



IPI HIGH-LEVEL POLICY FORUM

“THE MIDDLE EAST: IS THERE A WAY FORWARD?”

Featuring

Saeb Erakat

Palestinian Chief Negotiator and Member of the PLO Central Committee

Dan Meridor

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Responsible for Intelligence Services and the Atomic Energy Commission

Transcript edited by IPI

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Terje Rød-Larsen: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends. Good afternoon, everybody. It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the International Peace Institute and to this high-level policy forum discussing the way forward in the Middle East.

Today is a very special day. It is a unique opportunity to hear a direct and public exchange between two senior officials of the Palestinian-Israeli proximity talks. The topic being where the peace process stands, and how we can move forward.

Let me warmly welcome our two special guests, Saeb Erakat, the Palestinian Chief Negotiator and member of the Central Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Dan Meridor, Deputy Prime Minister of Israel and Minister responsible for intelligence services and the Atomic Energy Commission. It is quite an understatement to say that both Saeb and Dan have been intimately involved in the peace process over the years. In fact, they have been absolutely essential in moving negotiations forward and have both shown great commitment and leadership to the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

Let me start by introducing Saeb. Prior to assuming his current post as the Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Saeb has had several key positions in the peace process including vice-chair of the Madrid peace delegation, and later, as vice-chair of the Washington negotiations. He also played an essential role at Camp David a few years later. He has held important ministerial postings, including as minister for local government and minister of negotiations.

Let me now introduce Dan Meridor. Dan holds a distinguished place in Israeli politics. Before his current role as the deputy prime minister and minister responsible for intelligence services and the Atomic Energy Commission, he served in several ministerial posts, including minister of justice and minister of finance. Like Saeb, he has shown great leadership and skill as a negotiator for bringing peace and stability in the Middle East.

In a minute I will give the floor to our guests who will speak for about ten minutes, but before we begin, let me just say a few words on the topic at hand today. Our meeting here in New York comes at a crucial point in the Middle East peace process. Nearly two decades have passed, and we are in dire need of new hope and new energy and creative solutions in order for negotiations to move forward. At the same time, the Middle East today is a vastly different place from what it was twenty years ago. We are no longer facing simply a local conflict, but one with both regional and even global implications. Indeed, the Middle East conflict is the only "local" conflict with an almost immediate global impact. We see this everyday, in newspapers, on the Internet and on television. It is also a peace process which suffers from an endemic crisis of expectations. Because when promises are broken, violence and conflict are the immediate result. Talks are risky. So my questions to both speakers are: (1) What types of diplomatic and political tools do we need to move forward? (2) How can we avoid repeating old mistakes and the risk of a crisis of expectations if negotiations fail and end with high probability of new violence? (3) Are the proximity talks working, or do we need other forms of engagement, direct or indirect?

I will start by giving Dan the floor first for his remarks and thereafter Saeb and will then open the floor for comments and questions. Dan, you have the floor.

Dan Meridor:

Good afternoon, everybody here, thank you Terje and thank the IPI for this opportunity to meet with all of you alongside my friend, Dr. Saeb Erakat, who lives something like thirty kilometers away from where I live. He lives in Jericho, I in Jerusalem.

The first thing we need to do is to move directly and without any delay to direct talks between Israel and Palestinians. This phase of proximity talks is quite strange after we have been talking to each other thousands of times, thousands of hours in all possible configurations. So we need to move back to the table and try to resolve the outstanding issues. I would suggest that we do this in two parallel tracks. One is define the status issues – if we can get everything resolved, it is the best, but because of the risk that Mr. Larsen just mentioned of raising high expectations with some risk of not succeeding, I would suggest at the same time we move bottom up, building on what we have towards this Palestinian state, step by step. In the last year and a half, there's been practically no terror. It sounds normal in New York, it is not normal in our area. It has to do with military and security operations by us, but also by the security forces of the Palestinian authority and the good cooperation between the two. I don't think anybody gains from time passing. In the way the Middle East is changing – not necessarily in a good direction – and I think both parties have an objective interest and they should have incentive to move ahead shortly. Waiting will not help any of us. One needs to look at the past in order not to repeat mistakes that might have been committed.

It is exactly ten years ago that both Saeb and myself, alongside our friends and President Clinton and his friends, met at Camp David, Maryland in July of 2000 in a very sincere attempt to put an end to the conflict. It failed. President Clinton made it clear why it failed the way he understood it. Israel got to a point where it

thought that the status quo was untenable and we, even without an agreement, were ready to evacuate all of the Gaza Strip as we did in 2005 and not getting anything in return – not even an agreement -- for the first time giving the Palestinians a land that they can control. The result, unfortunately, was not only the victory of Hamas in the election but the *coup d'etat* of Hamas in Gaza killing PLO people, sending them out, and then starting launching rockets at us.

Then there was another attempt a year and a half ago by Prime Minister Olmert, in talking with President Abbas and teams that they have. I read Saeb counted 288 meetings that took place in between the two. And then Mr. Olmert offered an agreement, the most far reaching ever, by any Israeli government and there was no response. It had to do with land, with Jerusalem, with refugees, with everything, and there was no response. We need to see why it happened and how we can avoid this. Can Mr. Abu Mazen give now the answer he didn't give in the past? Can the leadership on two sides take the right decisions? Let me say something about decisions needed. There are easy decisions and tough decisions. Easy decisions are decisions that your supporters like. Those who expect you to be tough to say what you will never give up and what you deserve to get, this is easy. The tough ones are decisions where you take a historic decision, paying heavily, risking heavily, your political base, because you think that is right for your nation. I think you can see such a decision taken by President Sadat of Egypt in 1977 and respectively by Prime Minister Begin of the time, both of whom would not have won a referendum had they asked me of the decision. But after they took it they moved the Middle East to a totally new era. I did not like the Oslo agreement, I voted against it, but Rabin and Arafat took that decision not respected by their people.

Recently the Israeli government -- the third in a row of Likud prime ministers, Olmert, Sharon, Netanyahu -- said those magic words, a "Palestinian state" -- a two-state solution. So there is an agreement on the paradigm. It was tough for Prime Minister Netanyahu, but he took it. I want to see the Palestinians making the tough decisions. Not what they want, but what they are ready to compromise on and how, on what issues, so that agreement would be reached. We see changes in the Middle East that we don't like: The front that is created by a radical Islam in Iran, in Hezbollah, in Hamas, with the help of Syria, is a front that does not want to see the peace process succeed. They have the ability to try to derail it, to put obstacles in the way and we need to look at it and not let it happen. The introduction of the religious element to the conflicts is as dangerous. In old times, we had conflicts but there has not been a conflict in the name of God. Neither Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt or any other Arab leader in the Pan-Arab movement or other particular Arab movements, none of them have ever made religious conflict, but we hear now from Hamas and from Hezbollah and from Iran that it is a religious commandment. There shouldn't be a non-Muslim state in this region. Gods, you know, never compromise. If they are introduced to the scene, it makes everything more difficult. So I think it is in the interest of the PA, and the interest of Israel, to try to give a political solution to the conflict.

We are in a phase which, hopefully, will lead to negotiations. We look at the troubles. Let me put it in a somewhat broader perspective. Decades of conflicts, wars, terror, are the ugly side. The brighter side is that we have reached agreement with Israel and Egypt. We have reached agreement of peace between Israel and Jordan. There have been talks, not yet successful between Israel and Syria. There have been relationships between Israel and other countries, North Africa and Gulf States. And there have been negotiations with PA but there have not produced results yet. But it's not a stalemate. Things are

moving. So there are the good direction and the bad direction. The good direction I just mentioned and we need to continue in it. The bad direction is the one that I mentioned earlier with those three or more partners that want a different Middle East.

