

Meeting Minutes
Gen. James Jones – Dr. Saeb Erekat
White House, October 21, 2009

SE: Thanks for meeting us today. I am here to deliver a message from the president. He will issue the decree for presidential and legislative elections next week. On the 26th or 27th he will ask the Fatah Central Committee to choose a candidate. If they refuse, he will have to submit his resignation. I want to make it clear, he is not bargaining. He just wants to make sure you're not surprised. He values your relationship. He trusts you. You, Barack Obama is what's in it for us. The last few weeks have been troubling. He haven't sat with you to strategize. And we know how much you need all these states.

What's been happening is that Israel, since Netanyahu, they don't want to touch us. I had arranged to meet with Uzi Arad, and two hours before we were supposed to meet he cancelled. He cancelled 3 times – they are sorting things out, “need time”. I asked David Hale to arrange a meeting with Molcho. They haven't taken a single step. I wanted to cut the story short: what are you willing to do? We meet with Israelis regularly – on security, irrespective of politics we will continue to uphold the rule of law, one authority one gun. No games like 2000. This is a commitment I delivered to Etan Dangot, Amos Gilad and to Uzi Arad by phone.

Since April we've had nothing from them. Then came Goldstone and all hell broke loose. You know the first public response to the Goldstone thing came from Lieberman, who said Abu Mazen agreed to postpone the vote because the Israelis threatened to release the “tapes” showing him coordinating the attack on Gaza with Israel. Then there was the report that he did it for Wataniya, which they said is owned by his two sons.

I told Etan Dangot and Amos Gilad: we are 19 years into this peace process, and we don't know anymore where we are going. This is a defining moment. We started by talking about how we're going to share [the land of historic Palestine], and are ending up talking about how we're going to share the West Bank with you. If he [Netanyahu] wants to keep Lieberman and settlement construction, then we will say to him, fine. But all you are doing is giving the region to Ahmedinejad, and to Aziz Dweik (to Hamas), and to Hezbollah. You will have Ahmedinejad in Gaza, in Yemen ... Pakistan failed, Somalia ... the Palestinian question is everywhere. Maybe Israel wants to repeat the chapter with Arafat. My message to them is: we will not allow Abu Mazen to go the way of Arafat, to be accused of being a “non-partner”. This will not happen. Nations can choose between the comfortable position and the right position. If he is going to choose Lieberman and Yishai, and another 3000 units in the West Bank and settlement construction in East Jerusalem, we are not going to touch him, and crown him “King of Israel”. Maybe that makes George Mitchell angry, or makes you angry. But, this is the message. By the way, Netanyahu cannot survive without us. Most Israelis want peace and a two state solution; it's their survival. So if he wants a smear campaign, I will respond.

I am planning to go on Israeli Channel 10 to say one thing: congratulations Mr. Netanyahu. You defeated President Obama. You defeated Abu Mazen. Now you have Aziz Dweik as your partner. And I will end with a nice little bit about the one person who knows this better than anyone is Sara Netanyahu, who took Molcho as a lawyer to make him sign a paper that he will not do so and so. That's the kind of trust people have in this man. We did not play in

their court, but they played in ours. I know am cost-free. If it's my word against theirs in your Congress and your Senate, I know I do not stand a chance. But now it is a defining moment.

Number 2 is Egypt. It has been our ally, our backbone. We always consulted them. And then their Foreign Minister Abul-Gheith comes to us and says—verbatim—'You're finished!' Then he attends a press conference in Amman to say he did not know about it in advance. Then, they say to us, 'Come to Cairo on Oct. 25 so you can sign this document.' When we ask if we can see the document or know what's in it, they say, 'No. Come on the 25th and we will send it to you on the 10th.' I was here in Washington at the time, and I told Mitchell and the Secretary, you have to ask the Egyptians to see what they have. Then when they said 'take it or leave it', we said OK but whoever does not sign you have to say it publicly. They call us to denounce Hamas and then call Hamas to denounce us, so they can get off the hook. We said let them all sweat: We will sign, and we sent Azzam Ahmed to Cairo. When Hamas didn't show up, we said it's off the table. (This is the worst document -- I would not sign in a million years, but we had no choice: this is the behaviour of nations in 2009.)

