



A New Accord for Israel and the Palestinians?

Chair:

Terje Rød-Larsen, President, International Peace Institute

Speakers:

Yasser Abed Rabbo, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), co-architect of the 2003 Geneva Initiative

Yossi Beilin, former Minister and Knesset Member, co-architect of the 2003 Geneva Initiative

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TRANSCRIPTION

Terje Rød-Larsen: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, good afternoon everyone. On behalf of IPI and the Mission of Switzerland, which is co-hosting this policy forum, I am delighted to welcome you all today. And of course I'm particularly delighted to welcome our speakers, my old and I dare say very old friends, Yasser Abed Rabbo, and Yossi Beilin, the two co-architects of the Geneva Initiative. Yasser is, as you all know, the Secretary-General of the Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee, and a member of the official Palestinian negotiating team. He has also served as Minister of Culture and Information, and he's also held many, many other senior positions, both within the PLO and within the Palestinian Authority.

Yasser was actually one of the first Palestinian public figures to call for historical reconciliation. He has played an instrumental role in the negotiations at Madrid, Oslo, Wye River, Camp David, Taba, Annapolis, and so on and so on. This is why he's here today. We actually met the first time in 1992. I don't know if you'll recall, because we together with the Palestinians and Israeli negotiating delegations, we had been in Paris at Hotel Bristol, this was in August 1993. And we were bringing the result from the negotiations related to the mutual recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and the State of Israel. And the person who received us at the airport was you, Yasser. And I still, in my office, have a picture of Yasser Arafat signing the recognition of the State of Israel. You, Abu Mazen and Abu Alaa are standing behind him together with Foreign Minister Holst of Norway, Mona Juul—who,

incidentally, is my wife—and myself. And after that, every time when I was in despair in my different incarnations in the Middle East and the region, UN, et cetera. I always came to you when the times were darkest, for comfort and inspiration. And this is why you're here today.

Yossi holds a distinguished place in Israel's political life. He has held ministerial positions in the governments of Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Ehud Barak. Yossi's played a key role in negotiating having initiated, and having initiated the Oslo Channel, which led to the Oslo Accords. We had a dinner here yesterday where Yossi was, and I reminded him when we met the first, which was in an Indian restaurant in 1992, where we concocted the start of what became the Oslo Channel in Room 16 at the American Colony Hotel. And the rest is history. So truly, Yossi was the initiator. He has also played an important role in various ways in virtually every single peace initiative that has related to Israel. He also created and led the public movement in Israel for a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, where I had the pleasure of working with Yossi as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy.

Yossi, you have also—ever since 1992—been on the Israeli side where I've come for comfort and inspiration. And this is of course also the reason why you're here today, because we want to hear some inspirational comments related to the topics of the day. Because I believe that Yasser and Yossi are particularly well-placed to comment on the difficult challenges facing the Middle East today, and to offer suggestions for the way forward.

Before we begin, I would like to remind everybody that the meeting is on the record, and is being webcast live. With these words, I will now give the floor for opening remarks to Paul Seger, who is the Permanent Representative for Switzerland, and of course Switzerland is co-hosting this policy forum with IPI. Paul, you have the floor.

Paul Seger:

Thank you very much, Terje, and also a warm welcome from us with the Swiss Mission to the United Nations to this meeting today.

What I sense about the atmosphere here in New York—I have with the impression we diplomats are acting like a herd of deer watching transfixed into the headlights of an approaching truck which is carrying the resolution on Palestine, with regard to United Nations. On news coming up that this resolution will require – will ask – for a membership of Palestine to United Nations, we still don't know the details. What we all tend to forget, from my point of view, is what this is all about; is about finding peace, is about finding a solution where both Israel and Palestine can live together side by side as good neighbors. What we're presenting today is the Geneva Accord of 2003.

And you know, it has come quite a long way since this accord has been launched, with the help, and on Yossi's piece, of the Swiss Government. It has been endorsed, as you know, by international key players and I think it has been contributing greatly to finding a two-state solution. The orbit of the Geneva Initiative has demonstrated with almost scientific precision that the two-state solution is neither a vague concept, nor a mantra, but it is actually a concrete opportunity. This 500-page Geneva Accord details all aspects of a just and reasonable peace that satisfies the legitimate Palestinian aspirations to matter to destiny, while taking into account Israel's security needs.

We must realize that unless progress is made now, we may be faced with a very long-term protracted conflict with no end in sight. This will be very dangerous,

and I'm not sure whether we can afford to wait any longer for the parties to work out a peace agreement under strong international supervision. The parameters defined by President Obama in his 19th May speech are wise terms of reference that we must seize with a sense of urgency. So what we have tried to do today is give a voice to reason, give a voice to common sense, and give a voice to dialogue.

