

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict:

Is the End in Sight?

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In-Depth Reports

Robert Satloff, The Washington Institute: We have asked our two guests this evening to engage in a conversation rather than to deliver extended formal remarks. Dan, Ziyad, please begin by giving us a sense of where you think the peace process is today, where it is going over the next several months, and what likelihood there is that indeed, before the year is out, we will see an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Dan Meridor: We live in an era in which we get our information at the quick pace of a television series, and when I say "we" I mean not only the people of the Middle East but leaders as well. We think we can have resolution of every conflict in a quick fix overnight. We have no time and no patience.

Questions about the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict make me a bit afraid. What is the end? What comes after the end? Is the end in sight? I do not know exactly what the end is, but I think in order to be a little more cautious when one tries to assess developments, one should put things into perspective. The Arab-Israeli conflict is the broad perspective. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict may be the core of the conflict, but it is only part of it.

Looking at the broader and more long-range perspective, I think that one can be quite optimistic and positive about developments in the past thirty-three years. Before the Six Day War, not one Arab country would speak with Israel. Afterward, however, there began a real peace process, starting with the late King Hussein of Jordan in 1970, who became Israel's great ally in the beginning quietly, then openly. Then of course after the election of Menachem Begin as prime minister of Israel exactly twenty-three years ago yesterday on May 17, 1977 the Israel-Egyptian Peace Treaty became a reality, and for the first time ever, an Arab country signed on to a formal, full peace with Israel.

After the Gulf War came the Madrid Conference of November 1991. For the first time, Syrians and Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis talked with each other. Following that, there was the 1993 Oslo agreement and the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty. Looking at the long-range view of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there has been significant progress, and more Arab countries are coming to terms with Israel formally and informally. It is a positive track. Yet, it is important to remember another track, namely that of Iran and Iraq; the developments there are not very promising.

The last phase of the Oslo agreement was signed in September 1993. I was not a very great supporter of that agreement, simply because it was a "buy now, pay later" deal. The Nobel Peace Prize and its glory came first, but as the time for payment approached, the price seemed quite high for both sides.

It was planned in a way that the easy parts came first and the very difficult ones were left intentionally for the later phases. It was relatively easy to agree about Gaza from the Israeli perspective. It was also relatively easy to agree about the centers of Arab population in Judea and Samaria. But when it comes to the issues that are at stake now, it is much more complicated. Issues such as final borders, Jerusalem, and the refugees are all emotionally loaded and therefore very difficult to resolve. One has to understand that, when speaking of a final agreement, one is required to compromise on national or personal dreams and aspirations. As long as the discussion concerned an interim

agreement, both sides could temporarily give up, but then ultimately demand, what they believe is theirs as a historical and religious right. This is the case for both sides approaching the final stage.

The plan of the Oslo agreement is one in which very sensitive, emotionally loaded issues are decided within a very short timeframe, and the gaps, unfortunately, are still quite wide on all these issues. The Israeli people have gone through a major change in public opinion and in the political arena since the Oslo agreement was signed. Until 1993-1994, for about six decades from when the British first offered a partition plan in the 1930s a debate existed in the Jewish public as to whether to accept or reject the idea of a division of the land. After the 1967 Six Day War, Israel was divided into two schools more or less half and half. While some claimed that the land was Israel's but argued that the state had to give up a large part of the land namely Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), and Gaza to settle the dispute, others refused to give up an inch.

The debates continued and many elections centered on this issue. After the Oslo agreement was signed, reality was changed on the ground and the Palestinians added more land to their jurisdiction. It became clear that to reach an agreement in the dispute, Judea, Samaria, and Gaza would have to be somewhat divided. The land cannot all remain Israel's; while some part of it will be in Israel's possession, a part will also be in Palestinian hands. Territorial compromise is now the prevailing idea, and, as the last election in 1999 has illustrated, this compromise is now accepted by more than 90 percent of Israelis.

Just as Israelis have acknowledged that the land in dispute is not going to remain completely theirs, the Palestinians must realize that it will not be completely theirs either. Therefore, if the idea of substantial compromise whatever the percentage is accepted, the end of this particular conflict may be approaching. The most important issue involves the delineation of borders, in terms of the lines between Israel and a Palestinian entity or state.

Although I follow the issue quite closely through open information and through intelligence reports, there is no clear answer to the question of where the borders will be. An agreement may be within reach, but only if both sides demonstrate a willingness to compromise on Gaza, Judea, and Samaria.

Ziyad Abu Zayyad: In short, it seems unlikely that the end of the conflict is in sight. The Israelis interpret and remember the conflict in a completely different way than we do. They forget very quickly and, in turn, expect the Palestinians to do the same.

Mr. Meridor spoke about the need for compromise regarding issues such as Judea and Samaria. Yet, he did not mention that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians did not start in 1967 and it did not begin over the West Bank and Gaza. The tensions began before the war in 1948, when the Palestinians lost more than 78 percent of their land. The hope to return to Palestine began many years ago.

When the Palestinians settled on a compromise, they accepted the principle of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Their compromise included 22 percent of the total area of Palestine, and so when they are asked to compromise even on that 22 percent of Palestine, they are being asked to forget the history of the conflict. They simply cannot forget Jaffa, Haifa, Lod, and all of Palestine that was occupied in 1948. If the Israelis continue with this approach, it seems unlikely that the two sides will come to a compromise and reach a deal any time in the future. Since the Madrid Conference, the number of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza has more than tripled. The more the peace talks progress, the more Jewish settlements expand and cut the West Bank into pieces. By constructing bypass roads, the Israeli government is trying to integrate the Jewish settlements with Israel so that they may become permanent.