The Middle East needs peace but needs stability. The forces of stability need to act together. The threat that comes from Iran is threatening not only a state of Israel which they openly say should not exist, it threatens the Arab regimes and the Middle East as we know it. The attempt of Iran to get nuclear and the attempt of the American, European and many Arab states to stop the development is a very crucial conflict. The result of this conflict will have a bearing, a meaningful impact on everything in the Middle East. If, in the end of this conflict, Iran gets nuclear in spite of what the UN has decided, America wants, Europeans want and others want, this may spell the end of the NPT, because other countries say they will get nuclear, mainly Arab countries. It may spell the end of the relationship that has been built between the Gulf area and the West. It is dangerous. Just think of how arrogant Hezbollah and Hamas will act if Iran wins. So there is a connection here. The struggle with the attempt of Iran to get nuclear is looked at very closely by everybody in the region, and if this is done well, and there is leadership and persistence and resolve in that conflict, it will add, I think, a lot to the ability to advance between us and the Palestinians.

I want to believe that if we can't get a full agreement on the outstanding issues regarding Jerusalem refugees fighting borders and security, we will not let the negotiations collapse but alongside that, build up from what we have now - a good economic growth, over 8% growth last year in the West Bank, and I hope more this year; an absence of terror; and more steps towards a Palestinian state. It shouldn't be all or nothing. We all wish for all, but if you can't get it, we should be very cautious not to risk everything on that.

So, I do hope in the coming weeks, negotiations will skip over this strange proximity talks into real talks. Proximity, in a way, is Orwellian, because it comes from a close proximity, getting closer, but in fact doesn't get us closer. We need to talk to each other and take the tough decisions needed. If this is done, we will see progress this coming year. The alternative is bad. It's bad for Israel, I believe it's bad for the PLO that may be losing in the competition with Hamas and the forces that don't want to see an agreement don't accept the legitimacy of our state in the region. So we have an interest, they have an interest, if there will be courage and leadership on their side in answering the questions that were left, I hope we will be able to proceed.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you, Dan for those very illuminating remarks. Now, it's my pleasure to give you the floor, Saeb. Saeb, you have the floor.

Saeb Erakat:

Thank you very much. Thank you very much for your attendance. I fully acknowledge that Mr. Olmert and Abu Mazen had very far-reaching talks together and I do acknowledge, on the record, that Mr. Olmert offered Abu Mazen this map. He said to him, we will take 6.5% of the West Bank, we will give you back 5.8% of 1948 areas and the 0.7% will be considered the safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza. Thus the total area of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem will be 100% the size of that of June 4, '67. This offer was made by Mr. Olmert.

My question to Mr. Meridor: Are you offering me the same map? Is Mr. Netanyahu offering us to talk if he wants to have direct talks, all we said to him we are willing to assume the negotiations will begin where we leave them in

December 2008, because we don't need to begin eating the apple from the start. Secondly, if we want to have negotiations direct negotiations, we never objected to it. All we said is Israel must stop all settlement activities, dictation, *fait accomplis* policies, trying to get the results from negotiations before they begin, by dictating the results on the ground, settlements, home demolitions, evictions of people, deportation, siege, closures and so on, so on so on. And, this is not a Palestinian condition. This is article no. 1 of the first phase of the road map. It is an Israeli obligation and not a Palestinian condition. If Israel, the Israeli government meets the requirements for direct negotiations we will go yesterday, beginning the negotiations where we left them in December 2008 and stopping settlement activities including natural growth and including East Jerusalem.

I don't know why the Israelis have this behavior of citing things that they remember. Mr. Meridor and Mr. Olmert and all Israeli said they did not get a counteroffer from President Abbas. As a matter of fact, President Abbas is on the record offering Mr. Olmert this map. When we agreed on July 30, 2008 with Dr. Rice, Palestinians and Israelis, and the [U.S.] State Department that the baseline is the West Bank, Gaza Strip, 4th of June, east Jerusalem, Jordan River, the Dead Sea, No Man's Land. Abu Mazen made an offer of this map accepting an exchange of land in size and value of 1.9%. The Israelis choose not to mention this fact. Why? I'm not here on mistakes, scoring points, finger pointing. Ever since Eve negotiated with Adam, I'm the most disadvantaged negotiator in history. I have no Army, no Navy, no Air Force, my people are fragmented, no economy. If it's my word against any Israeli and the Congress and the Senate, I don't stand a chance. And who said life is about fairness and justice. I'm out there trying to get peace. I'm out there trying to get a two-step solution. I'm out there not doing the Israelis a favor. I'm not out there scoring points or finger pointing. I want my children to grow free. I want them to taste freedom, dignity, statehood. I want my children to be exactly like their children and your children. And, that's why I'm trying to achieve peace. That's what President Abbas is trying to achieve.

Now, I hope that we hear from the Israelis that they accept the position of the Olmert government, which they talk too much about. And if you like it so much why can't you offer it to us, Mr. Meridor? Why don't you test us and offer a stance? And we are carrying out all our obligations including all security ones and the first steps of the road map. Please carry out your obligations, you have to stop settlement activities including natural growth, open Jerusalem institutes, move the siege and the closure, and stop taking 1.5 million people in Gaza as hostages, using their food supplies, medical supplies, fuel supplies as swords over their necks. This is absolutely uncalled for, and no one has the tolerance and no one should have the tolerance for such policies. The regional politics here I acknowledge. The United States borders as of the 21st century beginning 2001, 2003 are no longer with Canada and Mexico and the two oceans. The U.S. borders today are with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, the Gulf, Saudi, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, Iran. A nation that has 230,000 soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan have changed political geography in the region, thus changing their functional role of nations in the region. And, I know that the U.S. administration of Mr. Obama did not wake up one morning and feel their conscience aching for my suffering as a Palestinian when they say that they are establishing a Palestinian state is part of America's national interest.

There is no way on Earth you can solve the problem of the Middle East and the region through Marines, gun ships and more wars. This is wrong. You need two things to advance the cause of stability, peace and moderation in the region. One, ending this Israeli occupation that has been going on since 1967. I was 12

years old and I am counting this occupation because today I am 55. It is too long, and we don't need to re-invent the wheel here. It is two states, '67 plus agreed swaps and all the other security arrangements that would be agreed by the two parties and all issues – Jerusalem, borders, settlement, refugees are doable; agreed by both sides in accordance with international law.

Now, the region threat, ladies and gentlemen, we don't see Iran as a threat in the region. We may differ with Iran. We ask the Iranians not to take sides between Fatah and Hamas and to side with Palestine. We ask Iranians to take advantage of talking about adding Palestine to the map. But Iran is not a nuclear power. I think the only nuclear power in the region is Israel, and we want a region void of nuclear capabilities. Stop exporting fear. Stop exporting this doom and gloom. The last thing that this region needs is another war similar to the one in Afghanistan and Iraq. This would be a devastation to all efforts being exerted to bring about a region towards stability, moderation and peace. I urge the Israelis to accept Syria's offer of resuming indirect talks with the good offices of Turkey. Why not? Why not? What does it cost you? Turkey is an important regional power. It has done a good job between you and the Syrians. And why did your government fail to accept Syria's call to have indirect talks resume under Turkey's auspices? That's another thing. Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt -- all of us are partners in something we call the Arab Peace Initiative, which is the most advanced strategic formula introduced by Arabs to Israel, telling them once you end your occupation that began in '67 from Palestinian territory, Syrian territories, and whatever left from the Lebanese territories, you are going to have peace with all Arab countries. Israel did not even bother to respond up until this moment.

As I said, there is a difference between tough negotiators and non-negotiators, and I expect people to be tough negotiators when they represent their cases. But I don't want Mr. Netanyahu to stand every morning in the mirror, and ask the mirror, whether he is making the offer to have Abu Mazen come back to direct talks and have Abu Mazen saying no. That's public relations. That's not going to make peace.