And in that sense, I particularly thank IPI and Terje Larsen for hosting this meeting, and also being the discussion leader of today, and I hope, with you, we'll have a fruitful discussion, which carries us further. Thank you very much indeed.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Paul. I will now turn to our two speakers this afternoon. And to launch the discussion I will ask them a couple of questions. The first question is: what makes the Geneva Accords relevant today? But before I ask that first question, I would like to address the issue of the day. Because we are sitting here now, maybe the weekend before a significant political storm here in Turtle Bay maybe a political hurricane. And my question is: is there still time to find a compromise? Is there still time to find a way out of the mess which everybody thinks we are in this afternoon? I will first give the floor to Yasser.

Yasser Abed Rabbo:

Thank you, Terje, I thank you all for this opportunity, and I believe that the coming week will be a decisive week. Not only concerning the status of Palestine in the UN, but also concerning the whole future of the peace process and the implications of that on the region as well. We are living historical days in our region, where Arab nations had declared that they do not intend to live anymore under the conditions that they lived, their fathers, their grandfathers lived under for decades. And maybe I would say even more than decades. They want to live in a different world, different society, with totally different aspirations and hopes.

This we witness now, in the Arab world extending from the Atlantic until the Gulf. There are achievements made, but with difficulties—and there are more difficulties to come—but I believe that in 5 years, in 10 years, we will witness a totally different Arab world, where governments and leaders will be accountable to their people, to the voting books, and not accountable only to the interests of their family, of the leading security leaders or services, and accountable in front of this country or that country in the world, but not to their people. This is inspiring us more now, and encouraging us more to look at what should be done in order to save the future of our people. And by saying this also, we think we can save the future of Israel itself. The peace process, or the negotiations which we focused on in the past, I would say 10, 15 years, 20 years now, this option, the way it was led, is crumbling now in front of our eyes.

The world is telling us something we know now and we had already known for a long time: negotiations are the only way. We accept that. We believe in that, and we had practiced that for so many years and Terje had the list of them, and he reminded me of some of them which I had already forgotten, before, after, until today. And I can add to the list so many rounds of negotiations, even recently, which were not declared. And we intended to turn, as they say, every stone, in order to search for an opportunity for saving the negotiations. Because we believe that there's no other option. Today, tomorrow and the past, accept negotiations in order to reach a historical compromise, and the solution where Palestine will live peacefully beside Israel. And what happened is that the conditions on the ground are becoming more and more complicated. We might witness, in few years to come, a situation where all what we are talking about,

two-state solution, et cetera, is becoming impossible. Not because we don't want it, but because the conditions themselves will tell us that you are bad dreamers then.

The changes occurring underground in the West Bank is dividing, slicing the West Bank through those crawling settlement activities. It's happening, and I don't want to go into the details of that, but if these conditions will prevail for few years coming, then all what we are talking about, the two-state solution will vanish. This chance will disappear. And then we should look for another option, which I don't know what it is. Don't ask me what could be that option; I don't know what it is.

My focus, our focus was on finding the way to implement the two-state vision and this was our main effort when we started in very, very difficult days together, Yossi and myself, the attempt which reached at the so-called Geneva Accord. We started maybe after Taba, after the changes that had occurred in Israel politically and in the Palestinian Authority as well. And everybody felt at that moment that it is not possible. We tried to prove the opposite. And we had a different approach at that time that we shouldn't prove it by just focusing on the two golden themes or slogans that are used today as well, "Negotiations are better than no negotiations," and the "two-state solution" in a vague way. No, we tried to focus on having a concrete plan for implementing the two-state solution. Concrete, credible, possible. And that's why we still believe in that. I don't know about Yossi, but I think at least he is among the few Israelis who are still carrying that hope. I still believe in that. But I can tell you frankly that I'm afraid that this feeling, this hope, might disappear.

So, today, either we find a different approach to save the process... the approach is based on one simple thing: if the world will leave us Palestinians and Israelis to negotiate alone without any positive interference, or with the minimum of interference, we are doomed, we will not reach anywhere. The conditions will worsen more and more, and the disaster is just in front of us, one step ahead of us.

What we need is a more effective role by the international community, by the whole world, so that we will return back to negotiations on a more credible basis. We will return to a more genuine political process; a political process with the minimum of credibility and minimum of guarantees that it will lead within a certain time framework to the implementation of the two-state solution.