If the Israelis are interested in a Jewish state and want to live in a state of their own, why then are they trying to make a territorial separation between themselves and the Palestinians virtually impossible? The existing settlements inside Palestinian territory will not allow for any possibility of establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel, nor

for any separation between Israel and Palestine, unless the Israelis want a separation of people, rather than of land. Palestinians are not allowed to move to Israel, while Israelis are free to settle in the Palestinian territories. This separation is in only one direction.

Israelis are simply not mature enough for a compromise over what Palestinians call Palestine and they call the land of Israel, or Eretz Israel. A real solution therefore seems unlikely. Israel is a strong country and is thus able to dictate things to the Palestinians. Yet, it is important to realize that a dictated agreement is not always effective.

Satloff: Mr. Abu Zayyads view is that the Palestinians have made their compromise by accepting the 22 percent of Palestine that is the West Bank and Gaza, and Mr. Meridor's view is that the compromise has not yet begun. Is that correct?

Meridor: Not entirely. The issue here is not that of history and memory, but rather that of a continued conflict. It just seems that a discussion over history will lead nowhere. Yet, if it is necessary to go back to history, it is important to remember the facts surrounding the war of 1948. First, there was no Palestinian state in existence. Seven hours after the creation of the State of Israel, its Arab neighbors attacked and tried to destroy it completely. Now it seems as if Israel has to be excused for surviving.

Seventy-five percent of this land of Palestine was given to the Palestinian people, who accepted it; these people had and still have a king over them in Jordan. The main problem with which both sides need to deal is the issue of Judea and Samaria. While the settlement activity under former Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres was quite accelerated, it is important to remain dedicated to finding a solution regarding boundaries and populations.

Compromise is still possible. Reverting back to the mentality of 1948 when there was no state, or even to the situation in 1968 when all the Arab countries refused to recognize Israel's existence, is not the right approach.

Satloff: Israel and the Palestinian Authority have negotiated six agreements in the last seven years, but it seems as if the two parties have not even agreed on the basic premise of what is going on. Is that correct?

Abu Zayyad: The Palestinians are committed to their agreements with Israel, and they are dedicated to the peace process. Yet, what they see on the ground is that Israel is not implementing the agreements it has signed. For example, after the signing of the 1993 Oslo Declaration of Principles, the Palestinians agreed with the Israelis that there would be a redeployment of forces and that Israel would transfer all the occupied lands except the Jewish settlements and the military locations which represent about 10 percent of the total area to the Palestinians.

In other words, the Palestinians were supposed to have full control over about 90 percent of the land on May 4, 1999. It is becoming increasingly evident, however, that the Israelis were not committed to transferring that land to the Palestinians. When the Palestinians speak about the third phase of redeployment, the Israelis begin to discuss percentages. But the issue is not percentages. According to the agreement, in the third phase of redeployment, all the Palestinian territory should be transferred to the full control of the Palestinian Authority. The territory would all become Area A, and the classifications B and C would disappear.

But the Israelis are trying to change the rules of the game. The so-called framework for final status issues is not embodied in the agreement. It was invented by Prime Minister Ehud Barak at Sharm el-Sheikh simply to waste time in the negotiations. The Palestinians sign agreements with Israelis, but the Israelis do not implement the agreements. Then they accuse the Palestinians of not implementing the agreements and not doing their job.

The settlers in the West Bank say that it is the land of their fathers. The Palestinians are talking about 1948, while the settlers are talking about tribes that date back more than two thousand years. Why can the settlers claim for themselves the right of return to the places they call Judea and Samaria? When the Palestinians speak about the right of the return of the refugees of 1948, they are speaking about yesterday.

Meridor: The Oslo agreement does not say that the Israelis would give back all the territories save 10 percent. Issues such as final borders were supposed to be left to final negotiations; this is exactly what is being discussed now.

The return of Jews to the land of Israel is the essence of Zionism. It is true that the Arabs naturally, since the beginning, objected to it. If one objects to this very idea that the Jews too have a right to a state of their own and that the land of Israel is somehow connected to Jewish people, then there really is no basis for negotiations or understanding.

The Jews, like every other people, have a right to have their own state, and looking at the map, the Arab world stretches from Morocco in the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian/Arabian Gulf in Kuwait or Iraq, from Syria in the north down to Yemen in the south. Within this world, there is a tiny spot called Israel, and so it is interesting to discuss who is weak and who is strong in the long range. There is no sense dictating because that will not bring peace.

Jews returned to a land that they believe is their own. While there were certainly other people living on the land, there was never any Palestinian state. Israelis know that other people live there, and they want to maintain a state with an Arab presence. Unlike most of the Arab countries that do not have Jews or any other people, Israel has a vast majority of Jews and some Arabs.

The Palestinians will have their own entity alongside Israel. Concentrating on a possible solution, one has to deal with the realities on the ground so that there is a viable solution. Israel in both the Likud and Labor governments is ready. Both Rabin and Peres under their respective Labor governments were accused by Mr. Abu Zayyad of allowing settlement activity. They did allow settlement activity, and everyone must be ready for compromise.

