals. You have to emphasize high-level manpower, technology, and the essence of being in the holiest land tourism. Therefore, joint tourism, joint high technology, and joint exploration for energy and other resources, have really become the new modes of survival for Palestinians in the future, and they recognize that the only way they can make use of those resources is through a long-lasting peace that sticks and that is acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis.

I do not know if you have seen the New York Times article about offshore gas in area between Israel and Palestinian territory of Gaza. None of us have been talking about it very much for fear of creating expectations that we cannot fulfill. And yet, one of Israel's major problems the need for energy might possibly become one of the new bonds between Palestinians and Israelis, if this gas find turns out to be what we expect it to be. Most of the gas exported from Gaza would have to be sold in Israel through a joint pipeline system. I come from Khan Yunis, where the gas is just about thirty kilometers, or twenty miles, offshore, and already, Khan Yunis families are thinking of calling themselves shaykhs or sultans, or something. So maybe we are not destined to a fate in which Palestinians are forever perceived as being dependent on the Israeli economy in selling their work, rather than their products. Maybe we can come to an place in which Palestinians and Israelis find mutuality and equality through real interchange, and through the two economies giving and taking from each other.

I understand that the Palestinian economy is a \$5 billion economy and Israel's is a \$100 billion economy. I'm not ignoring the difference in sizes at this present time. But with the hungry Israeli technology market hungry for programmers and for computer scientists and with the abundance of Palestinian computer scientists everywhere in the diaspora that are coming back to the Palestinian territories, there could be a lot of synergy between the Palestinian and the Israeli economies. This high-tech industry, the prospects for new gas exploration, and cooperation in tourism are three areas in which we should expect that peace will create new conditions of interdependence, rather than conditions of dependence and hegemony. For these reasons, and others, both Israelis and Palestinians have moved consistently toward this peace process, and have abandoned many of those positions that make it impossible to reach a compromise. Opinion polls, both in Israel and in the Palestinian territories,

indicate how much our publics are sometimes well ahead of our leaders in their willingness to accept compromises that are thought to be impossible by the leaders.

And so, questions of red lines and green olive branches have to be resolved in a way that people can live with, and that their neighbors can also minimally accept, because Israel is not desirous of making peace with the Palestinians alone; absent peace with the Palestinians, Israel cannot have peace with the Arabs. But once Israel has peace with the Palestinians, its objectives, I'm sure, are more broad: it wants peace with the entire Arab world. And because this objective is important for the sake of the same four assumptions that I have presented here, it is very important that the peace between Palestinians and Israelis also be minimally acceptable to and respected by their Arab neighbors. Otherwise, we will not get the kind of comprehensive and permanent peace that we are all seeking.

I wanted to spend more time on why the United States should also feel the same way about the peace process, but I will defer to your experts on this matter. After the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the end of the Gulf War, and the advent of this new global economy, the United States has no interest in perpetuating conflict in the Middle East. On the contrary, the United States has every interest in achieving the kind of peace that would ensure stability for the U.S. economy and for the U.S. global vision of security that did not exist during the Cold War or during the occupation by Iraq of Kuwait. So there are absolutely positive, personal, and objective conditions as to why the United States also wants to see this peace process continue and succeed.

I want to move now to the prospects for the next six weeks.

Camp David really was a revelation to both the parties and their audiences. We disagree about what happened at Camp David, because there are no written records, and everything is filtered through the perception mechanisms of the parties that attended. Was it a failure? Was it a success? Did it lead us forward, or did it make things even more difficult? The failed Geneva summit between the late President Hafiz al-Asad and President Clinton led to sliding back in the peace talks between Syria and Israel. Will Camp David have a similar result?

I am one who thinks that Camp David was the single most important negotiating phenomenon between Israelis and Palestinians. We went to Camp David with very little preparation. Yet, the talks succeeded in pushing us forward on almost every one of the issues. The fact that it also revealed some critical sub-factors without which a peace cannot be made is also testimony to how much detail we went into, and how we have, really for the first time, managed to put together a framework even though that framework has not yet been agreed upon. But we do now have a structural framework for a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, the likes of which we have never had before. In fact, Camp David tested the credibility and the imagination of our two publics. Both sides had both somewhat lost sight of the difference between an interim agreement and a permanent status agreement because of the predominance of activities on the interim agreement that took place as a result of the unorthodox Oslo process.

