

Meeting Notes/Summary:

Dr. Saeb Erekat Meeting with the Negotiation Support Unit & Heads of Committees

16 June 2009

NAD Ramallah

Present: Dr. Saeb Erekat (SE)
Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh (MS)
Ms. Hiba Hussein (HH)
Samih Al-Abed (SA)
Mr. Issa Kassissieh (IK)
NSU - LPU and CD

[Start: 2:45pm]

SE: The purpose of this meeting is to do three things: 1) Brief you on our meetings in Washington; 2) Brief you on our meetings with George Mitchell (GM) last week and; 3) Talk about what needs to be done after Benjamin Netanyahu's (BN) speech.

1) In Washington, Abu Mazen (AM) met with Barack Obama (BO), Joe Biden, General Jones, Hilary Clinton, Rahm Emanuel, and GM. Before our meeting with Obama, we were surprisingly asked by the US Defense department to meet with Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was the first time in 20 years the Department of Defense asked to see the PA delegation.

Mullen said to AM: "We're helping you; General Dayton is with you; and US laws don't allow us to send you even a single bullet. You're the most important person in the Middle East. Arabs and Muslims have only one thing on their mind: Palestine. So, we want to help you establish a Palestinian state. We don't want it to go the path of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia. We don't want another failed state. Help us by showing us accountability, transparency, good laws. We know you have good people who can do it. I have 230,000 troops in Iraq & Afghanistan and I am bringing back 10 each week draped in American flags or in wheelchairs. This is painful for America. Because I want to bring them back home, a Palestinian state is a cardinal interest of the USA. Washington today is different from Washington yesterday."

We told him that the element to make or break your strategy is Israel. People will judge you by what they see in the West Bank and Gaza – not based upon what you say. Treating Israel as a country above the laws of man will bring 500,000 US soldiers to the region because *it* will go down as a failed state. We've recognized Israel's right to exist. We're against settlements, checkpoints, and incursions. AM told him that he can give him his word that he will do his best to maintain control in the West Bank – one authority, one gun.

BO said that Washington speaks with one tongue. We were supposed to meet with Kerry but he cancelled at the last minute and Sen. Carl Levin came instead. He gave the same message: Washington speaks with one voice. BO said that he's not going to deviate from

the end game. That's where his attention is: a Palestinian state, two states, is in the national interest of the US. BO wants a comprehensive peace – not just Israel/Palestine. If he can get a Syrian agreement before an Israel/Palestine agreement, that's fine. He is not going to pit different peace tracks against each other. BO talked about Iran as a “growing threat” – SE noted the distinction from Bush, who called Iran a “threat” – and said he would engage seriously with the Iranians.

SE spoke about AM telling BO he would not interfere with American efforts to improve relations with Syria and that PA is not threatened by this. SE said that if there wasn't an Israeli embassy in Cairo, Bin Ladin would be there and if there wasn't one in Amman, Zawahri would set up shop there too.

BO said that BN is not ready to resume permanent status negotiations. BO told AM not to allow it to sound like BN offered to resume permanent status negotiations but that AM/PA rejected it.

BO gave BN until July 1 for an answer on settlements and his stance on two states. BO will not accept anything less.

BO said that Arabs have to take steps without waiting to see what I (BO) will do. BO is concerned with Palestine's internal situation. He knows a lot – about Hamas, Gaza, Arab & Islamic politics, that everyone's playing our cause. BO doesn't want AM to surprise him with the government. He (BO) told us “I don't care who is in your government. I want you to succeed with national unity. But don't let me down. The government must be unequivocally committed to two states and renounce violence. These are your obligations and responsibilities. BO sees the Palestinian issue as a wall between the region and Bin Laden.

AM told BO that we have committed to the Road Map. We're exerting every effort to convene the Fatah conference no later than the end of July. We agreed with Olmert that the baseline map is the (4 June) 1967 border. We need to reiterate this and stick to it. AM told BO that regarding the API, Arabs won't take any small symbolic steps until Israel takes major steps.

AM asked BO about using international organizations – UN, NGOs et al. - to rebuild Gaza. BO said not to wait for us.

AM told him that if settlement activity continues, there can't be two states in any way. The meeting ended and BO told us that GM was our point person and that he would visit us at least once per month.

Gabriel Fahel (GF): On Gaza, did Americans offer any initiative to put pressure on Israel?

SE: BO told us that he wants us to know his personal feelings on Gaza and the whole Palestinian question. AM told him that 70% of Gazans were living in UNRWA camps,

they could allow UNRWA to help Palestinians rebuild. That if the Americans want something to happen with Gaza, they can make it happen.