Israelis never said that Palestinians could not build in Judea or Samaria, but Israel cannot forbid Jews from building there either. The issue was open because it was not decided, and so it is time to decide on these matters. For this to occur, both sides need to remove themselves from the realm of "ours" and "theirs." Historic aspirations must be put aside to achieve a comprehensive agreement. Such an agreement is possible, but only with leadership. Leadership is not simply repeating what all the people want. Leadership means doing things that may be difficult for the people. This is a problem for Barak, as he deals with issues in the Knesset. If Arafat is ready to do things that his people do not like, then he is a leader. If he is just following the polls, the results are obvious.

Both sides are approaching the end of the road for good or for bad. An agreement may be reached, but there might also be an opposite reaction. It is very natural that there are more rumors and more hints of this sort than in the past. Hopefully, courageous decisions will be made by courageous leaders.

Abu Zayyad: Regarding borders, there is a historical competition between al-Azaria and Abu Dis. Children used to go in gangs from al-Azaria and attack the children from Abu Dis. They were always jealous of each other. A few days ago, my little son came to me and said, "I am sure that those who live far away in Europe or the United States think that Abu Dis is as big as London." There is too much exaggeration in the discussion about Abu Dis and al-Azaria. These were transferred to the Palestinian Authority a long time ago, which possesses the civil authority over these areas, including zoning and building licenses. Israelis bore the responsibility of security and decided to transfer it to the Palestinians. Palestinians do not understand why Abu Dis is considered so significant.

Satloff: It is not a big deal for the Palestinians?

Abu Zayyad: On one hand, it is not a big deal. The real issue is whether or not Abu Dis can be an alternative or a substitute for Jerusalem. The answer is that it simply cannot. Jerusalem means the walls of the Old City, the Dome of the Rock, the Holy Sepulchre, the narrow lanes of the Old City of Jerusalem, and the old buildings. That is Jerusalem. Abu Dis does not have the Dome of the Rock, the Holy Sepulchre, or the Wall. It does not have all these things that characterize the City of Jerusalem, and therefore no one can accept Abu Dis or al-Azaria not even as a temporary alternative to Jerusalem.

Generally speaking about the issue of Jerusalem, the first thing both sides need to define are the borders of the city. Jerusalem can be extended through half of the West Bank, or it could be made to include only the Old City. If the Palestinians want to make a deal with the Israelis or compromise on Jerusalem, both sides need to first agree on the borders of the city. If there are real intentions to achieve a compromise, it can be achieved.

Satloff: Dan, if Abu Dis were not such a big deal for the Palestinians, then why was it such a big deal to Israelis?

Meridor: If it had not been such a big deal for the Palestinians, they would not have insisted, as they did, on having civil authority for the neighborhoods transferred to them.

Abu Zayyad: The Palestinians insisted on Abu Dis and al-Azaria because they wanted to remove these issues from the negotiating table so that only Jerusalem remained.

Meridor: Ziyads strategy explains the reason that many Israelis thought that it was unwise to remove these two issues before discussing Jerusalem. In Israel, there was no objection by the vast majority to the idea that both al-Azaria and Abu Dis would be transferred to full Palestinian control. Prime Minister Baraks primary decision was whether or not it was worth waiting until the end of the final negotiations. Like Ziyad said, the issue depends on how one defines the historical borders of Jerusalem: Is Abu Dis part of it or not?

Jerusalem is now the capital of Israel. Historically, however, Jerusalem was under Muslim rule for hundreds of years. Even when Jerusalem was under Jordanian rule for nineteen years from 1948 to 1967 surprisingly enough, nobody made it an Arab capital. It never was an Arab capital because nobody ever thought that it should be an Arab capital. No Arab or Muslim ruler through a period of hundreds of years made Jerusalem a capital. Inventing it as a new Arab capital now presents many problems, especially for the negotiations. It is important to remember that these claims are not based on any historical link.

Now, I am not saying that the demand is not legitimate. There is a Palestinian demand, and there is our position. And when we speak of a compromise it should take into consideration the entire question of land. Jerusalem is in the equation. But while it is true that the Holy Sepulchre is in the Old City, Im not sure Jesus had a Palestinian passport. I think he was a little more Jewish than Palestinian, that he would define himself more as a Jew. I am not saying that we deserve the city because Jesus was there, but whether the fact that the Holy Sepulchre is there makes it more Palestinian is another question.

The truth is that the problem can be resolved. But it will not be resolved by a division of sovereignty over Jerusalem. The sanctity of unified Jewish sovereignty over the city should be taken as a consensual position among Israelis historically, emotionally, politically from almost all the way to the right, to almost all the way to the left side of the political spectrum, maybe with a fringe objection of 5 percent. So speaking realistically and looking also to Baraks coalition problems, it really remains out of the question for any Israeli prime minister to put the Jerusalem issue on the negotiating table.

Other questions, like the religious aspects that were rightly mentioned here the Dome of the Rock, the Holy Sepulchre, and other holy sites are to be handled with the most liberal approach, acknowledging the religious rights of Muslims, Christians, and Jews. One can and should be flexible on this. It is an open city and it should stay an open city, unlike its status from 1948 to 1967. Realistically, I do not think Jerusalem can be divided again. It is not right. Yes, Arabs live in Jerusalem. I do too. I was born in that city some good number of years ago under the British Mandate. In fact, on my birth certificate it says that I was born in "Palestine."