I don't want to say anything how we think about Netanyahu and his government. Maybe I'll leave it to Yossi, okay? But with this government, our experience had proved that we will not go anywhere. They want to waste time to gain time in order to achieve their strategy. And the strategy is based only on one thing: the continuation of the settlement activities, the crawling annexation of territory, and imposing facts underground that will make it difficult – not only for the world, but for any future government – to be a serious partner in a historical peace deal with us.

So this is the moment where we want the world to interfere. How, you might ask me. I'll go into the Security Council, to the General Assembly, in just a few days now after our meeting. My answer is: I don't know. We will address the UN. We might go to the Security Council first, we might go to the GA first, I don't know. This we might decide the last moment, the last hour. It will depend on what is the right path that will allow the international community to stand firmly in support of a serious peace process. The international community had told so many leaders

and governments in the region that the game is over. It's over. We need this message to be conveyed to us, Palestinians and Israelis, that the game is over. We should sit together. The parameters are very clear but they should be adopted by both sides, not by one side. If we speak about '67 borders as a basis, and this was mentioned lately. The last thing we heard about it by President Obama, and we heard the kind of rejection to it in a glorious meeting that took place a few days after in the Capitol Hill, which was receiving Mr. Netanyahu, and what he said was a rejection – not to our demands – what was a rejection to the invitation of starting negotiations on the basis of '67 borders.

We need to have a starting point, and we need to have a more effective international wall. This is the issue of today, and that's why the world should intervene and tell the Israelis, tell us, tell everybody in the region, and tell them that the game is over. We should start the process, start the negotiations. These are the borders; these borders can be swapped and modified by negotiations and agreements between the two sides. And this is what we did, by the way, in Geneva Accord. And all the core issues should be addressed in these negotiations for a time limit which is one year.

By the way, we had defined this time limit last year that it will end by the opening of the General Assembly this year, and that Palestine is recognized as a Member State by the international community, because the international community is intending to tell everybody the game is over.

By the way, I want to remind you of something which is...it sounds obvious, maybe. People speak about a crisis between two parties as if we are equal parties, between the Palestinians and the Israelis. For God's sake, they are the occupiers, and we are the people under occupation. We are not equal. We will never be equal until the occupation ends. We are the weaker side. And when we address the international community, it is because the international community had always intervened, in all cases in history, in modern history, to enable the people under occupation to arise relatively to the same level of the occupier. And that's what we intend to do, bluntly. The game is over, but parts of the old game are still necessary; mainly the negotiations. The other part where you go together, played the game together, is not any more viable. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Yasser, for that very candid intervention. Now the floor to you, Yossi, to address the same issues. It's kind of strange here, because with the Geneva Initiative, these two gentlemen are actually sharing exactly the same political platform. So it's very interesting to listen to the dialogue between you, given that fact. And I would also point out that negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis have been lying down for the past, broadly, four years. And here we have two of the key players sitting in New York and very frankly discussing the issues. Yossi, the floor is yours.

Yossi Beilin:

Thank you very much. And thank you for your kind words. I believe that the issue of bringing the Palestinian draft resolution, which has not apparently been prepared yet, or many drafts have been prepared but not a final version, is a done deal. I'm afraid that there is no real realistic way to do something big enough in the coming days in order to divert it to something very different.

It is a kind of a tragedy because nobody is happy. It's not that the Palestinians are so eager to get the UN resolution and that is their dream, because they know that the morning after it will be the same. 40% of the West Bank and the Israeli occupation will not disappear as a result of it, and frustration might increase. And nobody knows. Nobody knows what might be the ramifications. The Israelis are

worried about violence. It was the Minister of Defense Barak who spoke about that tsunami. But the effects are already there. I mean, what we are seeing in the Arab world, in Egypt, in Jordan, what we are seeing in Turkey do have some connection to this frustration. We are paying a price. United States doesn't want to be the small minority in the UN, voting in a way which will be understood as anti-Arab vote, when it has to leave Iraq and has to leave Afghanistan. This is the last thing that they would like to have. And Europe is worried about an appearance which will be totally divided. There will be apparently states which will vote for it and against it and abstain. And Europe doesn't want to find itself in such a big issue, so much divided. So if there is a solution – go out of the box – it might help everybody.

Right now I think that if there is something, it might be drafting the resolution in a way that either Israel can vote for it, which will change everything immediately, for all the participants, or that at least a majority of Israelis – it won't be easy to judge, but we know more or less according to the public opinion polls what are the views – can identify with it. It can become a very important resolution, not only for the Palestinians but also for the Israelis. I mean, other than saying the '67 *mutatis mutandis* is going to be the border, to say that this is going to be the permanent solution between Israel and Palestine.