Azem Bishara (AB): Any indications about substance? Baseline map (4 June) 1967?

(SE response inaudible/omitted here)

HH: Returning to Gaza?

(SE response inaudible/omitted here)

IK: Settlements?

SE: We gave BO a file that gave him all the details on this issue, on E1, on Ma'ale Adumim, etc. Hilary Clinton told us that E1 wasn't going to happen but to be quiet. She got something from the Israelis.

MS: Did we get any information in writing?

SE: We preempted him on this. We told BO that we don't need any new mechanism or agreement or framework. We can solve this using old agreements and frameworks. They're clearly developing something, and I told him that when you develop it, go back to old agreements and use them as a guide.

HH: Do we have some sort of a timeline?

SE: Obama will see the Russians on July 6. And when they hear answers from everyone, they will tell the Russians whether to go ahead or not.

2) On the Mitchell visit; GM said this last trip was for Israel but that he thought it would be nice if he stopped by. He said he had real business with GoI. He's a man of stature and decency. GM took note of convening the Fatah conference, said he noted our determination to convene it and wished us success in July with national dialogue. He asked AM what he thought would be in BN's speech. AM gave him 8 points, such as trying to hold together his coalition, create national unity in Israel, economic peace, natural growth of settlements, recognize Israel as a Jewish state, Iran, Jerusalem as the eternal, undivided capital. AM told Mitchell not to be polite; just stop settlements. AM said settlements are not a Palestinian precondition; it is an Israeli obligation. We gave him some progress notes on judicial reform and security improvements

GM said two things. He said there were serious gaps between the Americans and the Israelis, and he spoke about Damascus. AM told him things would be different and encouraged GM on the Syrian track.

Rami, make a meeting with Dayton. Only thing on the Americans mind is security – and Israeli incursions are preventing us from doing our job.

Rami Dajani (RD): Dayton is getting reports from our security forces that our people have good coordination with the Israelis. We were surprised to hear this and we need to settle this. When we presented the problem of incursions, the Americans said you should check with your people on the ground because they're reporting it as positive to us.

SE: I need to see Dayton next week, Tuesday or Wednesday. I've seen with my own eyes what they do. Police in Jericho hide in my house when the Israelis come in and you want them to have credibility the next morning?

RD: Maybe they (Palestinian Security Forces) have a tendency to want to report something positive (to the Americans)?

MS: Where do we go from here? We've heard from the Americans, Arabs, Israelis?

SE: AM will deliver a speech. And we are not maintaining contact with the Israelis. Any contact with the Israelis will be directed exclusively by NAD.

Bader Rock (BR): Including technical meetings?

SE: No meetings take place without our approval. We don't want the Israelis to be able to say that we're meeting every day and that progress is being made.

BR: The Ministry of National Economy and some other ministries are meeting.

SE: I'll talk to Fayyad.

GF: The Wataniya negotiations? Should that continue or should be coordinated through NAD?

SE: (inaudible - Mustafa is in charge of this). Security will go on, day to day issues will continue. We need to be cautious. We'll likely be jobless for a long time.

SE: I called the White House and the Europeans. I'm very unhappy with the Washington Statement after BN's speech. It takes either someone to be deaf or I have a neon sign on saying, "stupid." For a change, you couldn't say BN was vague, imprecise, or unfocused. We heard "No's" to the API, Road Map, Obama, Resumption of PS talks. If you are fooled by the term Palestinaian state... If he wants to call the inside of my house a state and let me play music and raise a flag... The Russians said this was what they expected.

Every journalist in the book called me and asked if I would accept his offer to resume negotiation. I asked them, "Did he offer that? Did he offer to talk about PS issues?" He negotiated with the parties in his coalition and said to me, "Come here, boy." We don't want to play the stupid game of even giving them a chance

Hala Rashed (HR): Were the Americans privately understanding of your position or were they all towing the public line?

SE: (some inaudible parts) General Jones didn't want us to threaten a 3rd Intifada. As if we can afford a 3rd Intifada... Jake will see AM tomorrow.

HR: Do they genuinely interpret it the way you say they did?

MS: We need to do 5 things: 1) AM must deliver a speech and he should use the opportunity of the graduation of the Arab-American University in Jenin to deliver it from there; 2) We need to have a diplomatic campaign across the world to explain what was misleading and false in BN's speech and what our positions are; 3) We have to give BN a hard time in the international arena; 4) We need to gather the Counsels General so they will deliver the message to (their) capitals before BN arrives there; 5) We must not give the impression that we are dealing with this Israeli government. This is a very wise decision. Limit interactions to a minimum and to the most urgent. We need to focus our time away from negotiations and on our internal affairs.