Number 3, Jordan, we have shared and consulted on everything. Then the Jordanian Foreign Minister says the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 'will not tolerate negotiations that do not include moratorium on Jerusalem' –and that Abu Mazen is accountable. And he says he had no knowledge of postponement. Maybe there are parallel governments in Jordan and Egypt.

Then there's the Saudis—and thank you for helping us to get the \$200 million. We could not have done that without you. They accused us of being “smugglers”.

DR: That's true [re the \$200M].

SE: The Saudis are too busy equating us with Hamas...

Five, Qatar. When you have the Emir of Qatar personally calling Arab and Palestinian intellectuals to talk about us... We know you have Central Command and Petraeus, and your interests ...And Turkey... So where do we fit in all of this – in the bigger picture – AlQaeda and Ahmedinejad ... Where are we? ... Ten days ago, we had to convince a Palestinian businessman to pay \$50 million for Mussawi to have a radio station [???]. In the past we went into negotiations and we trusted people and they failed us. We want to help you. But, why have negotiations anymore? On security, Gen. Jones, you have the paper we did. On borders, there are maps: we said 2% and they said 6%. We're not going to reinvent the wheel or eat the apple from the start.

If people are going to say, 'If you don't go along with this then you'll get more settlements etc.,' then we'll have to go back to our people and say, 'We were wrong about the two states,' and go for a one state! One state, from the river to the sea, and call it 'Israel'. I don't want to weigh two kilos in Jericho and 100 in Washington.

This is a defining moment. So please don't put me in a position where I say no to negotiations. We just don't want to surprise you with anything. I did not create the language that says “freeze all settlement activity (including natural growth)”. I did not go to Cairo University and say “real freeze”. You did. I presented you with a paper on the end game. Instead you went for the matrix of responsibilities.

If you can't convince Netanyahu to invest in a four-month moratorium on settlements, will anyone believe you're going to have him agree to discuss Jerusalem, or 1967?

The region is slipping out of your hands like sand. Look at the bigger picture – there have been 699 movements in political Islam – that used God rather than worship him. You don't fight them with military force. You fight them with ideas. The only force you have is the Palestinian national movement and it is being killed by Moslem Brotherhood and the Arab states. Netanyahu and the Arabs will be celebrating if this happens, so I know what the message may be self-defeating ...

JJ: Thank you... This fits in well with the rest of my day, Afghanistan, Pakistan ... A couple weeks ago my phone rang at 3:00 AM—I've gotten lots of phone calls at 3:00 AM and it's never good news. So, as I was waiting for the bad news, I was told the President has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. And I responded, 'And what's the problem with that?' [laughter] I said, 'You called me at 3:00 AM to tell me something you could have told me at 7:00AM? Don't ever do that again.' [laughter]

SE: When President Obama won the prize, I was contacted by an Arab reporter. I hadn't heard the news yet. I don't know why they called me... When anyone wins something, what do you do? You say 'congratulations'. That's what you do—even if it's Binyamin Netanyahu. There very next day, I was attacked all over the Arabic press.

JJ: Seriously, now. I know this is a very serious message, and a very troubling message. Speaking for President Obama, he really thinks that Abu Mazen is the leader of the moment and that he can make the difference despite all the challenges and the problems we've seen lately. It's hard to imagine anything other than chaos without him... undermining what we've discussed over 2 years and what have spent their lives trying to achieve. I know that the President—he has been informed of this by the Secretary of State and I'm sure he will be trying to reach Abu Mazen to see whether there's some way to correct this situation and get things back on track. I don't know if he'll be successful, but he will try. He is extremely concerned and will voice it directly. And I know that you and PM Fayyad and others are equally important.