Referring to Jerusalem, for example, it is one thing to say if Jerusalem would be the capital of the Palestinian State, and hoping that wise people will understand what does it mean for Israel, and another thing is to say clearly that Jerusalem, West Jerusalem, will be the capital of Israel. That for 63 years, no country recognized our capital. And the one which did, did not move its embassy to Jerusalem. So if we can have something which will benefit both sides, this might become a very different story. And here we are not speaking necessarily about changes on the ground, evacuation of settlements and whatever; the people believed that it is so difficult, I don't think so, but okay. It is a bridge of worlds. I mean, the English dictionary is so big, full of words.

You know, some of us here have been to this world. I think that we know what are the words which might make people happy, and not necessarily to provoke the other side. Now, I must tell you what I heard yesterday. For me it was mind-boggling, that the American Ambassador to the UN is telling that the United States is not going to be involved with drafting the resolution. You know, while I understand perhaps the motivation; they are against the resolution so they are not going to play with the words. But this is not the policy which is needed. I do believe that one can suggest many ideas, and I can also tell you a secret: people are trying to do this. And this is my hope. This is my hope still, because it is very difficult to know what will happen on the day after.

Now, I believe that the biggest mistake is that the world relates to the resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine as if we had Rabin and Arafat as leaders of their respective peoples, with big majorities for peace, and the only problem is to find the right solutions. They are searching for solutions badly. How are we going to divide Jerusalem? How are we going to solve the very delicate issue of the Palestinian refugees? What are we going to do with the borders? And here comes the world and says, "Kids, sit together. You will find a solution. If you want us to help you, no problem. And you also have the Geneva Initiative, which solved everything for you.

You know, our big luck is that there is no competition in the market. There is not something like the Geneva Initiative with all these 500 pages of annexes and details which is competing with us. There is no other group of Palestinians and

Israelis who are not necessarily the last people in their peoples, who sign such an agreement. So everything is in place!"

No. Nothing is in place. We are not in the '90s. We are in another era, if I may say so regretfully. We are after the assassination of Rabin, after the death of Arafat. The two peace camps were defeated. Hamas won in Palestine. Right-wing governments are ruling Israel since 2001. This is a very different situation.

So I mean, I agree with Yasser that if the world says to us, "Sit together, sit together, you can find a..." You know? I remember what happened in '95, I believe, when the Israeli negotiator, Uri Savir, and the Palestinian negotiator, Abu Ala, sat together, it was in Taba or in Eilat, on the interim solution which was signed in September. And it was in a hotel there, and suddenly Dennis Ross entered the room. So immediately they decided to hide the papers under the table. And he asked, "What's going on?" And they said, "No, you know, this problem is this guy's not going to help us, he doesn't know how to work. To everything he says no. I mean, this is the way." And he left. And they burst into laughter, took back the papers and ended the job. This is not the situation today.

Rabbo: No, it's the situation –

Beilin: Dennis is still out.

Rabbo: Dennis is back.

Beilin: Yes. Dennis is back. Yes. No comment. But...no, I really didn't say anything. No comment. But this is another situation. You have a government in Israel today which is not a partner for a permanent solution. It doesn't mean that it is not a partner. It might be a partner for something else, not for a permanent solution.

And my demand is, don't expect this government to do this, because it will do whatever possible in order to run away from it. It was not elected to have a permanent solution. It was not elected to have a Palestinian State. The fact that Netanyahu referred to a Palestinian State with all the reservations and the restrictions was a big surprise. But he ran on another ticket. One should take it seriously, one should respect it. This is Israeli democracy. And to impose on him something that he is not going to do—I'm telling you, it is not maybe he changed his mind in his second term or something like this, I can tell you.

I appreciate Netanyahu. I think that he is a very able person. I'm his political rival, far from dismissing him. And I also appreciate his ideological motivation. He is not there to divide Jerusalem, okay? Without the division of Jerusalem, there is no permanent agreement. This is obvious. So this will not happen. And the big question is whether we Palestinians, Israelis, peace camps, are ready to take it into account and to say, "Okay, let's go for the second phase of the roadmap." We are all committed to it; it is also part of the Geneva Initiative. It needs a vision for the Palestinians and a timetable for the Palestinians, but then you can do something at least.