We don't need a spokesperson, we need a media machine. We want to launch this campaign not have the journalists come to us or wait for us. What is the purpose of this: isolate BN, make him resign, or make him change his position.

SA: Maybe part of our strategy should be to wait until July 1 to see what answer the Israelis give. Did we ever hear anyone in the Israeli government say anything different from what BN said?

SE: Olmert accepted 1000 refugees annually for the next 10 years; '67 borders and 100% of the WB and Gaza; East Jerusalem as our capital – what is Arab is Arab, what is Jewish is Jewish - the Jordan Valley; the Dead Sea.

SA: And I agree, AM needs to give a speech.

SE: I'd like to read all of your ideas. What you'd like to see in AM's speech.

HH: 1) A proactive approach is what we've been lacking. We need to focus on that. If the US position says that we are okay, we shouldn't relax. Opportunities are short-lived.

2) Our government is a promising government but it needs to be more legitimate. Service has been lacking. We need serious institutional development. The Israelis always ask if our institutions are ready and we give them the opportunity to undermine us. On the street, there is no sense of hope remaining with Palestinians. Among all Palestinians – in the business community, in the professional community, and among cab drivers – they see limited change on the ground. They see Fatah and Hamas disagreeing and don't believe in our leadership.

3) BN gave a repetitive “no.” We should demonstrate our position on Jerusalem and refugees. The street things we’re so helpless that the Israeli will is always imposed on us. People are critical. They need to hear a counter argument. This is not just for the international community; this is for a domestic audience as well.

IK: 1) (something inaudible here about Qalqilia); 2) Livni working with Netanyahu; 3) We not only need to get the Consuls General together; we need to visit capitals as well to defend our position. When BN spoke, we shouldn’t just say the speech is bad. There is this perception that Palestinians always say “no.”

RD: We need to articulate our message. CD can deal with media component. BN negated all the aspects of a sovereign state. We can positively relay this message: what does a two state solution need to succeed?

AB: The American response wasn’t one we were looking for. Should we give the US a chance to change policy? For example, we could send a resolution on Jerusalem to the Security Council and see what the American vote will be. We can take similar steps to create change in American actions.

(someone unidentified asked: Iran?)

SE: We should stick with the AM position. He wants to see US-Iranian dialogue succeed.

HR: This is a period of explaining. We shouldn’t desire negotiations now. We need to win the Americans over on our side on each issue.

I disagree with the idea that our problems all stem from this Likud government. I do not see a big difference between Kadima and BN. It would be a strategic mistake to say that BN’s government is the problem. At Annapolis, we sat at the table and talked about these issues, and we saw what happened on the ground – and it culminated in 1,300 Palestinians killed in Gaza.

AM’s position is good, he needs to push the API and keep the heat turned up on settlements.

AB: You were quoted as saying you wanted to freeze the API?

SE: That’s not true. I was misquoted by the Jerusalem Post.

GF: Regarding the speech, the theme should be similar to what Arafat did at the General Assembly. “Ever since I was elected, I have wanted to achieve peace.” Reframe the issue; don’t respond to BN. Focus on what our positions have always been. “We have always had our hand extended in a gesture of peace.” Reframe the debate the way we want to have it

Thomas Dallal (TD): The American political landscape is different than it has ever been. Jewish organizations are divided. They're going to come back swinging if we give them fodder. If we can show Obama that we'll refill the political capital he spent trying to push our position into the political mainstream, we should do that.

SE: One suicide bombing by Hamas will ignite the Jewish community.

BR: BN is weak. He has lots of problems in-house. Serious economic problems have him giving more and more to Shas. He will have to make serious changes. Stagnation in the political sphere will work more against him than it will work against us. BN's 1996 economic policy of privatization is very different from BN's policy in 2009 of spending to have a government with Shas.

SE: I'd like to see figures.

MS: What is the Israeli public reaction to BN's speech?

BR: It's too early to tell, but it's welcoming. Likud accepting two states is earth-shattering. Sharon left Likud because he wouldn't have survived there.

SE: But did he really speak about a Palestinian state?

BR: It was rhetorical, but for the vast majority of people, they will see it as significant.

AB: 71% of Israelis support BN's positions in his speech. At the same time, he created an opening for Kadima even if he loses some of the right wing elements of his coalition.

BR: A bus exploding in Tel Aviv or Haifa is what BN is dreaming about. It will give them an argument for the Americans. We need to understand that and exert all possible efforts to not get to the point where organizations are planning this. A terrorist attack is not against Israelis; it is against the Palestinian people.