In most agreements ending occupation and creating peace, you start by setting the final status objectives and then you put in place interim arrangements to reach that final state. In Oslo, it was the other way around. We focused on interim measures that would build confidence between the parties and kept the shape of the final agreement rather vague, stating only that it would be an implementation of Resolutions 242 and 338, and so on.

We spent seven years, rather than the five we should have, ending the interim period and moving into the permanent status negotiations. I really would, without any propaganda, like to lay a lot of the blame for this on Binyamin Netanyahu's prime ministership; he just delayed everything, and we lost three years. It is impossible to rewrite history, but had the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin continued, or Shimon Peres, we probably would have finished everything in five years. But because of that interim period, people started thinking that the whole peace process is about interim matters 2 percent here and 3 percent there, release 50 prisoners here and 50 prisoners there, improve accommodation at the borders here, and create better passage there. The Palestinian people began to

think that there would be no more discussion of the real issues of borders, Jerusalem, refugees, and so on. And as a result, Camp David was a shock to many people. A good shock to some, a bad shock to others. Nevertheless, it really made people realize that these are the real issues an awareness that did not exist before Camp David.

In Camp David, we made a lot of progress on the territorial issue; we were really quite close to reaching agreement on the total territorial percentages. And the land swap idea will close the gaps and loops. We also made quite a bit of progress on the issue of security. The Israelis really, for the first time understood what we meant by, "We care about your security and will accept many security arrangements, but we will not accept those security arrangements that lead to annexation of territory."

We also made a lot of advances on the refugee issue. All the issues we discussed were 1967-related, but the refugee issue whether we like it or not has to be 1948-related, because that is when the refugees were really forced to leave, or prevented from returning. This is a very important component, because I believe that we cannot really reach a final peace without end to conflict and an end to claims. The refugee issue was properly discussed in that light, and it was discussed for the first time and in a lot of detail. I spent sixty hours negotiating the refugee issue with my Israeli counterpart during Camp David, something we have never done before. You know how much time was spent on Jerusalem, of course, and we have Faisal Husseini here with us I'm sure he will spend much more time talking about Jerusalem.

And so Camp David brought us closer, although not close enough in every one of those areas. In some areas, we probably came out nine out of ten. In others, we were seven out of ten. In others, we were probably four or five out of ten. But we were always trying to reach for a solution. We did not and we cannot escape some sliding back as a result of the fact that we did not. We would have loved to have left Camp David knowing that we would continue talking the next day, but we at least agreed not to engage in assigning blame for the lack of progress. Yet, when one has not succeeded, it is human nature to do exactly that it is a human weakness. So after leaving Camp David, we started trading blame. When you start blaming the other party where you have not succeeded, you give the impression that you have failed. In addition, you spend all your time trying to defend your position. In effect, we and the Israelis have spent a lot of time explaining to the world why each of us, respectively, is not responsible for that fact that what happened at Camp David did not lead to real success.

We should have been, by now, much closer to the possibility of an agreement in the coming six weeks. We have, in fact, slipped back a little bit. Although we are close on many issues, some particularly when they have symbolic importance become very difficult to negotiate, especially in the public eye. In addition, there is something to be said for discretion. But discretion, valor, and all of that, do not exist in the realm of negotiations between us and the Israelis. We were all like a sieve in providing information about what happened, and it could not be kept out of public discussion.

Does Arafat want peace? He does, and I would like very much to try to disabuse you of any idea that President Arafat wants to die as a martyr without having achieved his cause that he would rather remain a revolutionary leader with honor and valor rather than become the president of a small nation, a member of the United Nations like Micronesia and the Marshall Islands.