Jerusalem should remain under Israeli sovereignty. There are many other cities in Israel with Arab populations Haifa, Lod, and Acco. We will find ways to establish total equality there. And we should do more. By the way, I do not think we have done enough in terms of the economic distribution of resources and building infrastructure for the Israeli Arabs. I know it is difficult for the Palestinians, which is why I said in the beginning that these issues are more

difficult to resolve at the end of the process than at earlier stages.

What if we do not have a final agreement? It is in the mutual interest, I believe, not to go back to chaos and terror, from which nobody will gain. All of us could lose, some more, some less, but everybody will lose. Is there an alternative route, to go on negotiating beyond September? This is a big question. I would rather have an agreement tonight on all the outstanding issues, but what if we cannot? I hope we can, but I am not sure.

So I think responsible people should think not only of what they want but what may realistically be achieved.

Satloff: Ziyad, Dans last point concerned the promise by Chairman Arafat that by the end of 2000 there will be a declaration of Palestinian independence, whether by negotiation or unilaterally. This would seem to run afoul of the commitment to negotiate, regardless of time. Will there be, one way or the other, a declaration of independence this year? If so, how do you ensure that it does not happen in a way that provokes complete chaos and a breakdown of all the security and other areas of cooperation between Israel and the PA?

Abu Zayyad: As I see things right now, Arafat is willing to go ahead with declaring independence and sovereignty in September. I hope we will be able to conclude a kind of agreement with the Israelis that will prevent any breakout of violence as a result of this declaration. But if we cannot reach such an agreement, my impression is that Arafat is willing to go ahead with his intentions.

Going back to what Dan said about Jerusalem, the reason why the Muslims did not make Jerusalem their capital is the same reason why Mecca, for example, has never been a capital: Islamic tradition maintains that holy places should be highly respected and not "soiled" by being used as political capitals. Palestine is not a fundamentalist state.

Participant: And you want to break this tradition?

Abu Zayyad: We are a national movement. And we see the conflict between us and the Israelis as a national conflict. Jerusalem, for us, not only consists of holy sites; it is a symbol of our national dignity and a symbol of our religious attachment to the City of Jerusalem. And without having our capital in East Jerusalem, there will be no stability; no agreement signed with the Israelis will survive. Therefore, the Israelis and Palestinians must seek together a formula that can solve the problem of Jerusalem in a way that will allow each of us to say "our Jerusalem," and to acknowledge that his own rights are considered.

Satloff: Perhaps the worst outbreak of violence in years broke out this week in the territories. According to reports, Israelis and Palestinians agree that the violence was instigated by PA officials. In the end, these officials may have tried to put it out, but they also certainly helped to start the fire. So says the New York Times. Poll data from Palestinian sources suggest that while an overwhelming majority of Palestinians support negotiations, there is also still a significant plurality of Palestinians that supports violence, suggesting that you can support both negotiations and violence at the same time. How do you reach an agreement in this kind of environment?

Abu Zayyad: Well, first of all, we have our opposition just as the Israelis do, and not every Palestinian is happy with the Oslo agreement and with the peace process. There are Palestinians who still believe that the process is unfair, that we are yielding our territorial rights in Palestine while the Israelis are using the peace process as a cover to carry on their policy of expanding Jewish settlements on our land. But it is obvious that the overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people are interested in and do support the peace process. It is natural that there are Palestinians who support violence. There are also Israelis who are against the peace process. It is the same on both sides.

I don't think it is true that the Palestinian Authority supported or initiated or encouraged the wave of violence that we have just witnessed. There is accumulated anger and frustration among the Palestinian people as a result of the lack of progress in the peace process; it's something that has been growing over the last two or three years. Now, it has

flared over the issue of the Palestinian prisoners. People understand that any time there is war and there is a ceasefire, when the fighting parties begin negotiating with each other, the first thing they do is release the prisoners of war. We expected to see our prisoners set free from jail, especially when some were involved in the struggle before the peace process began some of them twenty-seven years ago. And many of them were dispatched by the same person sitting at the negotiating table with the Israelis. Many have also developed chronic diseases being inside the jails, and it is time to let them out.

These prisoners support the peace process, by the way, and are in support of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and they support what Arafat is doing. So what is the use of keeping these people inside Israeli jails? Recently, these prisoners went on a hunger strike, following the Irish example. This ignited the entire Palestinian territories; people began to demonstrate and perform sit-ins, all in solidarity with the Palestinian prisoners.

Anyone who ignores the fact that there is a lack of progress in the peace process and deep frustration among the Palestinians in that regard, who ignores how important the prisoner issue is to Palestinian public opinion, and who at the same time blames the Palestinian Authority for the outbreak of violence, is either ignorant or pretends to be ignorant.

Meridor: Ziyad said rightly that there is opposition to the PA policy on the Palestinian side, just as there is opposition to Israeli government policy on the Israeli side. That is very true. But could you imagine the Israeli government allowing, say, 10,000 members of the Israeli opposition to go and stone people in Bethlehem or Hebron or Ramallah? We allow many demonstrations. There was a big one in Jerusalem last week, and there should be demonstrations, if there is a reason for them, on the Palestinian side. I have no problem with that. But the right to demonstrate never includes the right to throw stones or the right to put a blockade around people, around villages.

Whether Arafat is responsible or not, I don't want to discuss here. I agree with the New York Times and its assessment that this time Arafat knew and was perhaps even involved. But I think he wanted to keep the violence contained to the lower levels. I don't think he wanted any shooting or killing. But Israelis were certainly stoned, and we don't think that our soldiers should be sitting ducks for rocks. No army in any country should. But there is something deeper. I think Ziyad is right there is frustration on both sides. Everybody has his own idea of what the other side should and does not do. But Palestinians are hearing that because there is no progress on the peace process, violence is a legitimate response.