The question to the Israeli government today, we have accepted Israel's right to exist in peace and security on the '67 borders. Does Israel accept the right of the Palestinian state to be established under the 1967 borders? There is no such thing as a nation-state without borders. When people talk about two states, which states? Mr. Netanyahu, as far as I'm concerned, said he will not negotiate Jerusalem, he will not negotiate security, he will not negotiate refugees, he will not negotiate my skies, he wants to control my passages, and then after that he said: "Come here Palestinians, we know what's best for you, don't put any conditions after putting all these conditions." And we have always said we don't want to choose who we talk to in Israel. We respect the choice of the Israeli people. But Israel and this government of Israel has a choice: settlements or peace. They can't have both. Siege or peace -- they can't have both. Policies of incursions, siege, closures, assassinations, home demolitions, deportations, and we've seen what happened in international waters three weeks ago, over people were coming to bring some food supplies and medical supplies to the people under siege in Gaza.

Look, as I said, we can talk and talk and talk. But peace will not be delivered through people talking or through people wishing. Peace throughout history of man is about a matrix of interests. Like your personal relations with each other, your matrixes of interest must be watched carefully. As Palestinians, we have come a long way. We have accepted international law as basis for our solution,

the national resolutions of the UN General Assembly and Security Council. We have accepted to live in peace and security instead of Palestine next to the state of Israel under the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. We have accepted all the norms and the laws of what we call international legality. I am not going to beg the Israelis for peace, I'm not. Israel is a country that has 5,000 tanks, 3,000 fighting planes, and nuclear weapons, but yet you have three options. My option is a two-state option. That's their option. That's the international community's option. That's international law. A state of Palestine to live side by side in peace and security in the state of Israel on the 1967 borders with the agreed swaps etc. etc. etc. on all issues. If the Israelis don't want this option, and they want to call my hometown Jericho, *Yəriho*, and they want to call Nablus, *Şəhem*, and they want to call Jerusalem, *Yerushaláyim* and they want to call me instead of Mr. Saeb Erakat, *Mar Saeb Erakat*.

You want to talk about the one-state solution, talk to me. You don't scare me with this. But don't mistake me, that's not my option. My option is a two-state solution. Those who continue committing settlement activities, dictation on the ground, forcing their occupation, building walls, trying to dictate outcomes of negotiation before they begin, are leading this region towards a one-state solution. Option number 3, today in the West Bank -- and I don't know if Mr. Meridor said that he lives 30 kilometers away from where I live, maybe in distance, but I don't know when was the last time Mr. Meridor even bothered to look at what's taking place in Planet West Bank. There are roads today in the West Bank that we cannot use as Palestinians -- only Israelis can use. And look -- such diseases as racism and bigotry, once it inflicts underneath our skin, we have tended to justify it, sometimes [indiscernible], sometimes economically, sometimes psychologically, and sometimes even sexually. Today Israel is justifying this apartheid regime in the West Bank by security terms -- that's racism. That's the third option.

As Palestinians, we are there to stay. We have reached out. We have recognized Israel's right to exist in peace and security. And we want to make peace with Israel and we want to live side by side in peace and security with state of Israel. But if the Israelis think they can accomplish peace by lowering my expectations through their military might, through their occupation forces, through the dictation on the ground, think again. The first and last element of making peace between conflicting parties is fairness. Without fairness, peace cannot last. And fairness here is not about who has the might and the power to exercise over the other. Leaders may sign peace agreements, but as far as us and the Israelis, what will make peace is the day after. How the commoners will feel the day after. Have they been treated fairly, equally, equal partners, or have their interests been undermined? I think we can make it. I think we can continue... we have the choice of continue sloganeering, finger pointing at each other, and so on. Or, say to each other, I am not doing you a favor, Mr. Dan Meridor, when I make peace with you. You are not doing me a favor. We are doing both ourselves the favor. We don't need to reinvent the wheel or eat the apple from the start. It's a two-stage solution. And the minute you say today that you are ready to resume negotiations or relive them in December 2008 and that you stop settlement activities, we will engage you directly in direct negotiations. Thank you very much.

Rød-Larsen:

I would like to thank both Saeb and Dan for their courage and willingness to share their perspectives and abuse with all of us, actually in direct and not indirect talks here at Trygve Lie Center in New York. I know Dan would very much like to respond immediately to some of the questions and remarks which Saeb had, but I would like now to open the floor for questions and remarks and

would ask everybody - I see hands up, flying up here - but I would ask everybody to be as brief as possible. The Trygve Lie Center is packed today and we have to end our discussions here at 2:45, so please be to the point and short and don't give speeches. When you take the floor, please state your name and affiliation and that's very important. I open the floor. First row.

Khaled Dawoud: Thank you, Dr. Saeb. My name is Khaled Dawoud from Al-Jazeera Arabic. I just have two very brief, quick questions. Dr. Saeb, Mr. Mitchell has been going back and forth for almost a year and a half now. So what is the difference, what is proxy talks about... this is basically what he has been doing for the past year and a half, coming back and forth, and what are you discussing during this period of time. Mr. Meridor, I mean about the NPT issue, you also responsible for the nuclear matter, the NPT review conference, how Israel is going to respond, will you attend the conference, and will you open your installations for international inspection. Thank you, sir.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you. I will take three questions in a row. And then I will open up for responses from the panel. Second question, please go ahead.

Edith Lederer: Edith Lederer from the Associated Press. I'd like to ask Mr. Meridor to respond to Mr. Erakat's question about whether Israel is prepared to go back to start where the Olmert government left off in December 2008, and I'd like to ask Mr. Erakat to address the question of trying to form a viable Palestinian state when the Palestinians themselves are so divided. Is there a prospect for unity on the Palestinian side?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. Another question before we go back to the panel.

Naomi Weinberger: Thank you. Naomi Weinberger from Columbia University. Thank you to both of our distinguished panelists. My question is about the fact that both of you have spoken about the recent improvement in the performance of the Palestinian security services and yet, of course, Hamas' ability to seize power in Gaza in June of 2007 had a lot to do with the fact that the executive force of Hamas really outgunned the local Palestinian security services. So I am wondering whether you see a way in the effort to create a new national government that Hamas would accept Palestinian security sector reform, or would you see the most important way forward there in terms of an enhanced international element on the ground in Gaza?

Rød-Larsen: I will now go back to the panelist. I would also ask the panelist to answer as briefly as possible because there is a forest of hands here, and I'd like to answer as many question as possible. Dan, will you go first?

Meridor: Yes, the question that was put to me by the gentleman from Al-Jazeera. What Senator Mitchell did, he tried very much to bring us closer, so far not successfully. I do hope that there is reassessment and we'll look now for a better way to proceed. My feeling is that time is, as I said, not working very much for us. Unfortunately, it is not the feeling on the other side. I can tell you that on the Palestinian side there are people who think that they don't need to hurry. I can quote something like this said by a Palestinian important leader...

Erakat: By who?

Meridor: I'll tell you in a minute. At Camp David, they offered us 90%, recently they offered 100% -- this was Olmert -- why should we hurry? - Said by Dr. Saeb Erakat to Al-Dustour on June 25, 2009. He feels that he doesn't need to hurry and I don't

agree with him. I think that we need to hurry. I think that he thinks time is on his side and he makes mistakes for his people and more than for us, but both of us need to hurry.