Palestine with all respect to Micronesia is never going to be Micronesia, for obvious reasons because it is a party to the most important peace process in the world today. Had this process been among Micronesians and Polynesians and St. Kittians, it would have been quite different. But because it involves Jews and Palestinians, it is very important, because of our connectivity to the Arab and Western worlds, because of our importance to these societies, and because of the importance of the holiest of holy lands. Accordingly, we are never going to be marginalized. And Arafat does not want to go in history just as a man who kept principles aloft. Of course he has his principles, and he has his red lines, but he also wants to have an agreement, and he wants to have it in his lifetime. He wants to be the

president of a Palestinian state in full peace with Israel and the world.

Do the Palestinians want peace? Obviously they want it. They are sick and tired of being under occupation and in exile. They are sick and tired of not being able to make it, of sending 130,000 workers to Israel every morning and come back to Gaza with a lot of humiliation. They're sick and tired of being dependent on anybody, even the United Nations.

What are some of the ideas that can push us forward? I talked about land swaps, because the swap between some areas in West Bank and some areas around Gaza would create a lot of advantages for Israel, in terms of some of its needs regarding settlements and security. For the Palestinians, it would increase the size of Gaza, allowing refugees there to live on a greater area of land, reduce the ghettoization and condensed living conditions, and allow closer proximity to the West Bank. These swaps should not lead to any interruption of the contiguity of the Palestinian territory on the West Bank, nor on any vital interest of Israel near Gaza. It is a brilliant idea that was accepted in principle in Camp David, it must be pushed to achieve final results.

A unified city of Jerusalem has to be the city of two capitals. We simply cannot marginalize the fact that there are 350,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem and that in the Old City, 92 percent of the population is Palestinian and claim that this city is the unified capital of Israel. It cannot possibly be. The city must be unified, but as the capital of two states in a unified and interdependent existence, with joint planning, joint zoning, and complete freedom of passage and movement.

There is a need to move toward economic interdependence, rather than toward the old idea that the Palestinians need peace just so that they can send more and more workers into Israel. This must change, and there are a lot of ideas concerning interdependence that I have already talked about. There is the idea of non-annexationist security, which has been accepted by the two parties in Camp David, and we have to work hard on this principle to make it stick in the final agreement. In addition, there is the need for an option of return for the Palestinian refugees whether to Israel or to the Palestinian state and perhaps also compensation for those who want to remain where they are, aided by international assistance.

The option of return is vital to ending the trauma of people who were forced to leave in 1948, who had all most of their villages, 430 villages and towns, totally destroyed and razed to the ground, and who were never allowed to return. Ten thousand of them were killed as infiltrators who tried to come back to their houses. Two hundred fifty thousand of them are still called by the Israelis the "present absents," because they were not in their homes at the moment the statistics were compiled by the Israeli authorities in the Galilee and other places. They lost all their property, their homes, and all their stocks and bonds and bank accounts, and so on. You have to seriously look into these issues and to translate what happened in Camp David into a viable agreement that takes into consideration both the rights of the Palestinian refugees and the demographic needs of Israel, in an agreement that we can all recognize and understand.

Now, what does this all mean for today? Palestinians and Israelis need to get back to a full negotiating posture now. If it is absolutely impossible to make an agreement without Jerusalem, it is equally disastrous to place all the focus on just one aspect of the Jerusalem issue the Temple Mount while holding everything else hostage to an agreement on that one aspect, considering the interests of 1 billion Muslims and 200 million Arabs and some 20 million Jews. If we talk about the Temple Mount issue only, and keep everything else stalled, we can solve neither the problem of Jerusalem nor the other problems. We have got to get back to a full-scale negotiation on all matters, and try to make progress on every one of them, so that we are at least closer by the end of the six weeks if not fully ready to sign a peace agreement.

We also have to keep the United States interested. I know President Clinton is very committed. I am not a Democrat,

or a Republican, but I have seen in President Clinton the kind of determination, the kind of compassion, and the kind of zeal to make this agreement succeed and the kind of brilliant attention to detail that would really make it a shame not succeed while he is in office. And yet, he made a mistake in Camp David, because he handled most of the negotiations himself. There was very little contact between Ehud Barak and Yasir Arafat. Barak and Arafat probably only met twice during this whole fifteen-day period. One occasion was a dinner in which Mr. Barak had Mr. Arafat on his right and Chelsea Clinton on his left. And you know who Mr. Barak spent most of his time talking to? Chelsea, of course. There was really no time for Arafat and Barak to interact, with the concomitant lack of trust and lack of chemistry between the two men. Where we succeeded most was where Palestinians and Israelis moved forward together with the nudging and the support and the urging of the United States in Oslo, in Gaza, and in Jericho.