You have to take into account the victory of Hamas is also something. And it is not that Abu Mazen can tomorrow easily bring Hamas or Gaza to the table. So even if I had been in charge of the Israeli policy, my policy would be to go immediately to Abu Mazen, because he is really a unique person – and I don't think that after Abu Mazen there will be another Abu Mazen – and strike a deal with him according to the Geneva Initiative, immediately. To be implemented first

in the West Bank. Gaza, I'm afraid, is not available for us. So this is another reason why it is impossible to speak like we spoke in the '90s.

And this is the suggestion. I mean, I'm saying two things. Immediately now in the coming days, try to phrase or re-phrase the resolution that it will not be an anti-Israeli resolution and this might change everything. Maybe it is difficult, maybe it is impossible. I don't believe that it is impossible. Later on, this resolution may become the vision for the Palestinians; good enough in order to negotiate on the Palestinians taking provisional borders. Then once the state is there, bring it to the Security Council to recognize it as a Member State, and then negotiate with the new state about the permanent solution, knowing that if we speak about the current government in Israel, regretfully, it might take time.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much, Yossi. We have now two very candid and very provocative interventions. Before I open the floor, Yasser, I would just ask you one question: Is the Geneva Accord still relevant? Is it still a useful tool? In a nutshell.

Rabbo: If I believe in anything which is still relevant, it should be the Geneva Accord, frankly. So many things I don't believe in anymore, but Geneva...as I said... Danny... it's a vision, it's an approach, although it is a very detailed solution. It's a vision and approach which was based on a very pragmatic basis. Meaning that we put aside the ideological approach, we put aside the conflict between the two stories, historical stories. We didn't ask – one side didn't ask the other – to forget about his historical story. And we tried with this very difficult approach to find practical and pragmatic compromises for all the difficult and thorny issues: the refugees, Jerusalem, borders, security, et cetera.

And by the way, I know that it had motivated, maybe, some people in Israel who were in power at that time, to ask for some kind of evacuation of Gaza, at least. Because maybe they thought at that time that Geneva had filled a vacuum. And nobody has any other alternative to this approach. So it might gain more and more credibility, and by this way, they will be cornered. So one reason – I don't say it was the only one – but one reason that motivated Sharon, and I know it by reading about it...was what happened in Geneva.

Beilin: He said so in *The New York Times*.

Rabbo: Exactly.

Beilin: That's what he said.

Rabbo: Exactly. Until today, I didn't see anything, as Yossi had said, replacing Geneva. We hoped there will be something of that kind. I mean, it's not that we're pleased with our monopoly or whatever it's called. See, we hope there's something more credible, more pragmatic, more...with imagination, that will fill the vacuum. Because the vacuum is not a theoretical one, is not an imaginary one; the vacuum, which is still existing, is costing a lot of sacrifices until today. And we want to put an end to that.

Rød-Larsen: Very clear words. Before I open the floor, I would like to recognize a very special person that's with us here today, namely Sir Brian Urquhart, who actually – for those of you who don't know – was the second employee in the United Nations. And he has worked in senior positions for every single Secretary-General until the last one. Sir Brian celebrated his 90th birthday in this very room a few years ago.

And Sir Brian has been involved in every single issue related to the Middle East in the UN since the inception of the United Nations. So we have the person here with first-hand knowledge. And for those who don't know and may not have been in the holding room of the Secretary-General, the room is called Sir Brian Urquhart Room, in recognition of his influence as being the head of what today are both the Department for Political Affairs and the Department for Peacekeeping Operations. Sir Brian, we are proud to have you with us.

May I now open the floor please? I see the first hand coming up in the back there. A well-known face.

Benny Avni:

Yes. Benny Avni of *New York Post* and Israel Radio. With all due respect to the Geneva Accord, which was signed between one member of the Palestinian Authority and one non-member of the Israeli government, there are signed agreements between Israel and the Palestinian authorities, including the Oslo Accords for which the two of you are responsible. There are those who say that by going to the United Nations today, you're violating the provisions of the Oslo Accords. And from the tone of what you're saying, you're basically saying this process cannot continue the way it does because two sides are unequal, the Israelis are not ready, the Palestinians are not ready, and so forth. So, how can we trust signed agreements if this one is violated, if indeed you agree that this is a violation?

Rød-Larsen:

So we'll take two more questions before we go back to the panelists. Any other questions or hands? I can see a hand over there.

Naureen C. Fink:

Naureen Chowdhury Fink, International Peace Institute. My question relates to the timing. We know, and you've spoken at length, about the number of negotiations that have taken place, but there are, continuously, generations being born now in the region that don't recall peace, and peace is not a compelling vision for them to come back to the table. So my concern is, you say that after leaders like Abu Mazen, we may not have anybody who's even willing to entertain the notion of peace in negotiations. So to what extent is this timeline putting some pressure on politicians, and how do you think we can manage this timeframe? Thank you.