On the NPT conference, this is an ongoing issue. I believe that the understandings we had with the American administration were good along the years and I believe they will continue the way they were. The question of the lady from the Associated Press. Two questions: About the offer made by Mr. Olmert that was not responded to at all by the Palestinian leadership reminds me that it is a history of proposals made and never responded to. This organization, the UN, under whose auspices we sit now, decided in 1947 to have a Jewish state and an Arab state. We accepted, they rejected. Later they made the decision they will never recognize us, then they established the PLO. People may forget -- before there were occupations, before '67, whose very goal was to destroy the state of Israel by its charter. It takes some courage to sit here and say that all they wanted is peace. It was strange but never mind that. Then there was an offer by Mr. Barak at Camp David. Ten years ago, it was refused and President Clinton said exactly who he thought was to blame for this. Then there was the offer of Mr. Olmert, this was not responded to at all. So, always going back to the same pattern of not catching the opportunity when it appears, and then years later and coming back and ask us to roll history back is somewhat strange. It is quite difficult because we just heard from Saeb, and again he said it, that Mr. Olmert offered something which is 100% in land. This is what he said. Then he added, Mr. Erakat in the same interview that I just now mentioned that was given to Al-Dustour, that there is another problem that we haven't spoken of and this is to me the crux of the matter on which he will not say anything even today. This is what we call the refugees or in other words-- not '67 this has never been a problem of the PLO. This is '48. And this is what Mr. Erakat says: "It is not the right of return or compensation. It is the right to return and compensation. The Palestinian decision makers do not have the right to decide the fate of the refugees. Only refugees themselves will decide." So, what we are demanded to do is not only to return to lines that existed before '67, but after that to give millions of people the right if they so choose to decide that they don't want to live in a Palestinian state, they want to live in Israel, meaning that conflict will never end. This is dangerous. And this is why there was no agreement, and this is why Mr. Abu Mazen did not respond to Mr. Olmert because he did not agree to that.

The question of Ms. Weinberger from Columbia University raises another question which is difficult in that I'm sorry I have to say this. There is a natural tendency to get national unity. We were a national unity. Britain in times of war tried national unity sometimes. We very much want to get an agreement with PLO. It's tough. Olmert tried it. Abu Mazen tried it. We didn't get it. Adding Hamas to the equation, when Hamas says Israel will never exist, will never honor the Oslo agreement, will never renounce violence, means that there may be national unity, on the Palestinians, there won't be peace. So, it's decision time in the Palestinian track -- do you want to go for co-existence with Israel, legitimizing the Palestinian state and the Jewish state, Israel and Palestine, or you agree with the Hamas ideology? Don't play down the ideological commitment of our adversaries. They are serious. We do hope and believe the PLO has gone a long way towards agreement with us. Hamas says just the opposite. So if they want to call us, they can do it. It will cast a giant shadow over the ability of the Palestinian leadership to make an agreement with us that will hold as a final agreement to end the conflict. I hope I am wrong, I want to be proven I am wrong, I am not sure.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Dan. Saeb, you have the floor.

Erakat:

Thank you very much. Khaled, concerning your question about the proximity talks. I read somewhere a quote by Abe Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League saying something that Mr. Mitchell has been honest and fair --- that's why he should not have this job. I really believe that exactly Mr. Mitchell is fair and honest and that he should have this job. Look, Israelis and Palestinians must understand -- no one will make their decisions for them. They have to make the decisions. Proximity talks are not indirect talks. There is a third party that's either facilitating, go between, mediating, or arbitrating between two conflicting parties. We are under oath not to reveal what we're doing with Mr. Mitchell, but, I believe that, as Palestinians, our position in all permanent status issues, is with Mr. Mitchell and with Mr. Obama. And as far as the Israelis are concerned in the proximity talks, we don't even bother to ask Mr. Mitchell. I said to him once, Mr. Netanyahu can speak to you about Maccabi Tel Aviv or Maccabi Haifa, the two soccer teams that compete in Israel.

Now, I am not asking the Americans to introduce decisions for me or the Israelis, but look at the situation: Here is one side that offered their positions, and the other side has not even yet thought about or recognized the issues. I haven't heard any Israeli saying that Jerusalem is a negotiated subject on the table. Not a person in this government. I haven't heard any Israeli in this government saying that two states on the '67 borders. And, you know, the viability of states... it's true, we have a deep major wound as Palestinians by this division amongst us and Hamas in Gaza, and if we don't help ourselves as Palestinians, nobody else will. We have gone through difficult transitions. We are part of developments in this region, but President Abbas is exerting every possible effort in order to have a rapprochement, an end of the coup, and nationality government, and, on the record, I would say Hamas has never questioned the jurisdiction of the PLO to negotiate with Israel. Negotiations with Israel and permanent status issues is the jurisdiction of the PLO. Article no. 5 of the nationality government, article no. 6 of the Hamas government, specified that it's the jurisdiction of the Palestine Liberation Organization and my department, the department I had, negotiations in international affairs department, to negotiate.

But I am not undermining the deep wound that we have as Palestinians. What was Israel's excuse before Hamas took over in 2007? We began negotiating in 1991. How come we haven't reached an agreement 'til 2007? What was the excuse the Israelis used not to make an agreement with me before Hamas took over? And I know that this division among Palestinians is really costing us a lot, and I think if you can calculate what Mr. Meridor said, you will understand exactly how this coup is being used now to excuse Israeli settlement activities and *fait accompli* policies, and so on.

Mr. Meridor, you said that Mr. Olmert did not receive a counteroffer. I can tell you, sir, I was in that room, when this map was offered to Mr. Olmert. But then Abu Mazen went on December 18, 2008 to Washington. He met President Bush, Dr. Rice and Mr. Hadley, Steve Hadley, and he left with them the two maps and a matrix of summation of 288 meetings between Palestinians and Israelis on twelve committees, including refugees. I am not here to negotiate permanent status issues, including refugees that was discussed, and of course, we follow international law. That's our guiding principle. We say "just an agreed solution on refugee issues in accordance with one man forward," but at the same time international law doesn't give governments the right to solve refugee problems. It's the choice of the refugee. They have to choose whether they are going to go back to 1948, Palestine, stay where they are, third party. But then at the end of

the day it is going to be agreed with you. We are not going to force an agreement with you, but you cannot cancel my rights on refugees and trade me with another issue. I have whatever international law provided for me as far as Jerusalem is concerned, as far as refugees, as far as water, security, settlements. That's what I mean by a fair agreement.

And as far as the time, time is of the essence and so on, I was referring to, in my other part of the same interview, that Israelis began their negotiating behavior with us in Washington by saying we can't run their education and their hospitals. Then in 1996 they came out with a map of 66%. The *souk* is open. And then before Camp David it was another map of 88% advancing, making concessions, and then, in Camp David they were generous enough to say 92% and then Mr. Olmert came out with equal in size - not the '67 but the size of '67. That is what I was referring to. Who's wasting time? From day one, we entered the negotiations and told the Israeli government we are there to achieve the two-state solution on the 1967 borders, plus agreed swaps. That was my quotation I think if it's put in the -- but there was a Palestinian response, and I believe this response is skipped with President Bush and, as a matter of fact, the Bush administration sent eleven pages and the two maps and the documents to Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much for very brief and very stringent answers to the questions. May I go to the first row here first? Could you please state your name and affiliation, madam?

Raghida Dergham: Yes, I am Raghida Dergham. I'm with Al-Hayat. I really would like to get a straight answer from you, Mr. Meridor. Do you, are you ready, since you mentioned this quite often about the offer of Olmert. Are you ready to put it to the negotiations right now, at least as a starting point? Are you willing to say it categorically, since you just said this is what you want. And why are you so nervous about the Americans being there at the proximity talks? You don't want the proximity talks because the Americans are there, and, like Mr. Erakat, just said, as facilitators. Mitchell is there to watch what both sides are doing. Why are you so nervous about that? And Mr. Erakat, why are you going on this sort of a road show with Mr. Meridor here, the diplomatic road show together when publicly you sit and you fight it out and when you say you are under oath with Mr. Mitchell that you will not reveal what you are talking about. Basically, you are doing open negotiations, the diplomatic dinners you are having. Why are you on this show?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. Actually, so far, it's not the road show. I hope it will become a road show. This is one very unique event and opportunity for you to talk to both parties at the highest level. Now we move to the gentleman in the second row.