The whole idea of sitting around the table means that when we do not agree we don't go to war. When we agree, there is no problem. If we do not agree, we go back to the table. We don't go to the streets with violence. We can demonstrate, we can speak, we can attack verbally; but we don't respond with violence. And this, I think, is important given what happened last week. Unfortunately, people were killed on the Palestinian side, and people were wounded on both sides. The idea that negotiations cannot take place amid violence is an important principle to establish for the coming weeks; we are approaching the very final stages of the most difficult negotiations, and it's not illogical to think that there will be more impasses, more dead ends, and more crises. And of course there will be frustration on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides by those who are asking, "Why do we have to give up so much?" If we return to violence every time this kind of frustration occurs, we will be moving backward, not forward.

So, again, it is a question of leadership. If Arafat is not able to control his own people in these sorts of demonstrations, then is he the leader with whom Israel should be negotiating? Of course, there are terror cases that you cannot control, as in the assassination of our own prime minister. So I don't blame every terrorist act on the leadership. But these demonstrations were not possible without at least the consent and there was more than consent of the PA. This sets a bad example.

On the prisoner issue, the people still in jail were convicted of murder. This is not a war between regular armies, but

it is true that at the end of a war prisoners are released; two sides have a peace treaty, and they release prisoners. But have we reached the end? Do we have a final agreement according to which there is no war and no fear of releasing the other sides "fighters"? Hopefully, we'll get there.

Second, even in war there are things you don't do. Nobody released prisoners who committed war crimes in Yugoslavia because they killed civilians, as did many of the Palestinian prisoners. Perhaps in the context of a historic compromise, of reconciliation between two nations, you would go even this far. But you need to know that you're at the end of the road, and that the people you release will not go back to the circle of violence again.

In sum, both of these nations live together in the same place; we speak with the same people and see each other in the street every day. Both of us understand the need to reach an agreement. Although difficult, I don't think it's impossible.

Satloff: I now open the floor to questions. There are a lot of specifics we have not considered, a lot of issues that remain on the table.

Question: Mr. Meridor, do you envision the incorporation of any Arab neighborhood or village into municipal Jerusalem? Second, what you propose to do with the 230,000 Palestinians currently residing in these neighborhoods? Are you suggesting that they would become full citizens of the State of Israel after this kind of annexation?

Meridor: I speak of Jerusalem as the borders are currently drawn. The city's boundaries have changed many times during the 3,000 years since King David made it the capital of ancient Israel, in 1,000 B.C., more or less.

Second, I think it's interesting that you spoke about 230,000 Palestinians. I am not sure of the exact number, but you are right I believe it is more than 200,000. It is interesting to note that about 60,000 of them are Arabs who moved from the territories to Jerusalem as, if you like, settlers.

While Ziyad said that only Jews go to the other side, I do see Arabs coming; we can live with it because we can live happily with Arabs among us; we don't have a rule against Arabs living here. There are some Arab countries in which, by law, Jews cannot live and where Arabs cannot sell to Jews, and so on. We have in Israel about 1 million Arabs, or Palestinians, and they live in the Galilee, in the Negev, and in other areas, as well as some in Jerusalem. I think these Arabs should have the option of Israeli citizenship. Many have not chosen this option, and they enjoy every right but one the right to vote as long as they refuse Israeli citizenship. By the way, they can vote in municipal elections even though they are not citizens, although not many choose to do so. I wouldn't want to live in a country whose residents are refused citizenship. Arabs in Jerusalem should have the option, and I have nothing against more of them taking advantage of it.

Maybe it would be better if the world were structured such that the French lived only in France, the Romanians in Romania, and the Hungarians in Hungary. But in the real world, there are minorities, and you have to know how to co-exist with these groups and to grant them all the rights of the majority. This is a test that we have to pass. So far, Israel has done so quite successfully although not fully with the Israeli Arabs. I think Israel should do more than it has done so far, but it has done a lot. The same rule should apply, more or less, to the Jerusalem Arabs.

Abu Zayyad: I really do not know whether Dan knows the truth about Jerusalem. Allow me, Mr. Meridor, to explain things as they are. First of all, you said that Arabs came from outside Jerusalem to live there. In 1967, after the occupation of East Jerusalem, Israel declared that all the Arabs living in Jerusalem at the time and some of them had been living there many hundreds of years would be considered "tourists," not Israelis, when they reentered the city. According to this law, these Arabs would be given a permanent visa, a resident visa, that permitted them to stay and live in Jerusalem as foreigners. From an Israeli point of view, they were considered Jordanians. And according to the same law, if any of them were to leave Jerusalem for a period of more than seven years, their visa would expire and

they would lose the right to return to the city. This would also be the case if the center of their lives moved outside Israel.

Since 1967, not a single Arab has been permitted to come to live in Jerusalem. Those who did so came, from an Israeli point of view, illegally. They still hold West Bank identity cards. There are many cases of divided families, half residing in Jerusalem and half living in the West Bank; no family reunification is permitted. My daughter is married to someone from East Jerusalem. Even now, after two years of marriage, she is living illegally there; if she is caught, she will be thrown out of the city. Although they applied for a resident permit so she could have a blue identity card from Israel, she has been refused.