Terje Rød-Larsen:

There is a hand at the very back on my right-hand side.

Raghida Dergham:

Yes, I'm Raghida Dergham of Al-Hayat and happy birthday, Sir Brian. Yossi, you say that the language will make a difference, that if a resolution says to recognize West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Did you mean to leave it at that, or did you mean to say, "And East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine?" I don't know if you meant both together.

Beilin:

It should say that. Geneva says that.

Dergham:

All right. So, do you think that really would be a way to solve the problem, to get the Israelis to accept? Because you then contradicted yourself and, at least as I heard you, sorry if I mistook you, misunderstood you, but you then say the Prime Minister will not accept to touch Jerusalem. He does not want a permanent solution. He's elected, and it's a democracy of Israel. So then, why are we going to just keep on playing with the words, if the bottom line is that the Israelis elected a Prime Minister who does not want this deal to work or to happen, and why isn't that an Israeli problem, not the world's problem?

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. I will ask you to address the views and the questions first, Yossi.

Beilin:

Question about going to the UN is breaching the Oslo agreement. The Oslo Agreement is against unilateral steps taken on the ground. And one can interpret this decision as a violation of the Oslo Agreement. It's not a direct one, but indirectly it is not an unreasonable interpretation. I think that it is not the only one. For example, building settlements is also something which is breaching the Oslo Agreement. It is even more on the ground than a resolution in the UN. And I believe that both parties did breach the Oslo Agreement. Both parties, by the way, are having a nice list of breaching the agreement by the other side. Usually we did not list our own faults.

Now, imagine that one does not do something like this. Because we have an agreement, this is the Oslo Agreement, and we don't change anything. For how long? For how long? Hundred years? Two hundred years? There is...the limit is already May the 4th, '99. Apparently it will not happen. So one cannot say we keep the status quo, which is—let us say—in the Israeli view of at least some of us, in our benefit, for as long as we wish. Because if there is a government which doesn't want to negotiate, so it will keep the current situation, continue to build settlements, and the Palestinians cannot do anything because it is not...it is against the Oslo Agreement. Something is problematic here. It cannot be accepted, rationally.

So there might be lawyers who will say, "Yes, you are breaching the agreement," and the government of Israel will decide to take sanctions against the Palestinians and will not give them their money that they deserve because of their customs. And they will prove in a legal way that it's okay. But in practice, you cannot keep it anymore. You cannot demand that something like this will not happen.

Because, what is the situation? I mean, it is quite bizarre. You have a Palestinian leader who is a man of peace. I can testify for it. He is really for the Geneva Initiative; he is really for the Oslo Agreement. He is the one who is behind many, many agreements. You even perhaps know about our bilateral agreement from '95. He doesn't believe that it is in the interest of the Palestinians not to have peace with Israel. He is not doing it because he likes me, because this is his national belief.

Now, he is committed not to use violence, and he was the one who stood against Yasser Arafat and said, "The second Intifada is stupidity." And, you know, everybody knew it, and he paid his price. He paid his price, without getting into details. And then he goes to his people and says, "Okay. I'm for peace. Don't use violence. And about negotiations, I'm sorry but I know that there is a government in Israel which is not ready for a permanent solution." What do we want him to do? The UN is not his preference, this is his outlet! The last thing that is needed now is to come with lawyers and tell him that he is breaching the Oslo Agreement. What are we going to benefit out of it?

Now, about the question of the passing time, it is in the eyes of the beholder. There are those who believe that every minute which passes strengthens the Israeli hold on the territories. Every hour, every day, every week. And there are those who say that we are hurting ourselves every minute that we are still there. I mean, the last thing that I need is to occupy Yasser Abed Rabbo. It's really—I mean, for people like me, it is inconceivable. Why should we have this problem? Why should we be the holders of the Zone C and prevent him from going from

one area to another? Why? So, it is not that everybody understands that time is against him or her. It depends. The peace camp on both sides believes that we are losing time. And the other side, on both sides, believes that we are gaining time.

Now, the last thing about West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem. If it became that the resolution in the UN became a big deal, and this is a success of PR, which I respect, I don't know whether the Palestinians themselves appreciated what kind of a big deal they were creating by going to the UN, because as you know, the UN took already several resolutions without big fuss. And they were not in favor of Israel. So now it is a big deal. The whole world is looking at this resolution. Maybe, despite of what I'm saying, there is no resolution which will get the support of the Israeli current government. But it is not only the government. It is a big peace camp in Israel. You can look at the polls on both sides. 65% agree to the Clinton parameters, to the Geneva parameters, you name it. In winter less, in summer more, but it is around this number.