Nabil Abi Saab: Nabil Abi Saab, Al Hurra TV station.

Meridor: Al Hurra?

Nabil Abi Saab: Al Hurra. Can we consider this meeting like direct negotiations between you gentlemen. Mr. Meridor, you keep talking about the problem in Gaza with Hamas but you haven't given a good example, and the West Bank, where you still have around 600 check-in points, and the wall, and 10,000 Palestinian prisoners. And Mr. Erakat, what was the American response to your offer you just showed us the map?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. May I -- I am hesitating here now because there is only the Arab media here but I will take the risk. Can we go there? Name and affiliation, please.

Ali Barada: Thank you. I'm Ali Barada from Al Nahar Newspaper in Lebanon.

Meridor: From?

Ali Barada: Al Nahar.

Meridor: Al Nahar.

Ali Barada: Al Nahar newspaper in Lebanon. Mr. Rød-Larsen, would you suggest secret, direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, as you did in Oslo. You played a major role there. For Mr. Erakat, do you categorize the conflict in Jerusalem as a religious, vis-à-vis what Mr. Meridor said about Iran and Hezbollah and Hamas once all of them want a religious war in the region? And for Mr. Meridor, do you believe that the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon should be naturalized in Lebanon? Thank you.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you. I think we will take one more question before we go back to the panel here. But as for the question to me, I am the moderator today so I don't answer questions but I think you can guess the answer to your question. May we move over to the gentleman in the white shirt?

Joe Lauria: Thank you, Joe Lauria from the Wall Street Journal. Mr. Meridor, can you explain why foodstuffs like soft drinks and snacks were ever on a prohibited list going into Gaza to begin with? How could that possibly been a security threat to Israel? And, if you don't mind answering the question about the NPT that my colleague asked, I think we would all appreciate that? Mr. Erakat, the wall or the fence: Has that contributed, in your view, as Israel says, to the reduction of terrorist incidents?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. Saeb, you go first in this round.

Erakat: About two weeks ago, I was the guest at Tel Aviv University. I get invited by many forums, internationally, including Israeli institutes and I go and lecture. With all due respect, this is not a road show. This is a very serious institute that extended an invitation. I came to present my peoples' point of view - the PLO point of view, in open discussion, not secret. I will do it anytime as long as I have the freedom to express my opinion the way I like to express it. And I appreciate the fact that Terje invited me and invited Mr. Meridor, too, to exchange opinions in front of you.

This is in no way a negotiation - direct or indirect. This is a lecture, debate or whatever you want to call it. And as far as direct negotiations are concerned, we have never said no to direct negotiations. The minute Israel accepts to resume negotiations where they left in December 2008, and accept to stop settlement activities including natural growth as per their obligation -- and, by the way, this is not a Palestinian condition, this is an Israeli obligation -- we will resume it.

As far as the American response to what we offered in December 18. President Bush asked Abu Mazen to send someone on January 3, 2009 to Washington, and he named me to go, and he asked Mr. Olmert to send someone to Washington on January 3, 2009. Unfortunately, Israel chose to go to Gaza on December 27, and instead of coming to lock in, or initially, what was exchanged,

and this time, we did not hear anyone blaming us because we did that. Unlike Camp David, I was set up in Camp David. There was a set up for me personally. I was asked to see Mr. Clinton and Mr. Ben-Ami and they both asked me to prepare a communiqué in which the communiqué said on the 25th of July that the three sides met and a lot of progress was made, and they intended to continue the negotiations, and we issued the statements. The minute I gave the spin. I was in many press conferences here and then I had Mr. Barak and Mr. Clinton saying that they made Arafat an offer and he said no. Mr. Meridor was there. If you have a copy of this offer, please show it to them. One day I was lecturing in Netanya University and Mr. Barak was sitting in the audience. I told him, Mr. Barak, please stand up and give the people what you offered Arafat. No one can make an offer of such magnitude without handing it over to us. I would like to see the offer made to me at Camp David. And when I asked President Clinton, I said to him: "Sir, you brought Palestinians and Israelis to squares where no person had brought them there before, you turned every possible stone. Why this petty politics? Why do you assign blame on us?" He said I was told if I did not say this, we would not have a peace camp in Israel. Look, I know if it's going to be my word against any of their side, I am dead. But that's the truth. We were both in Camp David. We were both in Camp David, and we both made genuine efforts but then there was no offer to speak of. Actually, the offer came on December 23 when we met in the White House with President Clinton, and he dictated to us the text of the "Clinton Parameters."

No, I don't consider the conflict as a religious conflict. I'm surprised that Mr. Meridor is saying about Iran, this, that. You know at least these people did not turn God into a land broker, and the point of using God – Judaism, Christianity and Islam is about reconciliation, about healing, about peace, and I think there is a difference between worshiping God and using God. I think the example of Israelis, and this is not the time and subject here, but it is not a religious conflict. Jerusalem came under occupation in 1967 as did Khan Yunis, Rafah, Jericho, and Nablus, and what is applicable in the admissibility of acquisition of territory by force in all these territories is applicable as far as Jerusalem is concerned. We will never ask Palestinians to stand against people's belief and faith. Jews have always lived in Palestine, Christians and Muslims, and we are trying to achieve peace and the state of Palestine will be open to all, and will not be closed in the face to anyone. We will stand tall and proud and dignified in seeking peace and seeking reconciliation and seeking to look forward and not backward.

I believe the fence and the wall has managed to suffocate Palestinians, and is the highest form of terrorism committed against Palestinians. I don't think it contributed to security. It was Abu Mazen's policy upon authority -- one gun, and the rule of law, with the help of the Americans, Europeans, and many, many others who did that but I believe that dictation and the walls did not actually contribute anything to security. If there's going to be an explosion or reversal, it is because of the dictation and the wall and the settlement.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much Saeb. Dan, you have the floor.

Meridor:

Let me first say that I envy Saeb. I've known him for years. You may want us to hate each other. I don't think we do, I think we like each other quite a lot, and we are courageous enough to speak to each other. We are not afraid. He is not and I am not. So, why the wonder, I don't know. But I envy him – I don't like the road show as well but we are talking to each other, and he's not the only Palestinian I talk to, and there are very few Israelis Saeb is not talking to, so it is not good for the drama. The drama needs a conflict. You create one, there is one, but don't

overdo it. There is talk all the time. There will be continuous negotiations.

I do envy him because he said you might have heard that he goes to Tel Aviv University two weeks ago and he spoke at Netanya College. I wish to see the day where I am invited to speak at An-Najah or Birzeit University. I have not had the honor yet.

Erakat: [Indiscernible]

Meridor: Of course, no problem. I go there, no problem. I'd love to but I'm not sure they are that welcoming as Saeb is to me. But I go back to the questions.

If I created the impression, and I hope I didn't, that we have any problem with Senator Mitchell, we don't. I think Senator Mitchell is ultimately a decent man, I've known him for many years. A decent man and a good-hearted man, and with experience. The fact he didn't proceed much, that here is obvious and we are trying to do something different. Hence the proximity talks. I hope they will succeed. I am afraid they, in themselves, cannot succeed. It cannot substitute decisions that need to be taken on both sides. And I speak from the Palestinian side as I mentioned earlier. And I hope it will be made shortly, and it will cross those bridges that need to be crossed talking through third or fourth or fifth party. We do talk to each other, as you see.

Now Olmert gave his offer, in the name of the government of Israel recently. Our rule is that wherever agreements are signed, they are committing us. We came to power in '96 after the Oslo agreement is signed. We didn't like it. We voted against it. But we said we accept it, because a government cannot renounce agreements agreed to legally by the previous governments. This is about agreements. Offers are coming and going, and offers that were made and not accepted are not binding on the government or even the same government when it comes to decisions in our government. The fact that Olmert offered 100% of the land as was said by Saeb here, and even against what I would have offered, division of Jerusalem, and other things that were unprecedented, there was no reply.

