

Meeting Minutes
Dr Saeb Erekat – Amb. David Hale
Friday 15 January 2010
NAD Jericho

Attendance:

Palestinians: Dr Saeb Erekat (SE)
Rami Dajani

US: David Hale (DH)
Daniel Rubenstein (DR)
Rick Waters

DH: Got back yesterday from Brussels. Senator Mitchell will be coming next week ...

SE: When will he be here?

DH: He's going to Beirut and Damascus Tuesday and Wednesday, so he will be here at the end of the week – Thursday or Friday.

SE: We have Thursday open to meet AM. On Friday he is seeing the leader of Kadima.

DH: Has anything developed with Molcho?

SE: No.

DH: We have a lot to talk about. We've met with the Jordanians and Egyptians, Omar Suleiman, Nasser Joudeh in DC. In Paris we met Kouchner and [unclear]. In Brussels we met with the new European leadership – lady Ashton. We had a bilateral with Russia-Sultanov. And of course the Quartet meeting.

SE: I've been briefed by all the parties but want to hear from you.

DH: Yes. We wanted to get a sense of what is possible. Our desire is to get into talks right away, but want to do that in a way that honours your positions, and your dignity. We realize that the outcome may not resolve all issues. We now have 67 lines and swaps on the table, which wasn't there before. The Egyptians brought ideas similar to our thinking.

SE: Did they give you a paper?

DH: Yes. The same in substance to what you have.

SE: The Jordanians and Saudis too.

DH: Nasser Joudeh did not give us a paper.

SE: No – but we coordinated the position.

DH: So your approach is either an un-announced freeze in Jerusalem, or adoption of the principles. Neither of these is feasible. They won't happen. You know about Netanyahu's position on the freeze. And the paper describes the end of the negotiations not the start. But there are ideas, as we discussed with the Egyptians, that we can build on. They've talked with Netanyahu and think he is serious. We should look at what more will Israel do beyond what it has done already. However a freeze in Jerusalem is beyond reach. We are thinking of building a conditional ladder: talks with us present over measures to build confidence. And there is the 'American letter' – Sen. Mitchell calls it a 'set of notes'. The origin is a request from Saudi Arabia to put down on paper what Mitchell said to Saud Al-Faisal. It's nothing you haven't heard before – ToRs, the US position on key issues – position on Jerusalem and settlements in a way that's helpful. Such a letter can help provide cover for AM, but it will only be there if we are convinced we're entering a negotiation process.

In the Quartet meeting in Brussels there was unanimity that we need to get into talks soon. It's not about pressure or coercion ...

SE: Did they raise the freeze in East Jerusalem and the end game?

DH: There is unanimity that it's not feasible [the freeze]. We also discussed assistance and the need to support Fayyad, to front load assistance and get the Arabs to contribute. For the creation of the Palestinian state there is the diplomatic front, and also the resource front. There is a strong commitment for both, but frankly if one isn't working it is hard to keep the other on track.

SE: Yes they are integrated.

DH: We want to use Sen. Mitchell's time efficiently in his next visit. We'd like to look at it as a deadline. We are fearful that [example of recent events in Nablus] that in a vacuum of diplomatic efforts things can unravel on the ground.

SE: Thanks for the briefing. I got a briefing from Muhammad bin Jasem – he wants me to put down a new road map. I've also been briefed by Egypt, Jordan, France, Marc Otte, Robert Serry – so I'm moving two steps ahead of you.

First, you don't need to convince us of the need for negotiations. We know the devastating impact of a stalemate – vis a vis Hamas, Iran, relation with Israel on the ground. Keep this in mind: our cardinal interest is to resume negotiations. But (and I'm telling you the truth as AM sees it – he is not a tactician) AM has assessed the impact of Netanyahu's conditions. If he goes into negotiations with these conditions, it will destroy him.

DH: Conditions?

SE: Netanyahu says East Jerusalem is just a neighbourhood, like Tel Aviv, so it's building as usual, tenders ... it will finish AM off. The problem with all US administrations is they underestimated the significance of Jerusalem to the Palestinians – for internal Palestinian politics. This was the failure of Camp David. AM is not planning to run in elections. He is ready to resign – but he will not be thrown out of office. Our credibility on the ground has never been so low. Now it's about survival. There is Hamas and the bigger picture in the region. I told the Israelis from the beginning: let's not waste time, let's not wait. Let's see what you have to offer and see what we can work with. I called Uzi Arad before Passover and arranged a call from AM to Netanyahu – to congratulate him. I got nothing – come Ramadan, the feast, nothing. I called them to meet from the beginning, they kept canceling. This is Netanyahu: Recently six presidential guards in civilian clothes on their way from Bethlehem to Ramallah were stopped by Israeli soldiers and stripped to humiliate them in front of their people. Nablus was to humiliate Fayyad and AM. This is Netanyahu,. I can't compete with him – ask President Clinton! I was there at Wye River. Note what Shimon Peres relayed from him, or what Netanyahu told the Egyptians – he said “when peace comes” it will be ... He didn't commit to it. He didn't say I am committed. He wants to begin with whatever he can. Molcho has the talking point: “Jerusalem is a neighbourhood – you know it's excluded”. Come on!