Now, they also deserve something. If the Palestinians are going to the UN with a very...with something which is seen as a very negative resolution, because they have a majority, even for a very negative resolution. I believe that we are going to lose or to offend part of the Israeli public opinion. And the Israeli public opinion is a very important component of our story.

So what I'm saying is, try. First of all, try to convince the government of Israel to support it. But if this is not the case, don't forget the Israeli public opinion.

Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. Do you have any comments to your partner in peace?

Rabbo:

Yes, I have some comments. First of all, about the question related to the Oslo Agreements. Yanni, look, I like some Israeli questions when they are based on one major issue: respect, legally, word-by-word, all agreements signed. And focus on this. So I take it as a positive question, and positive remarks. They want us to respect Oslo. Oslo says that no steps or measures should be taken on the ground that will pre-judge or undermine the outcome of the final status negotiations. I don't know if this attempt at the UN is considered among these kinds of violations, but I'm sure that the settlement activities were meant by this Oslo statement. I'm sure of that. Hundred percent. This was the explanation at that time.

Anyway, and Oslo, the other thing was supposed to be a five-year process, where by the end of the five years we should have concluded the final status negotiations. And now we are in the...18th year of Oslo? Okay. Anyway, this is another story. So please, if the story is let us all be committed to all signed agreements, I would say welcome. Let's go for it. That's what we want, by the way. That all signed agreements...we are not very excellent in PR. I should confess it, if this big noise is occurring. But what had driven us to take this path is the deadlock and the deadlock will not stay as a deadlock, it will have its own consequences, which means that the deadlock will lead to blocking the possibility of a two-state solution--that's a minimum--and will block the main goal of Oslo Agreements, which is to have a settlement, historical settlement. It didn't say by that exactly, but it said that the two sides should sit together and in five years should conclude and put an end to this conflict. Where we are now? Are we here today because the Palestinians are addressing the UN? How many agreements we made in the past years? How many of them? How many international accords or projects or whatever we heard about? The last one was the American road

map. And I don't think that we were behind undermining that road map to be implemented.

The worst thing that could be done today is to say that what could replace the UN is a statement by the Quartet. Another statement by the Quartet? How many statements were issued by the Quartet in the past three, four years? And what was their effect on changing the conditions on the ground, and on the negotiations themselves to make them more credible? Zip. And the Quartet started to make statements and nobody paid attention to them. We didn't reject any of these statements. If there were rejections they came from the Israeli government; this Israeli government, at least. So the last moment to say that the Quartet should rush -- to do what? To do what? When we demand that at least freeze the settlement activities, they say it's impossible. If freezing the settlement activities is impossible, withdrawing from East Jerusalem will be...less difficult? It's impossible because of the constituency of Mr. Netanyahu and his government, et cetera.

And there's a list of arguments, and some of them are reasonable, yes. But reasonable from one angle alone; it's the angle through which the occupier is looking at the conditions on the ground, and he wants to increase these conditions, and worsen them more in order to create facts on the ground that are not possible to be changed in the future. That's it. This is the conclusion we're each at. Now, what are we basically demanding? That the UN will recognize a Palestinian state. What does it mean? How do you cash it? We are telling, and our president was telling our people today, two hours ago, "Don't think that this will lead our delegation to come back home carrying the Independence Declaration, or Independence document in their hands." We know. Every single Palestinian knows this. But it will lead politically as a signal. And even as a symbol, in a symbolic way, it will lead to one main thing: to give the negotiations process a kind of an ultimatum.

You two parties have to proceed. The parameters of '67--and this means the establishment of a Palestinian state--the world is behind establishing a Palestinian state. Not only in a symbolic way, but next year, maybe in a more credible and more concrete way. Do it now and start the process now. Because in that, if there will be a message, Yossi, to the Israeli public, it's not that we give the Israeli public a kind of false hope. We don't intend to do that. We want to give the Israeli public a very credible and obvious outlet. '67 is an outlet not for us, for Israel, because how Israel is going to face a scenario, a situation? And this was your nightmare as it was my nightmare.