Dergham: [Indiscernible]

It's interesting that Saeb said it was, but in the interview which was very full about this a year ago, something might have happened between. I didn't hear of the offer until this minute -- of the answer or the offer. In all the interviews that he made at Al-Dustour I can give to you, it's all on the network, it's not hidden. It's open. There was no mention of the response by the Palestinians. Everything's there but this. So he might have forgotten it then. He remembered it now. It's okay. I'm not going to doubt. I'm not going to doubt your integrity and your truth-saying as you did to President Clinton. I'm not in that field.

I was asked by the man from Al Hurra—sorry. And the bill about Gaza and this West Bank. I think that in the West Bank the situation is much better now because we removed many of the roadblocks and checkpoints because of the absence of terror. And sitting with Tony Blair some days ago, he told me what he saw there, and how impressed he was with the development of economic situation, the progress in employment, the progress in projects. I don't pretend to say that if you have economic development, the political situation is resolved. No. People will not sell what they think just for money. And not one of these. Important it is, but it's not a substitute for the real negotiations. But it's better now. Can we do more? I hope that with the cooperation of the Palestine Authority

in the West Bank, that we have, I think we can do much more with them. They have projects that they want to promote. When I spoke of bottom-up approach, I think we can do much more. Not now only to alleviate it, but to have a better life. Better life for the Palestinians there is good for us. Not bad for us. We have no interest in the country of seeing people, poor people without employment. Not at all.

Now the lady from Al Nahar, or the man from Al Nahar... you're not a lady, sorry sorry. I don't think that in Jerusalem, the conflict is religious. I didn't say it. I think, on the contrary, that the addition of religious elements make it more difficult. And I think it should be resolved politically, between nations who fight for the same land. You really cannot help but remember something that some of you may not like, but I will quote a religious leader here. Against all that I said, it was the former Pope, John Paul II, when he visited Jerusalem, he said, there's something that I don't want to draw any political conclusion, but he said the following. I quote I think verbatim, I don't remember the exact quotation, he said, "Jerusalem is holy to the three religions, but was promised only to one people." I think he was right. But I'm not going to go to politics. I think he's a religious leader. Oh, you will see the quote. But he spoke religiously and he doesn't bind anybody, not Nasser or anybody else, we should do political thinking and not for religious thinking, not for us.

You asked me about the refugees in Lebanon. It's a serious question. In Lebanon there are several hundreds of thousands of them, three hundred thousand, something like that, people who are refugees. They send refugees from 1948, mostly now descendents I believe by biology, but they are there. Lebanon hasn't given most of them, I mean the Muslims in them haven't been given Lebanese citizenship. I think the Christians have been given Lebanese citizenship, if I remember correctly. In Jordan, it's different. They all got Jordanian citizenship. The solution of the refugees problem is critical, because it is what the PLO was built for, not the territories. There were no territories. Which is why I put emphasis on it earlier. Whether the solution is that Lebanon should give them citizenship, or if some of them want to go to other countries, or to Palestine, when there is a state of Palestine, is their choice, not mine. Not to Israel. Palestine? Okay. Not my problem. We divide the land that we believe is all ours and they believe is all theirs.

MALE SPEAKER: [Indiscernible]

I don't think it's our business. I think it's their business -- the Lebanese' business, the Palestinians' business, but the division of the land into two countries, which is the two-state solution, means that every nation, ours and theirs, should exercise all the rights and hopes and wishes in their territory. Not across borders. This is why I said that the refugees problem is the crux of the matter. This is why I was quite concerned, not to use a tougher term, when I hear from my friend Saeb, and I read from what he said, that he has no right to negotiate the right of refugees. So with whom should I negotiate it? Will it stay hanging over me after there is the agreement? Do we go back to an agreed two-state solution? And then the main problem that brought everything will stay alive? I thought the PLO has a right to say for the refugees what the solution is, and they will be bound by it. If not, we are in deep trouble here. So this is a major issue, and because the whole story began there, when they did not accept '48, not '67. The very existence of Israel was not acceptable. This is why the PLO was built.

And if this is not over, then I find something that I didn't know when I came to New York two days ago. I hope I didn't read correctly.

There was a journalist asking what was the logic in preventing some sort of food—I think it was a wrong policy. I said it openly before this. I think it was legitimate by international law. I can refer to the American Supreme Court judgment on the same issue of whether the blockade can relate only to military or to general support provided that humanitarian level is reserved, but this is not the issue. I don't think it was a good policy. I think we did good that we changed it. It does not mean that we have no problem with imports to Gaza of weapons. You may know that in Gaza now there are about five thousand rockets aimed at Israel. I don't think that this country has five thousand rockets aimed at it. On top of 43,000 rockets from Hezbollah at Israel. All of Israel is covered by those targets, or Israel is targeted by 5,000 rockets, mostly Hamas, some of them Islamic Jihad. And the Iranians tried to get more. So we need to see to it that it doesn't get in. We were in Gaza for practically 40 years. It was bad. We left it all together. We kicked out all the non-Arab, all the Jews out. We left it open. The result was launching rockets at us. We defended ourselves. We had the war in Gaza a year and a half ago. Bad? Why do you do that? Very bad. So we left Gaza. At least not let Gaza be armed again with more and more thousands of rockets that will fall on our heads in the future. So this we tried to do, but doing it on some sort of foods, I don't think was smart, and I'm happy that we changed this policy some time ago.

Well, the wall—you know, when you see the fence, or the wall, in some places, you see how it looks. I'd rather not have it. But I see the results. The fact that there is no terror has to do with many things. One of them -- the fence. It's much harder to cross. It's not impossible, but much harder. But not only this. It has to do a lot with the cooperation that has developed between our security services and the Palestinian security services. If this continues, I think we'll have better chance of success in the negotiations.

Joe Lauria

You mentioned international law. I wanted to ask you whether, if it would have been better off had you waited for that ship to leave international waters and tried to enter Israeli waters. If Israel would have been better off now diplomatically had you waited to see whether that ship was going to leave international waters and enter Israel's waters.

Meridor:

No. The territorial water is not the issue here. We have no territorial water in Gaza. We are not there—it's not our territorial water anyway. The blockade that was decided, that was issued by the previous government of Israel, Olmert and Barak, in the time of the Qassam operation, was declared by international law, in the way it should be declared, and it said if you read, I don't want to take you into international law, this is my profession in a way, I'm a lawyer. I just read recently, I was not an expert on that, the San Remo convention, you see what it says. A blockade can be put by a warring party on another party in times of armed conflict. But everything can be stopped, but you should look into it that the basic humanitarian needs are maintained. You can't block it that far. I think, again, you can ask—I don't want to go into it, it is legally legitimate. Was it smart to do it this way or that way? I think we changed our policy and it was a positive step.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much for, again, very frank, candid and very interesting answers -- sometimes conflicting factually and politically. I will now open up for a new round and looking at the watch, this will be the last round. I will take a bit more than three questions. May I start with the lady down there on the left-hand side?

Jacqueline Spann:

Hello. My name is Jacqueline Spann. I'm the President of Education and Literacy Fund for Africa. My question is directed to Mr. Erakat. I would like to know that in

the future, have the Palestinian people thought about the fact that if Iran does in fact have nuclear weapons, and Israel is engaged in some sort of conflict with Iran, how is that going to affect the Palestinian people? And in addition with Syria, if there is some sort of engagement with Syria, how is that going to affect the Palestinian people? Have they thought about this?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. The gentlemen at the very back. It's you, Craig.