So I want Mr. Meridor to know that no Arab from the West Bank is permitted to come and stay in East Jerusalem, not even for one night. Nor are Arabs in the West Bank allowed to buy property in East Jerusalem. Part of my village falls within the municipal borders of Jerusalem, but I am considered a West Banker. I cannot buy an apartment in East Jerusalem, and I cannot sleep in East Jerusalem. This is the situation.

So Dan should not say, "We do not have problem with minorities; we like Arabs to live among us; its nice to be with them." This is not the case. On the contrary, in 1991, Israel began expelling all the Arabs whose visas the Israeli minister of interior claimed had expired because its holders were living outside Israel. And where is "outside Israel"? The neighborhoods around Jerusalem are included in that designation because, as a result of the restrictions on Arab building in East Jerusalem, many newcomers who did not have houses to live in moved to the neighborhoods around the city. Then the Israeli interior minister came to them and said, "You are not residents of Jerusalem any more; get out." Today, anyone who goes to the ministry of interior in Israel to apply for a birth certificate or to register a child must bring a long list of documents to prove that during the last seven years he has been living in Jerusalem. He has to bring school certificates for his children, telephone bills, electricity bills, income tax records, the lease for his house, municipal tax records, and so on. And if he fails to provide any of these documents they tell him, "You have no right to stay in Jerusalem; you must move outside the city." This is what we Palestinians call the ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem.

I am sure that people like Dan Meridor do not know about this policy practiced mainly by the minister of interior. Eli Suissa was a racist minister who applied a racist policy against Arabs and against Russians. Now that Natan Sharansky is the minister, he has solved the problem for the Russian immigrants, but still we are victims of this policy.

Meridor: Interestingly enough, in the midst of this "ethnic cleansing," the number of Arabs in Jerusalem has risen. If there is wrong done and I believe there are wrongs done to both Arabs and Jews then one should fight it. I am one who tries to do so when I know about it. There may be wrongs done by governments, by officials, by all sorts of people. Bureaucracy can be used for wrong purposes. I think at the end of the process, whoever ends up being within Israeli borders, in Jerusalem or elsewhere, should be treated with complete equality. And if any policy or practice precludes this, we should fix it as quickly as possible.

Question: What has happened vis-à-vis security with the Palestinian prisoners who have been released? Has there been disappointment or satisfaction?

Meridor: I hope I will not have to take back my words. If you asked me in 1993 when the Oslo agreement was signed whether the Palestinian Authority would act as effectively as it has regarding security cooperation, I admit that I would not have given such a positive projection. Generally speaking, with some exceptions very bad ones like the February-March 1996 explosions in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, in which the PA was giving terrorist groups like Hamas the "green light" to kill Jews the level of terrorism as we have known it has been lower than expected, the recent riots excepted. I have to admit that it is not just our people doing their jobs, but Arafats people and their security services

doing theirs, albeit for their own reasons.

I have been surprised. I must admit I didn't think there would be such cooperation. I don't want to go into details; it may not be good for either side to elaborate on this issue. But it shows that if there is a will, there is a way; if the PA wants to, they can generally control the level of violence against us. And I must say they do, in most cases. Of course, it is not as good as we want it to be. We have many complaints against them: there have not been crackdowns on all bases of possible terrorism and fundamentalism. But on an everyday basis, I don't think the level of violence is as high as I thought it would be. People here may not know that the PA controls Bethlehem, Ramallah, and other areas around Jerusalem. There is no fence between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, nor is there a fence or Israeli soldiers between Tel Aviv and Kalkilia. If somebody with a bomb on his body wanted to hide somewhere in those areas, he could do it. But with very few exceptions, this has not happened. Either they don't want to, or somebody makes sure that they don't. Now, this may change tomorrow. One individual with a bomb can change the whole situation. But I must say that security is taken care of by both Israel and the PA on a level that is more or less reasonable regarding primary terror activities again, without speaking of the recent violence.

Regarding the release of prisoners, Israel has had all sorts of experiences. There are cases of people released by us who are not totally inactive in terror. I don't remember their names now, but I know these cases and we are following them as much as we can. There was a release of prisoners before Oslo by Israelis in 1986 or 1987 that many people said brought on the Intifada. I am not against the release of prisoners. I'm just saying that we need to see the end of violence beforehand. I have to admit one more thing. Israel was obligated by the Oslo agreement to release prisoners. I think there is even a number specified. Many of them have already been released, although I am not sure we have reached the exact number. I know this is a problem that has to be taken care of. And the less violence there is, the less fear there is on the Israeli side that these people will return to the streets with terror. Don't forget there are civilian victims of terror still alive the easier it will be.

Satloff: Ziyad, you serve both as a minister in the PA executive and as a member of the legislature. One of the most underreported parts of this issue is what goes on inside the PA domestically. Dan, I think maybe even the Israelis themselves bear responsibility for not placing as high a priority on the development of Palestinian democracy as they should have early on. What do you say to those critics of the PA who are still waiting for an open, accountable, democratic Palestinian government?

Abu Zayyad: Mr. Meridor said that we were doing well in fighting terrorism and reducing the security threat, and this is true. But the price we pay for these activities is that we are accused of violating human rights when we arrest or detain or interrogate people. We are really between a rock and a hard place. On one hand, we are asked to observe human rights; on the other, we have to do our job. I myself, as a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, am very unhappy with violations of human rights committed by the security services and by the Palestinian police. And we argue all the time with Mr. Arafat over the demand that human rights be respected and that there be no rights violations in Palestinian jails, especially when it comes to prisoners with the potential to carry out activities against Israelis that undermine the peace process. We are the only losers in these cases.