I spent ten months with Amnon Lipkin-Shahak in a hotel in Taba, overlooking the beautiful Gulf of Aqaba. And we spent five days a week together, day in and day out, week in and week out, sixteen hours a day for ten months. We finished on the dot, in time, to implement the Oslo and Gaza and Jericho agreements. In the process, we made the best of friends, because I'd never spent as much time with anybody talking about our lives and our futures save my wife, of course as I spent with Amnon Lipkin-Shahak in that Hilton hotel in Taba. This is how you go about negotiating. The leaders came into this agreement, these negotiations, only three times. Rabin and Arafat came to the opening, the closing, and during a big problem in the middle. The Americans also came only three times; the rest was accomplished by Israelis and Palestinians. But America was there prodding, pushing, helping, and motivating. And that is what we want.

I would like to conclude here by saying that peace is still doable; in fact, it has to be done. And it has to be done in a way that is permanent and acceptable to the parties and to their neighbors. And when it is done, it will be the single best peace this world has ever seen. If it succeeds, it should end all the fears Israelis have about the domino effect and their lack of trust in the Palestinians. Palestinians will commit themselves to peace, because this is also their chance to have independence, freedom, honor, dignity, and prosperity for the future. Let us all work together to see that it becomes a reality. Thank you very much.

Robert Satloff, The Washington Institute: Dr. Sha'ath, thank you very much for that tour-de-raison as well as tour-de-force. I'd like to open up by clarifying the procedure for the next six weeks as I think I understand it from your talk. It sounds as though the objective of a full agreement is still out there, but the goal for the next six weeks is less than a full framework based on negotiations without the principals Barak, Arafat, and Clinton.

Sha'ath: No, the principals should come once in a while, but the negotiating teams have to do most of the work. The leaders will come to solve problems, but they do not have to be at the table at all times; this is what went on between Arafat and Rabin and Arafat and Peres. Obviously the two leaders of the two negotiating teams would be in touch with them daily. There is no such approach as "authorize the negotiators and let them do it." They have to get authority from the leadership, and the leadership has to find a way of then democratically creating a consensus in the communities for what they come up with. It is a political process, but you do not need to keep everything stalled until the leaders meet. You have to create success, and, armed with success, there will be more trust and the two leaders can then create chemistry between them. The leaders have to come back maybe once every two weeks within the next six weeks, and the rest has to be done by their people. The American leadership should probably come in once or twice maybe just once. But the American team still has to be there monitoring and prodding.

Joyce Davis, Knight Ridder: I was struck by your optimism about the receptivity of the people to the peace process. It goes almost against everything that my reporters have been writing that many of the people, especially Palestinians, are not really receptive right now, at least to the kind of peace that they have heard about. Would you explain a little bit more about why you are optimistic and why you think the Palestinian people actually are ready?

Sha'ath: I will give you two very important proofs. One is hopefully the ultimate end to, but at least so far the almost

total stoppage of, the kind of terrorism we saw in the first three years of the interim agreement. Not that Hamas does not represent at least a portion of public opinion and enjoy support among the Palestinian people, and I know there are equivalent religious parties some of them extremist on the Israeli side, as well. One of their people assassinated Prime Minister Rabin, and another shot and killed thirty worshipers in a mosque. There are forces of extremism on both sides.

And yet, Hamas at one time almost succeeded in derailing the whole peace process with the suicide bombings that took place. We were not ready to deal with it. We did not have a proper police force, we did not have proper intelligence, and we had not created the proper cooperation with the Israelis on this matter. But there is also a very important political connotation to this situation. Whereas Hamas was encouraged at the beginning, hitting Israelis and thinking that it had the political support of the population, it was totally dissuaded when it found out that the vast majority of the Palestinians were against the violence, because they thought that these suicide bombings, followed by excessive retaliation by the Israelis, would lead to an end of all their hopes for the future. So Hamas was defeated, definitely, by two things. One, obviously, was a better police force, better coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security forces, better investigation, and better intelligence. But above all, Hamas was defeated by the kind of political commitment by the Palestinian people that made it negative for Hamas to go further into such activity. And that is, in itself, a tremendous proof of the commitment of the Palestinian people.