Craig Charney: Hi. My name is Craig Charney. I'm pollster and consultant for IPI. My question's also for Mr. Erakat. Last year, here at IPI we did a poll that showed most Palestinians favored the two-state solution, as you do. It also showed, though, that about a third of them would support continued resistance even after an agreed two-state solution was fully implemented. That's an awful lot of people to plant bombs, fire rockets, or help those who do. How would you keep them under control in the event of a solution?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. On the left hand side there? Could you please state your name?

David Michaels: David Michaels from B'nai B'rith International. Two quick questions for Dr. Erakat. The first one, Dr. Erakat, you mentioned that the Palestinians have fulfilled all of their obligations, and in particular, you referenced more than once the occupation since 1967, specifically, and the acceptance by the PLO and the PA ostensibly of co-existence with Israel based on the '67 borders. And my question relates to incitement, particularly incitement in Palestinian press and media, but also other strata of Palestinian society. Incitement to martyrdom, denial of Israel's existence or legitimacy, but particularly demonization of your peace partners or of the other side, and even Jews in particular, more generally. Beyond that, I would ask as the second question, whether you feel that it's constructive for promoting peace and reconciliation to refer to Israeli policies as racist. As based on race, rather than political conflict and very real security considerations when certainly you're aware of those same considerations and in light of the context, where Israel is a pluralistic society relative to the oppressive regimes around it. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. The lady over there.

Shamina de Gonzaga: Hello. Shamina de Gonzaga, World Council of Peoples for the UN. My question is in fact to both of you. I know that we often revere experience, but I'm wondering if all of the experience and painful memories or baggage that you might carry, is that ever a handicap in your efforts? Are you too experienced to come up with new ideas, and are you creating spaces, or can you create spaces for other actors, especially younger people that represent important factions of your respective populations to have a voice in thinking about a way forward?

Rød-Larsen: Do I see any other hands now? No? I see no other hands. Then I will go back to the panel for final remarks. Saeb, would you go first please so that Dan gets the last word in this round?

Erakat: I come from a city called Jericho. It's in the Jordan valley. That's my constituency. Israelis have a GNP per capita, ladies and gentlemen, of 36,000 dollars a year.

Meridor: I wish so.

Erakat: How much do you have? 27,000?

Meridor: 28, 29.

Israel has a GNP per capita of 28,000 dollars. In my constituency in Jericho there is the most poverty stricken refugee camp on earth: Akbar Jaber refugee camp. 700 dollars GNP per capita. Last month, I had to purchase my own water from Jericho. From an Israeli company called Mekorot. They dig the water in my constituency. I had to buy it from them at 75 cents a cubic meter in order to send it to Akbar Jaber refugee camp to drink. This is June 2010, ladies and gentlemen. I'm not creating this story. Sometimes ignoring facts does not mean, sir, they don't exist. I could care less if you are pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian. My world is divided between those who are pro-peace and those who are against peace. It's as simple as that.

And today in the West Bank there are 500 roadblocks. President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, once he wants to go to Amman, he needs to seek permission from the Israeli source of authority up until today. And if the Israeli government thinks that this will last forever, forget it. Time is of the essence. Mahmoud Abbas, Salam Fayyad, Saeb Erakat, we are not born just to be called by their names and authority forever. If by the end of this year, we don't have the two-state solution, you will sweat. You will sweat. And this is not a threat. I'm in no position to make any threats. We have been doing it for 19 years. We have tried everything in the book. We have recognized Israel's right to exist on '67 borders. And I wonder what's the highest form of terrorism? When we as academics, as historians, as political scientists as – I'm a university professor by training. What's the highest form of terrorism? You know what it is? Occupation. And yet some Israelis and some pro-Israelis don't even want to recognize or use the term "occupation" when it comes to occupying the West Bank. Denying facts don't mean they don't exist. And I don't think a Pope or no Pope has the right to turn God into a land broker. God is much greater than this. Judaism is much greater than this. Christianity is much greater than this. Islam is much greater than this. And as far as "refugeeism," it's an issue of permanent status. I said, just an agreed solution with Israel, we ask that question. We asked to begin the negotiations where they left off in December 2008. We did not hear an answer. We asked, is Jerusalem the capital of the state of Palestine? We do not hear an answer. Do you accept the '67 border as the best line for a two-state solution? We do not hear an answer. You say a wall for security. Why do you have to build the wall in the heart of my land? Why can't you build it in your borders? Why can't you build it in the '67? Why does it have to—if every nation, if the United States now thinks that between Arizona and Mexico they must build a wall, and they come and build it in the hinterland of Mexico, this will be unfair. They have a border. They have an international border. They can't build the wall there. But no, for Israel, the wall must be in the heart of the supposed-to-be-called Palestinian state in the future.

The failure in Gaza was not due to peace. The failure in Gaza and Lebanon was due to unilateralism. Bilateralism work, unilateralism failed and failed. And international law, I'm not a lawyer, but I know the hostage case brought to the international court of justice in 1948. When was asked when an occupying power withdraws from a region that's occupied and threatens to occupy this region, do you consider it liberated or under occupation? It was considered under occupation. So Gaza is not only attacked every day, it's sieged, controlled. So the West Bank and Gaza are a single territorial unit under Israeli occupation.

On the humanitarian aspects of things, you know, the first three months of 2007, 36,000 trucks of goods went from Israel to Gaza. The first three months of 2010, 3,600 trucks went there. Gaza requires 8,000 items of goods every day. Israel allows 81 items. I appreciate that Mr. Meridor said he's against such policies, because it's really a very short-sighted policy. You don't use medical supplies and food supplies against women and children and so on.

I believe, as I said about the question concerning Iran and nuclear power, I believe that war is not, should not be an option, should not be even thought about in this region. We need to reach out a peace agreement with Israel through peaceful means, to establish the two-state solution in accordance with international law, the due process agreed between the two parties. And the same thing is applicable to any other conflict in the region. Iran, the problem must be solved diplomatically. Israel is a nuclear power, and this region, sooner or later will witness a competition between nations and so on. We can promise U.S., Palestine will not seek to be a nuclear power. You can take our word for that.

And as far as incitements are concerned, I'm not saying that, I didn't say that we fulfilled our obligations. I said that we are fulfilling our obligations. We carried out all our obligations, because they are ongoing in nature. Our obligations, unlike Israel obligations, Israel stopped settlement activities, naturally grow, one time decision. Israel do this one time. My obligations are ongoing in nature. They will go beyond the establishment of a Palestinian state. So there is, and what we signed with Mr. Netanyahu, an agreement called Wye River Anti-incitement, where the Americans head the committee of Palestinians and Israelis. We have been inviting the Israelis to revive this committee, because we have a lot of cases to present. We have a lot of cases to present, and of course, Israel -- I'm not saying that we don't commit incitement. We're not perfect, by the way, as Palestinians, but I think the highest form of terrorism is the continued occupation.

And I'm sorry that term, racist policies, angered some here. I don't know what to call it. I don't know what's the definition for it. I said that in Tel Aviv University. I said it's shameless. It is shameless. It is shameless, in 2010, there are roads in the West Bank Christians and Muslims cannot use under security pretexts. Never in the darkest hours of South Africa's apartheid were blacks prevented to use roads. You're angry? Do something about it! Ignoring facts don't mean they don't exist. 42 years after a corrupt occupation, yes, it's developing. It's developing towards an apartheid system, and as I told you, and I conclude by saying this: Israel is a country with nuclear weapons, 5,000 tanks, 3,000 planes. If it's my word against any of them in the Congress and the Senate, I'm dead. I don't stand a chance. But Israel has three options, and three options only: number one is a two-state solution, '67. It's doable. It's my option. It's my option, because I believe ethnicity, language, religion has been the classic recipe, and we can do it, and it's doable, and time is for decisions and not for negotiations. Negotiations are over. It's decisions. We haven't heard a word from Mr. Meridor, and we will not hear a word from any of the Israeli government about the baseline '67, is Jerusalem being the capital, or recognition of Palestine on the '67 lines, none of this.