Now, if you count how many publications, how many radio stations, and how many television stations there are in the PA, you would be surprised and none of them are subjected to real censorship. Sometimes I see publications by some human rights organizations that disturb me. But no one stops them from publishing or from writing what they want to. This is the level of democracy Palestinians enjoy.

Now in other respects we have corruption, like in any other country. But if you compare the situation now with that which existed in 1995, you would be astonished at how much we have improved. There is mismanagement, but it is becoming much, much less pervasive than it was. The legislative council is constantly trying to put pressure on the executive authority to improve. So things are getting better, even though we are not where we would like to be. But in

itself, the fact that we are progressing, developing, and improving is really encouraging.

Question: Mr. Meridor alluded to the need to take certain things slowly, to create confidence-building measures. There is a sense that even if the conflict is not resolved by September and Arafat declares a Palestinian state anyway, life would go on. But whatever comes of these negotiations, attitudes of children will continue to be shaped by the books they are reading in school. I fear that peace among two peoples cannot emerge unless there is some sort of mutual inspection and cooperation with regard to school textbooks. Perhaps we should talk about how regardless of what happens in the negotiations this kind of activity in the educational field can move ahead.

Satloff: I think that's an excellent comment. Why don't we just leave it at that for now.

Question: Reports on the recent violence indicate that the shootings were perpetrated by the Tanzim of Fatah in the West Bank, and they were put down eventually by the forces of Yasir Arafat's PA. Does this point to a growing division between the PA and the PLO? If so, will this become a bigger issue in the future?

Abu Zayyad: There is no contradiction between the Tanzim and the PLO, nor between the Tanzim and the PA. The Tanzim are part of the Fatah movement, and within Fatah, there are some members who were very active during the Intifada; they are still active on the ground. As for the events of last week, don't forget that it was the fiftieth anniversary of the nakba (the "catastrophe": the founding of the state of Israel and birth of the Palestinian refugee problem); all the wounds were open, and people were expressing their feelings. As with anything that starts small, it is progressive. It's going to be what it is going to be. We exerted much effort trying to contain the events and prevent them from developing into violence; if you let things get out of control, you never know where they will end up. But in the end, people expressed their feelings on the anniversary of the nakba, and that is all. Tanzim is part of the Palestinian national movement, and Fatah was always the leader, the pioneer power within the Palestinian national movement.

Meridor: According to the agreement that Israel has with the PA, or rather with the PLO, all weapons are to be collected from all unauthorized holders. Had the PA implemented this part of the agreement, there wouldn't have been any weapons in the hands of those unauthorized to carry them, and they wouldn't have been able to shoot. Israel has its own youth movements, and they don't have weapons. I think it is a mistake for Mr. Arafat not to implement what he has undertaken to do.

As to the issue of school curricula, unfortunately, I must say that this problem occurs outside the Palestinian areas as well. Israel has had peace with Egypt for twenty-two years, but to this very day, you see things you do not want to see in Egyptian school textbooks. This is a very bad example of how to make peace.

People usually say you cannot hope for peace to come at once; it takes time. All right, it takes time. But the question is, what direction should it be taking in the meantime? If Arabs refrain from teaching their children that the other the Jew, the Israeli is not a human being nor should he be treated as one, and they refrain from using anti-Semitic or deep, cruel, anti-Israeli wording, then there is a chance for peace. But if they practice the opposite in their textbooks or on television, then even with time, I don't know where it will lead us. So I have to admit that it's not just the Palestinians. I knew someone who researched school books in Gaza that are quite negative, but he told me that they are actually getting the material from Egypt.

So this goes to a deeper problem. Speaking in the longer term, how do you try to create a more normal relationship? It has to do with the image one has of the other side. Israel has to correct some of its own terminology, I must say, but we have nothing in our textbooks like they do in theirs. I do not want to use harsh terms, but we will never possess the attitude they do. In their books they have not only cartoons but language and themes that can be compared to times in history I don't want even to mention. It's bad. It takes time to change, but one must. This is the future. It has been this way for many years now with Egypt, with Jordan, with the Palestinians, and it must change. It's strange to

note that people can live very close to each other and not see the other side as he really is that the stereotypes persist. You might have witnessed the same thing in some parts of America several decades ago, when the stereotypes of American minorities were overwhelmingly terrible.

So this is a major issue that goes to the root of how the future will look, and it must be addressed now so that people will learn about the other side in real terms, not in terms of hatred. We don't yet see this happening.

Abu Zayyad: I remember a meeting between Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin that I was attending as a member of the Palestinian delegation. Arafat complained to Rabin about smuggling weapons from Israel to the Palestinian territories. He said, "Please, Mr. Rabin, your security forces are behind the smuggling. Stop it." We Palestinians were worried that these weapons were being smuggled to our side to try to foment a civil war within the Palestinian community itself. It is true that the agreement said the PA has to collect weapons, but believe me, the most prosperous business these days is smuggling weapons from Israel and selling them in the Palestinian territory. Now almost everybody has guns. Everyone. From M-16s to Kalashnikovs to Uzis all kinds of weapons.