President Obama has signaled by word and deed from Day 1 his commitment and genuine support for a just peace and the goal we all share of a Palestinian state. This is a deeply held belief of our government. He understands that that a two-state solution is the only solution, which has not just regional implications but also global implications. I know I've told you before that if President Obama could solve only one thing in the world, I'm sure he would choose the Middle East—not Afghanistan, not Iraq—but this. The two state solution will be the one thing he invests the most in to bring about justice and equality, not just for Palestinians, but this is in Israel's strategic interests as well. They must recognize that the 2 state solution enhances their long-term ability to co-exist and thrive as a viable state.

Everyone knows what an end state is, but the real problem is finding the path to get us there. I think in the immediate term, you've raised the alarm. We need to get one of the key leaders of the Middle East to walk back from his decision. I don't know if that's possible... but our commitment is unshaken - if it's a matter of redoubling our efforts, we will redouble them. If there's something we haven't done that we need to do, we want to hear that.... We've said some tough things to the Israelis—Dennis was part of many of those discussions... But I can

assure you the President is absolutely committed not just to having negotiations, but to seeing a state within two years.

Dennis, do you have anything you want to add to that?

DR: Yes, actually. And I will speak from the heart because we've been through a lot together. One thing we've always been is honest with each other.

SE: We've have fought and hated each other – but we respect each other and tell the truth.

DR: We always told the truth. I would just say the following: you said Obama is what's in it for you...

SE: I shouldn't say this, but my view is it would be a mistake... I told Abu Mazen he should stay the course. He's not bargaining. You don't need to convince him about Obama, but the problem is how you convince him. President Obama should speak to him.

DR: Because we're what it's in it for you... and keep in mind the President is still only in his first year, and has many different challenges to deal with. You know, without the American president playing the role, it just can't be done. I would appeal to Abu Mazen to see that he really needs to give Obama a chance to work with him... You mentioned, let's just cut through all this [current process]... As your friend, I would say ... creative ways to solve problems. I appeal to him to give Barack Obama a chance to work with him in a way to benefit Palestinians.

One thing I am convinced of, based on the discussions we've had, we actually think the two sides are much closer together on substance than people think—there's much more potential there than meets the eye. The process so far has not focused on that. You haven't heard from each other what's important. I'm not saying it'll be easy, but there are possible points of convergence – what you can or cannot do, develop the right corridor, how to create space. You just haven't been given a chance to explore that together. What we're asking is that now is not the time to give up. You said you know this could be self-defeating, like so many other self-defeating choices in the past. You have to give him a chance to do it. Maybe he can't start exactly where you want, but we have a lot of other ideas.

SE: I'm glad to hear you say that. As I told George Mitchell and his staff: you don't need to put on blinders ...

DR: We're looking at a variety of options, but don't want to be on a path that's a dead end. At the end of the day, both of you have to be able to agree. So we need Abu Mazen there.

SE: I appealed to Abu Mazen. Really, I did. But that's it for him: he's not bargaining here. He's really the most decent man. So what he needs to hear is what Gen. Jones said, that this is the most important issue [for Obama].

DR: There's a chance to write a legacy now...

SE: When we speak of options, without Abu Mazen, no one else would last 15 minutes.

JJ: We got the message and we will act on it with urgency. And thank you for what you did a couple weeks ago; it was very courageous.

DR: Just one question. Regarding this whole approach to the Arabs... what's driving it? – we're going to deal with them.

SE: Let me just say, if they know I'm here complaining about them we stand to lose a lot. But with Egypt, you should tell them, next time they need to share things with you. The next time there's a paper your legal adviser has to review it.

DR: I can tell you we did put pressure on the Egyptians. I read the document [on reconciliation]—it's a disaster. We were blunt ...

SE: The Saudis are also crucial ... With Iran, Hizbullah, Syria – jumping around the region. They are doing nothing. Abu Mazen is doing Saudi Arabia's job. Instead they equate him with Hamas. The region is slipping away like sand through our hands.

JJ: I agree with that.

SE: You have to put together a matrix of interests to see where we stand. There's this pattern of Arab reconciliation - and we pay the price. This pattern must stop. I hope the Egyptians see us now in action. We didn't want to let them off the hook. I said to Omar Suleiman, 'How can we sign a document without seeing it?' And then you say, 'You're finished.'!

JJ: It's insulting. We'll take care of this.

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