The second option is the one-state solution. If you don't want two states, talk to us! But when I mention this, they look at me and say even Palestinians, you will undermine the Jewish nature of Israel, and Mr. Meridor tried to say a Jewish state, and so on. Look, we were asked to recognize the state of Israel. When I go to Washington, and I see the embassy, it says in front of the embassy of

Israel, it says, "State of Israel." In London, in Paris, in Cairo, in Amman, wherever you go. If Israel will go to the UN and register its name as the Biblical, 5,700 years Hebrew history of Biblical, united, and call themselves whatever they want, we recognize you as you register your name at the UN. But why do I need to define your character? I ask you to recognize me as State of Palestine on the '67 borders, and I recognize you as the State of Israel on the '67 lines. I have yet to hear an Israeli official telling me, face to face, that yes, we recognize you as the State of Palestine on the '67 line. Is this too much after 19 years of negotiations?

The third option, it's what's happening in the West Bank today. It's a growth of an apartheid system. Believe me, Mr. Meridor has not been to the West Bank maybe for the last 10 years. They don't know what takes place on planet West Bank. They don't want to see. Ignoring facts mean they exist... they don't exist. It's time to end this occupation. It's time to make decisions by the Israelis. I hope and pray that the Israeli leaders will move in the direction of making the required decisions, to recognize a state of Palestine on the '67 lines. We are there to stay, and we have no options but to stay, and we will stay. There has been 78 attempts since 1917 that did nothing but to undermine my existence. Some Israelis even said Palestinians don't exist at one point. Now, time is of the essence. You have a Palestinian leadership headed by Abu Mazen, who have recognized Israel's right to exist on the '67 lines, and I hope to hear, before the end of this session, a sentence from Mr. Meridor telling me that he recognizes the Palestinian state on the '67 lines. If he says that, history will be made today. Thank you very much.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Saeb, for that passionate plea. What answers we will hear, Dan, you have the floor.

Meridor:

Thank you. I must say that I'm of the opinion that tough rhetoric will not and should not substitute clear vision of reality, and accusations that have no foundation will not help the Palestinians to get anywhere. First thing one needs to do is to recognize reality and then move from there.

It's quite strange to hear of apartheid from people who says everybody has a right to build in the West Bank provided he's not Jewish. This is okay. Everybody can build in Jerusalem if it's not Jewish. This is okay. To say that people cannot live in a certain place because they are Jews is fine. So to speak of apartheid is really, it's very popular in some circles, but it's somewhat strange.

I don't know what is the Palestinian position. I heard now, today, the 25th of June, 2010, a statement, "time is of the essence." On 25th of June last year, I just quoted from the same person, "why should we hurry?" Which is the Palestinian position? Time is of the essence? Or why should we hurry? Left open. I heard that there is an agreement to a swap of land. That will say, it *won't* be the '67 lines. It was something different. So which is the position? '67 lines or swap of land? Left open. I heard negotiations are over. But still, we want to negotiate. So I must say that even good rhetoric cannot reconcile these conflicting statements coming so quickly, one after the other, with very potent rhetorical power. But it troubles me, because I don't know what is the position there. They don't want to negotiate, because negotiations are over, so why do you call me to negotiate? Why do you want the Olmert offer if you don't want to negotiate it, because negotiations are over? If you want to negotiate, why do you say it's over? Why do you say not in a hurry and then say time is of the essence? I can't understand. Why do you speak of apartheid when you don't let people dwell in a certain place because they are Jews? It's in a way, strange.

Or more than that. So I heard here that Lebanon withdrawal failed because it was unilateral – interesting -- and then I heard that there, that Saeb is against occupation. We'll be occupying Lebanon for 18 years after we have been attacked from there. Lebanese government, under the pressure of Hezbollah, was not ready to negotiate any settlement. So because he's against unilateralism, his position is to stay and occupy there, because there was no way to get an agreement. So what is the position? That if you can't get an agreement, stay an occupier indefinitely, until Mr. Nasrallah will say okay? Or that even you can't get an agreement, you get out because you don't want to be an occupier, which is what we did? So I must say that the two statements are very strong, very convincing, only one is just the opposite of the other. It's the problem we have in the negotiations all the time, that we have things, and the opposite of these things, and we are accused of not agreeing to both of them. It won't work this way. If we want to get an agreement, we need to be more sincere and stick to a certain position, be ready to compromise if one needs to on both sides, but be serious about it.

Unfortunately, I haven't heard a thing here on the most crucial of all issues which I mentioned earlier. On refugees, there are two issues here, one I quoted here: The Palestinian chief negotiator saying we have no right to negotiate the right of return of the refugees. They will have to make a choice, and they have the right both to return and to compensation. At the same time, we hear that if we negotiate, we will agree. Are you allowed to agree? It's not a minor issue. It's more important than even the exact delineation of the border, which is a problem, but we can agree on this. It's more important even than the security arrangements that are very important, because this raises the main question: are we speaking about the results of the war in '67 when we were engulfed by all countries saying they want to destroy us, and we won? Or are we speaking about '48, about the very existence of a non-Muslim, non-Arab, Jewish state with equal rights to all the citizens, including Arabs? Is that the question? If it's '48, there's no agreement. If it's how to resolve '67, what exactly the borders should look like, what the security arrangements, it's still difficult, but I think it can be done, if the Palestinian leadership will do what Israel has done. We will be there. What has Israel done? Our public was divided half and half for decades between those who said we don't want a Palestinian state altogether. It's all our land historically, it's our security, it's our life, it's all our memories, we will be there. And the other half said no, give away most of it and make peace. Now in every poll, you see in Israel, 80%, 75% saying two states. We understood this is the only way out. A state for them, a state for us. That means that this land that we believe sincerely is all ours, and they believe it's all theirs, will be divided. Division all through, to leave the conflict open by saying two states, but refugees are to be discussed later, means there's no end to the conflict. If there's no end to the conflict, we're in a different world altogether. This takes courage. It's not easy. Very few Palestinian leaders were ready to say openly, refugees will not go to Israel. One that I will mention here, Professor Sari Nusaiba from a highly respected Jerusalem family said it and says it day in, day out. Others don't say it. It's not a minor issue. It's not a negotiating position. The very renitence to cut the land into two, which is, let me say, difficult for both sides, is accompanied by the understanding the future is in two states, not in cross-borders claims, which will make the whole agreement a mockery. So I raise it again, because I read it and I heard it again and again. This is an issue we can't resolve. We're not allowed to resolve, added by the fact that recently, Hamas says, "We speak for the Palestinian refugees, not you!" So one can say it's one territorial unit. Can Mr. Abbas or my friend, Dr. Erakat go to Gaza, yes. Can he get out alive? I hope so. I wish we'll stop the rhetoric and be serious about what we do and take reality as it is and look for the possibilities. It is possible to move ahead, bottom-

up to a more Palestinian state from where we are now, up the road. It's possible to negotiate everything cautiously, seriously. It takes courage and leadership. I hope it will be shown at our neighbors as well. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. The Palestinian, Israeli, and Arab, and the Israeli-Arab conflict is one of the most difficult, one of the most violent, one of the most bloody and deadly conflicts on the globe, and maybe the only one who has the potential to inflame the whole globe and not only the region. Yet we've had here at the International Peace Institute two of the people who are leaders at the very front line of this conflict arguing their case passionately, persuasively, honestly, and I'd say courageously, and I was also just about to say, and with restraint and very well mannered. And I think that speaks volumes about the personalities about the two gentlemen who are flanking me here about character, about their personality, and I think that in itself gives hope for the quest for peace. I'd like to ask you to give them a big round of applause with a wish for encouragement and good luck.

Meridor:

And applause to Terje as well, of course.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you all.