The second is the issue of normalization and internal relations between Palestinians and Israelis. You find resistance to that normalization in every other Arab country around us including Jordan, which supposedly has a warmer peace with Israel than other areas. Part of it is based on the feeling that before the Palestinians had their justice, there would be no room for real normalization. But it also has to do with the fact that the Israelis and the rest of the Arabs are separated by Sinais and Jordans and Golans, and so on, whereas the Palestinians have accepted that they will have to live interdependently with the Israelis. It is that acceptance of our interdependence that is reflected so well in the Palestinians' insistence in almost every poll that there is no other alternative but to continue making peace with the Israelis. In these two cases, you can see how important it is that we have real support from the Palestinian people for this peace process.

I was also very much interested in Thomas Friedman's comment, "Palestinians, you should hear the sound of silence." By "the sound of silence," he meant that the late Prime Minister Rabin was shot and assassinated by an Israeli extremist for offering much less than what Ehud Barak has offered. And yet, there is much more silence among the Israeli public about what he offered at Camp David. Remember, I am a negotiator, not just a speaker. Would the Israeli public have shown a much greater willingness to accept a peace process in which there are a lot of very painful concessions?

I am encouraged by my extensive travels between the Israeli and Palestinian areas, by the general demeanor of the Israelis and the Palestinians; I'm more encouraged than many people who are far away might expect.

Satloff: While I accept your last point, it is important to consider the results of the peace index polling by the Tami Steinmetz Center. A couple of numbers relate directly to what you just said: sixty percent of Israelis are opposed to handing over ninety percent of the West Bank; seventy-six are opposed to allowing 100,000 refugees to return inside the green line; sixty-five percent felt that even if this were the last obstacle to peace with the Palestinians, the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital would be unacceptable.

Sha'ath: I would like to contrast that data with many other Israeli polls, including later Israeli polls published in Ha'aretz and the Jerusalem Post that list some figures that are quite different.

Edith Everett, The Washington Institute: In your estimation, how many Palestinians would actually want to come back to physical Israeli territory under the Palestinian right of return?

Barbi Weinberg, The Washington Institute: Thank you. Mr. Sha'ath, we're pleased to have you here, and you know that the Washington Institute has been devoted over many years to assisting the American government in its efforts to help the parties reach a peace that will be good for everyone in the Middle East.

It is very nice to hear you say that you are seeking the kind of agreement that will bring lasting peace and good relations on so many levels between and among the peoples of Israel and a future Palestinian state. And, therefore, it is very troubling to many of us to hear the kinds of speeches still emanating from different members of the Palestinian Authority (PA) figures of significance and importance that sound to us like incitement to hostility rather than encouragement to live in peace. It is also troubling to hear that the brand new, newly revised Palestinian school books do not speak of peace, do not speak of two states, actually speak as if there is no Israel, and that PA maps still do not contain the name "Israel."

David Makovsky, The Washington Institute: Nabil, I'm very impressed by your optimism and enthusiasm, and your sense that we're perhaps on the verge of a historic moment. You mentioned the "end of conflict" or the "end of claims" as being an objective. At what point do you feel that it is important to prepare your public, the Palestinian public, for what the "peace" part of the land-for-peace equation will actually mean and to specifically put forward these components?

Also, Eppie Yaar said that 80 percent of Israelis do not believe that this really will be the end of the conflict. How do you persuade them? I personally believe that if you do the marketing job on your side, you will not have to do it on the Israeli side, because the Israelis will hear the Arabic. But they do want to hear it in Arabic; the Hebrew does not really interest them as much. You're so articulate, and you're at the top. So I'd like to know from you, Nabil, when does this public campaign begin?