We are in negotiations now on technical issues such as the Gaza crossings, on goods/cargo, border crossings. The PM needs to say that negotiations need to be cleared with ministers. It may be important for some of these negotiations to continue, but they need to be cleared at a higher level.

HR: Be proactive on the issue of incitement. We need to make it clear that the leadership doesn't tolerate incitement.

Sharif Hamadeh (SH): We need to get our own house in order. BN had a choice: support the US or maintain his coalition. He phrased his response to get support. Palestinians could do the same, especially if we can make some sort of agreement between Hamas and Fatah before the speech.

SE: Hamas lashed me the other day. They said BN was refusing negotiations but SE had open arms. They want to drop the whole idea of peace and just start suicide bombing.

Wassim Khazmo (WK): Any speech needs to talk about internal divisions.

SE: Prepare points that you would like to see in AM's speech. Points to avoid, things to say.

Ashraf Khatib (AK): Are you engaging any Arab states?

SE: AM has a trip soon. We want foreign ministers to issue a common statement at least reiterating the API. No changes, no rewards. The Americans are putting a lot of pressure on the Arab states to normalize relations. An AM speech could be the best ally for the KSA.

Omar Tufaha (OT): I agree that we need to keep the message proactive and not reactive in capitals.

Enas Abu Laban (EAL): Today we contacted the Blair team to ask about Wataniya because Tony Blair was supposed to have a conversation with BN. There was nothing done on the Wataniya issue and BN cut Blair short on the phone. We think BN is putting all requests together in a package to give to the Americans. He'll offer this package as an alternative to stopping settlement growth. They are linking these things together.

The Americans want to deal with PS issues; they don't want to get involved in the day to day issues, but BN is trying to drag them into it. (inaudible) Zero done and BN cut Blair short because now BN is putting all requests into a package with the Americans against Americans concerning settlements. Linking two things together. When the Americans look to PS issues and (do) not (want to be) involved in day to day. BN is trying to drag them into it. Instead of the Americans putting more and more pressure on the Israelis, BN is trying to make the Americans responsible for the daily suffering of Palestinians. They want to give the Americans a choice: stop settlement expansion or make Palestinians' daily lives better.

Xavier Abueid (XA): Mitchell said that the US will defend the right of Israel as a Jewish state.

SE: Not a single American said Jewish State to our faces. I can't stand guard on their lips.

X: He (GM) said it openly.

SE: In UN Resolution 181, it mentioned a Jewish state and an Arab state.

MS: "A majority of Jewish people" is how Americans might say it

SE: I don't care. This is a non-issue. I dare the Israelis to change name to write to the UN and change their name to the "Great Eternal Historic State of Israel." This is their issue, not mine.

XA: This is the time to implement a real media campaign. We have no 24-hour available spokespeople like the Israelis do. This is an important issue you should raise with AM.

Alex Kouttab (AK): I strongly agree with the statements about being proactive. "There is nothing left to negotiate." We shouldn't drop those lines. We need to continue to set the terms of the debate. BN set a trap. He wants to say that he's "charting the middle course." We're in danger of being marginalized and isolated as rejectionists. We need to positively define what statehood means, using the PS issues as guidelines. We should never debate within BN's framework. AM needs to ground the conflict in its historical context. And about incitement, we need to know whether the Israelis are stepping up their incursions into the WB and Gaza.

Tarek Hamam (TH): AM needs to address the Palestinian Domestic audience. BN's speech was a direct attack on refugee rights. We need to answer this – but by speaking in the affirmative not in response to him (BN).

SE: I need a summary of all ideas we talked about divided into criteria, including Bader's comments about the economy. I'd like to see those draft points for AM's speech as well.

AK: On July 1st, if BN doesn't commit to a settlement freeze, what is BO going to do about missing that deadline?

SE: BN's speech tried to do two things: 1) Refuse a confrontation with Obama; and 2) put us on the defensive. On the latter point, he failed. Netanyahu will say, "There are buildings under construction. Should I tell the construction workers to leave?"

I want exact figures on how many housing units (have been) tendered and how many are currently under construction. We should preempt this argument with a letter to the Americans. We need to bring to their attention that this is not about tenders; this is about two states.

MS: We should also focus on the government incentives to settlers: loans without interest, land for free, agricultural subsidies in the Jordan valley. We can't stop a pregnant lady from having a baby, but look at what we can do. We should look at the 501(c)(3) organizations in the States that make donations to settlers. Let the US administration investigate this.

Settlement products are marketed in the Palestinian economy. The MoNE is coming up with a list. Can you send me a list of settlement products?

[End 4:45pm]