And we are worried. As the Palestinian Authority, we are worried about this widespread phenomenon that is becoming a business of the underworld in Israel. They smuggle these things from Israel and sell them on the Palestinian side. So it is not only about a limited number of guns that we should have collected and didn't. It's an ongoing business.

Now, regarding education, in 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, the military administration formed committees that reviewed all the textbooks used in the schools of the West Bank and Gaza. In the West Bank, there were Jordanian curricula, and in Gaza, Egyptian curricula. They censored words and terminology here and there, and then they said, "Now the books are okay; you can use them." And these books were thereafter used in the Palestinian schools of the West Bank and Gaza.

When the Palestinian Authority was established, we thought we needed a new curriculum that would express our aspirations and our dreams for a better future, that would teach the new generations growing up under the Palestinian Authority and under the Palestinian state. And so we formed committees to start working on a new curriculum. Hopefully, we will be finished by 2004, but for now, all the textbooks used in our schools are the same textbooks that were approved by the Israeli civil administration. The only change is that on the cover of the book, instead of writing "The Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria," we now write "Palestinian National Authority" with the logo of the PA.

Now, the ridiculous thing is that even in the municipality of Jerusalem, they use the same curriculum. Schools in East Jerusalem buy the books from Ramallah, from our minister of education, and these books have a sticker with "Municipality of Jerusalem" written on it, along with the symbol of the Jerusalem municipality. The schools cover this sticker with one belonging to the Palestinian Authority, and then they use the same books.

But when I meet with Jews from outside Israel, or with Israelis, I am always asked about the incitement against Jews that we supposedly have in our curriculum and about the anti-Semitic expressions, and I cannot understand it. It is becoming one of the classic items of propaganda, and you hear it everywhere. Wherever I go, people want to ask about it. They say, "You teach your children to hate Israelis." Of course we don't teach our children to love the Israelis, but believe me believe me at this time the best teacher for our children is the occupation. When our children go through the checkpoints, and one is asked to stand by the wall and raise his hands, and the soldier comes and with his feet he tries to spread out his legs and search him, and keeps him on the wall for some time, this is the teacher from whom our children learn best.

As long as there is this conflict, we will have a problem. Now, the curriculum in Israel is no better than our curriculum, and Dan knows that there is a problem even in the culture of his people, such as when Jews tell their

sons, "Little son, respect him, but suspect him." This is the kind of education that children receive in Israeli homes. Also, when you take religious teaching, or the teaching in the army about the enemy and the image of the enemy, and who the enemy is, it is understood that the enemy is an Arab. Perhaps when we have put the conflict behind us, we should create joint committees to start writing a new curriculum of peace for a new era of peace between us and our neighbors.

Meridor: I think some things you have said here would have been better left unsaid, such as about the Israelis supplying weapons to the Palestinian Authority. I think people know that it creates

Abu Zayyad: No, there are criminals on both sides. There are some Israelis involved in this.

Meridor: In the Israeli security services?

Abu Zayyad: No, I said that Arafat told Rabin about the security services doing the business of criminals. You dont know.

Meridor: I agree with you that Arafat said it, and I agree with your hint that only Arafat said it, but its not the reality. It is an allegation.

About the books, we have expressions in Hebrew that I think we should do away with. For instance, there is the expression, "Arab work," which means very low and nonprofessional work. I think it is a bad expression. We should do away with it. We should fight it. I think the natural tendency among the Israelis is to try to remember the terror bomb on the bus that exploded yesterday and to be afraid of a bomb that may be planted near your home tomorrow. And children in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv or Haifa more recently in Haifa and Tiberias are afraid because of someone who threatens their security, and their lives. If we leave it at that, they will develop hatred some of it justified, but most of it, if it is against an Arab nation, is unjustified. So it is the duty of the government officials to fight against this tendency. Officials may give explanations for the behavior, but that is not leadership. Leadership means fighting the hatred, because creating the right image of the other side is very important in the long run. I see it every day in the street.

Those anti-Semitic books exist, and they are not books that are supervised by Israel. But we are not just talking about books, we are talking about Palestinian television. Some people here might have seen the tapes. They are horrendous.

More should be done. We should accept that there were things not done right, and we should correct them. The better and the quicker we do it, the better for both of us. We live together, and we need a future together.

When we are ready to sit down as people to people, with a more similar understanding of reality, we will have a better chance. The end may be in sight, but we need to think in terms of a somewhat longer timeframe than we originally expected.

Satloff: It does seem as though, despite six agreements in seven years, there is still a long way to go. Let me just close by asking you briefly, by the end of 2000, will there be a permanent status agreement between the two parties yes or no?

Meridor: The only true answer to your question is, I dont know. I hope there will be. I dont think 2000 can pass without anything. There is this threat of the second declaration of Palestinian statehood. The first one was in 1988. A new declaration will not give Arafat any more control than he has, but I still dont think it would be a good development. It is better to have an agreement. Reaching finality in the conflict is very important, so that each side can say, "We have no more claims not for refugees, not for anything else." If there is willingness to compromise, I believe the people of Israel will accept an agreement. But if we think that there is not enough Palestinian flexibility, then it is important that we develop another agreement, or agreements, and build incentives, economic and

otherwise, so that the whole area will not fall apart; that kind of price would be very high for both sides.

So I very much want to believe that by December 31, 2000, we will have a final agreement. But I can only hope; I do not know.

Abu Zayyad: There will not be an agreement by the end of the year, but let us hope that there will be progress in approaching it. ❖

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