You give me goals. You got the Israeli goal right: Jewish state, secure borders, security arrangements, and subsequent developments. You said my goal is a viable and independent state based on the 67 border with agreed swaps. That is not my goal. Swaps are a Palestinian concession in the interest of peace and reaching an agreement. My goal is a sovereign state on the 67 border.

DH: Noted.

SE: So we look at what's doable. The Jordanians will support whatever AM decides. Egypt, I don't know – they want to bring Netanyahu in. The Russians want a meeting in Sochi ... The French – I told them stop this, don't try to bypass the US. You are what's in it for us. There is no other way. We have to avoid fragmentation. We asked you to give us your position on the end game, not a treaty- give us your position. Countries have positions. Your position is two state solution, Palestinian state, ending the occupation. So we said 67 borders with agreed swaps. That's your position, so say it! If you put down such a paper we will call an emergency Arab summit and get it accepted. Netanyahu will reject. Either he will change his coalition or there will be elections. Israelis want the two state solution but they don't trust. They want it more than you think, sometimes more than Palestinians. What is in that paper gives them the biggest Yerushalaim in Jewish history, symbolic number of refugees return, demilitarized state... What more can I give?

DH: Can we be more specific ...

SE: On process ... will meet with Uzi Arad. You know the paper – the paper I gave to Daniel, AM wrote it himself. We translated it. AM knows the Israelis well. He understands Netanyahu. He saw the minutes of his cabinet meeting where he talked about his book “Under the Sun” and called AM an extremist and a terrorist. AM will not allow Netanyahu

to do to him what he did to Arafat. AM is the father of the peace camp, Oslo – and 18 years later Israel remains the source of authority. His heart aches when he sees families thrown into the streets of Jerusalem. And Fayyad as well –with the events in Nablus. So these are the choices. [SE prints copy of paper]. Why can't you adopt the paper?

On handling the meeting with the Israelis, AM wanted to choose who. His logic is that if it's Arad, then it's not negotiations. But we can't choose. We can't get into that.

DH: Then they'll do the same with you.

SE: The focus is not on negotiations. It's on the security situation and strategic relations. This is what Sen. Mitchell should assure AM. So first we need a channel so things don't collapse in the West Bank. We will use the channel also to see where we can go. This is the 64 million dollar question. Second, we need to restore confidence within our security people. We said to DR to arrange a meeting with the US and with Diskin, to ensure they will stop humiliating them. Third, on the steps that DR spoke about last time – incursions in area A, prisoner release, roadblocks, redeployments – C to B and A, reconstruction in Gaza (by the way I'm glad it was discussed by the Quartet – I sent a letter requesting this. It should be dealt with by the UN and Blair's office). Regarding the steps, Netanyahu should not expect anything in return. These are his obligations that he has already breached. We've already paid in advance. We've delivered on security.

DR: On the meeting with the security people, President Abbas said he understood the difficulty of setting it up and asked to follow up with ways to deal with it.

SE: AM said that to give you a chance to follow up,. You're our partner. Don't let it all go down. If they're humiliated further they will shoot. They have their dignity. They would rather die than be humiliated like this. This is what happened in the Intifada.

DH: I would still like to get back to the paper. If you still ask us to adopt this paper we might as well talk about something else entirely: This administration will not be in any way directive about the outcome of negotiations. Almost every line of the second section is a topic for negotiation.

SE: So can you get him to refrain from tendering in Jerusalem?

DH: We try. On the elements – the package – I know these are obligations. But is it enough, to maintain dignity, to get you back? Based on this meeting I don't know what I can tell the senator.

SE: Tell him what I said about AM's state of mind, about Netanyahu's conditions. Tell him AM will not negotiate under Netanyahu's conditions: Jerusalem excluded, no resumption from where we left off ...

DH: These are your conditions, not the Israelis...

SE: Is the Roadmap his ToR? All agreements signed? Where is his position?

DH: Raise this with Molcho.

SE: I will. I've tried to meet him before.

DH: He's ready now.

SE: I want to construct a channel so it doesn't go down in one day. We can't say we're resuming negotiations. We keep the channel secret. Use it to discuss our strategic relations. The priority is not to have collapse on the ground. Let's meet again before Mitchell comes.

DH: OK. We need to make an assessment. I will inform Mitchell of what you said about AM's frame of mind regarding Netanyahu's conditions. There is a sense of urgency. Elements of what you said about a private dialogue may be helpful. Our ToR paper may also be helpful, with your remarks on the goals. The five issues we will continue to work on. You need to discuss them with the Israelis.

SE: The security people can discuss. Why political discussion? These are obligations they have to implement.

DH: Political discussions as well.

SE: They want to make us pay 16 times for the same thing. We already paid in Oslo for Area A and B. Finally I want to ask you about the paper you've been discussing. As we said in Washington we are your partner. Why do we have to hear about it from other parties? Why didn't you share it with us before you discussed it?

DH: We didn't share it with the Israelis either...

SE: Ask the Arabs next time you meet them about the November 12 statement they issued saying no resumption of negotiations before a settlement freeze including East Jerusalem.

END