Fred Lafer, The Washington Institute: You gave such a great description of how respect was generated when the Israelis and Palestinians met to negotiate and began to know each other as people. How do you make that happen when, for example, Walid Abu Zuluf yesterday was still talking about giving up 78 percent of the land as opposed to saying, "Israel does exist, it did exist, and 242 does exist"?

Shaul Bakhash, George Mason University: We all know why Israel is reluctant to grant the principle of the right of return. And so what guarantees can you give them that granting this right will not lead to the realization of their worst fears?

Robert Lieber, Georgetown University: Nabil, about eight years ago, you and I were at a meeting in Spain, and you had just come from a session with Israeli peaceniks in San Francisco. You were glowing about the fact that you and they had negotiated a kind of hypothetical peace treaty. My reply was that it would be utterly meaningless unless you and your counterparts could do the same with the Israeli mainstream meaning Yitzhak Rabin and the two-thirds or more of the Israelis who wanted peace, but wanted a peace with absolute security.

I see an analogy here that may point to what is missing from your talk, and what is missing from the goings on inside the Palestinian world. The explanation for the numbers that Rob Satloff quoted a moment ago, which are very telling and important, is that while the great majority of the Israeli public still wants peace with real security, the tremendous changes and broken taboos can only be acceptable if the Israelis are convinced this is the end of conflict. But to this very moment, statements, actions, textbooks, incitement, and everything else coming from other Palestinian leaders and spokesmen do not give the Israeli majority a clear indication that all these compromises on their part will be met, ultimately, by the end of the ArabIsraeli conflict. Absent these kinds of assurances, there is no agreement at least not from the Israeli side.

Sha'ath: It seems to me we have two questions, really, out of the six. One question has to do with how prepared the Palestinian people are and to what extent the Palestinian leadership has prepared the Palestinian people for

compromise and for the new world that will emerge after peace. This includes the issues of incitement and textbooks, because all these are really corollaries of the same question. The second question is about the return of the refugees, which troubles many people.

As for the first question, it is a little unfair to put all the onus, all the burden of preparation, on Palestinian shoulders. Not because of any need to shrug responsibility, or to in any way act "holier than thou," but because of the great imparity in power relations between the two parties. This point has to be considered when talking about really preparing people for peace. Palestine and Israel are not Nicaragua and Honduras, or Guatemala and Belize; we are not discussing two countries who have border problems but do not have a situation in which one is in control of the other's fate and in occupation of the other other's people and territory. The situation here is quite different. The Palestinians remain under Israeli occupation in the context of a fantastic power imparity to Israel's advantage, of course. The Palestinians feel constrained in everything they want to do: they feel their land being taken away gradually by increasing settlement activities; they feel their trade being hampered by excessive border controls; and they feel that their lives and their destinies are totally controlled by Israeli action. This imparity creates a situation in which preparedness to forgive, preparedness to give, and preparedness to make peace is constrained by daily experiences.

And probably, Israelis felt the same during the suicide bombings of Hamas. I cannot deny that during these bombings, which were devastating to all of us, many Israelis peaceniks, as you call them said, "All right, you want to make peace, but I do not know what happens to my daughter if she is three hours late coming on a bus." Here, there is a little bit more parallelism. Palestinians were under the constant threat of occupation, while Israelis were under a constant security threat. But this latter scenario has changed, and I hope the threat will never return. Therefore, the burden today is entirely a Palestinian one: their refugees are still refugees the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon still suffer tremendously, not to underestimate the suffering of other refugees and as for those in the occupied territories, well, there is no such thing as benign occupation. Occupation is morally unacceptable both to Shimon Peres and to myself. It is burdensome, and it is terrible.

In terms of textbooks, we have made much progress from the old Egyptian and Jordanian texts that were taught at the schools under Israeli occupation and that have existed for the last forty or fifty years. The textbooks that are written today are not the textbooks that will describe history when final peace is reached. But I suggest that you look at the New York Times article, not only the Washington Post piece, to find a more positive analysis of the textbooks, one that is written in a more balanced way. But show me one Israeli textbook that describes the agony of the refugees in 1948. There are new Israeli historians, like Benny Morris and others, but their points-of-view have not yet filtered into the Israeli textbooks. And how many Israeli textbooks contain the map of the state of Palestine yet? None and I cannot blame them. We are in a process; we are moving toward the kind of textbooks that recognize one another's agonies and beliefs more than we have before. We have taken a sizable step in that direction, but we are not yet there.

David Makovsky, I refer you to a long television interview that I personally gave on Palestinian television in Arabic the day we came back from Camp David. In it, I talked about what concessions we made, what concessions the Israelis made, how much progress we made, and what remains. And the people are absolutely ready.

There are very important red lines on Jerusalem and on the refugee issue that you have to recognize. And my friend Thomas Friedman went a long way yesterday in his article suggesting that the Israelis have to recognize those red lines, while the Palestinians have to recognize them on the other side particularly on the refugee issue. But this is a process. It cannot be one, single event. Once peace is in place, that process will accelerate tremendously toward rewriting history in the way you and I would like.

And for the end of conflict? Obviously, there is no reason to make this peace other than to reach a total end of

conflict. But you cannot talk about end of conflict before you reach that peace. You talk about it but you do not conclude it, and you do not commit yourself to it fully until you have it at least on paper. I really disagree with anyone who says that we can make peace without end of conflict. We cannot. The objective of the peace process is to end that conflict once and for all. But you have to consider the imbalance of power I talked about just a few minutes ago. For the Palestinians, committing themselves to the end of conflict is the last stage of the peace process, without which they have very few bargaining cards. The Israelis have a lot of cards. Israel is one of the strongest countries in the world today particularly in the Middle East and to many Israelis leaders, the Palestinians no longer pose an existential threat to Israel. To the Palestinians, Israel will remain an existential threat until peace is reached. If we can make it in the coming six weeks, or in even the six weeks after that, the end result of that peace will necessarily be the end of conflict.

Finally, we have the question of the refugees. I do not know how many refugees would opt to return, if they are given the option. One wrong way of finding out would be to take a public opinion poll. Not that I am totally against public opinion polls. But I do agree with something I heard from Shimon Peres that leaders have to lead polls, not to be led by them. I like that. But if today you were to ask the 4 million Palestinian refugees, "Can you see yourself going back to Palestine and Israel, to your village whatever it is now if you are given that option?" As a matter of faith, they will say, "Of course." Anyone who is polled about this kind of decision will say so; it would be an act of treachery to answer a public opinion poll question by saying, "No, I don't care about Palestine, and I don't care about my rights."

So any public opinion data in this scenario would be utterly misleading. Nevertheless, it is so important for the Palestinians that Israelis recognize the right of return. It is so damn important, because above anything else it is what will end their claims, and end their part of the conflict. Let me be very honest with you. Palestinians were very happy when Stuart Eizenstat helped the Jews get their money back from Swiss banks. But they cannot ignore the fact that they, too, have money and assets and bank accounts and buildings and houses that they would like Eizenstat to help them get back from Israel. And maybe he would be ready to do it.

The point is, you cannot marginalize or ignore these rights. The United Nations Conciliation Commission, which was headed by the United States with Turkey and France as members, spent ten years documenting Palestinian assets in Palestine and came up with a computer record of which we, Israel, the Jordanians, the Egyptians, and the United States each have a copy. There are 435,000 land deeds that are photographed and computerized by the commission. So any of this talk that Palestinian society at the time consisted of a few feudalists who owned all the land, and that the rest of the population ran away because they were instructed by the Arab regimes to do so, is ridiculous. Out of about 1.5 million Palestinians at the time, there were 435,000 land owners. Everyone owned his own home. How can you ignore these people's rights?

The question, in my mind, is how to construct an agreement that affirms and confirms the right to a free option of return, constrained by a set of incentives and disincentives built into the agreement, so that Israel will not feel an existential threat from a large inflow of people. But we have not yet reached that stage; the Israelis at the negotiating table have not yet asked the question of how to include these two guarantees simultaneously. First, we need Israel to recognize the refugees' rights in order to end all claims and end this aspect of the conflict between us. ❖

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