In ten years' time, in twenty years' time, they will have Greater Israel. And the ideological dreams of Mr. Netanyahu and his alliance will be fulfilled. But what are you going to do in Greater Israel when you have two equal nations? Equal in number, even? If not, one nation is exceeding the other in number. What are you going to do then? How are we going to face these conditions? I don't want to see that. Maybe I will not live, even, to see that. But I don't want my children, my grandchildren to face that. To face the threat of an endless conflict that might lead into more bloodshed, more sacrifices...for what? Because Israel wants to grab a small piece of land here, small piece of land there, small piece of land here, it's more...and to gather us into a kind of isolation centers in centers and islands inside our territory? That they can dominate and control? And then what? The last thing I would say is we would love to say openly, "We want the '67. We want to end the conflict. We don't want to have one state. We want to love you as neighbors but not living at this same house together. And East Jerusalem is our

capital and West Jerusalem is the Israeli capital." We say it, we say it publicly. And we will not use violence.

We taught, maybe, the Arab world some lessons but now the Arab world is teaching us lessons. Thanks to the technology of the media, our people are witnessing by their own eyes, our youth, young generations, that the Arab revolutions are able to achieve their aims through peaceful means. And when other means are used, it's not their choice. It was not the choice of the Libyan people, by the way. It was the choice of Gadaffi. They tried to keep it peaceful. The whole world was convinced at a certain moment, luckily, that...well, the world has to choose as well, in order to intervene and put an end to a massacre that was threatening the Libyan people. And the other cases you know about.

So we learned, our people learned, that violence is not the way. We cannot, through using violence, reach at our national goals. On the contrary, Hamas is against...by the way, Hamas is not less enthusiastic -- in comparison to Netanyahu position -- they are not less enthusiastic in criticizing our move and our presence here in order to ask for a membership in the UN. Why? Because they wanted to prove year after year, week after...day after day, that our strategy is a false one. It's based on false hopes and ambitions, and false basis. While their strategy is the only serious one that will lead to achieving our national hopes. So they feel that maybe we will achieve some success here, which will prove that our strategy is the real one, and not theirs. So they held...I'm sorry.

The last thing, they held a meeting of the members of our legislative council parliament in Gaza, just few days ago, to denounce our policy going to the UN. And say that this is not credible, this is hope false, this is...no people can support it, et cetera. They prefer, by the way, Netanyahu policy, because it helps them. As I don't want to complete the sentence, I know the conclusion that you all, or some of you all, share and understand how sometimes the extremists on both sides help each other.

Rød-Larsen: Thank you once again, Yasser, for your clarity, but also for your passion. Now we have several hands here I can see. Let us start on the left-hand side, on my left-hand side, third row.

Sherry Alpern: My name is Sherry Alpern. I'm with J Street. I'd like to know from both of you how you feel about the role of the United States at this point. We've heard for so long that peace will never be achieved; negotiations will never be achieved, without the intercession of the United States, with or without Dennis Ross. And I would like to know if you can honestly give us some insights into the US role, its importance now, the relationship with the European Union and the European states, as opposed to the US. We all know that the US Congress has threatened to withdraw funds from the Palestinian Authority, as well as from the UN. What does this all mean to you? How do you feel about the US now?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. We have about 20 minutes left of our time, so I would ask everybody to ask very brief questions.

Rabbo: And brief answers.

Rød-Larsen: I didn't say that necessarily, Yasser. There is a hand over there.

Adi Mahalel: Yes, hello, Adi Mahalel. I would like to ask a question of Mr. Yossi Beilin. You talk about the importance of the Israeli public opinion. It's true that it's a very right-wing government at the moment, but we did see in the course of the summer a

rise of a big social justice movement that was partially inspired by the presence of the uprising in Arab world, and my question is, how do you suggest incorporating this movement which brought 7, 8% of the Israeli public into the States, how do you suggest incorporating them into the pro-peace policies in the peace camp in Israel?

Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much, and thank you very much for your brevity. There is a lady here on my right-hand side.

Naomi Weinberger: Naomi Weinberger, from Columbia University. Mr. Beilin, you mentioned that one possibility would be for the peace camp to embrace, sort of a default option, the second stage of the road map with the idea of a Palestinian state in provisional boundaries, implementing it first in the West Bank. And my question really is to Mr. Abed Rabbo. Initially the PA had accepted the road map, and there's been enormous reluctance to talk about a Palestinian state in provisional boundaries. But the result of the UN resolution will be a Palestinian state under occupation in extremely unsatisfactory provisional boundaries.

So I'm wondering if there's a way to link that language toward the aspirational goal of the '67 boundaries in a way that might be more inclusive of an international initiative, and whether the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas is one of the factors that makes the PA leadership so reluctant to embrace that formula.

Rød-Larsen: Can you please raise your hands again? There was a forest of hands a minute ago. Over there?

Unidentified Woman: Thank you. I'm a student from Columbia University, and this is a question for Mr. Yasser Abed Rabbo. Regarding Hamas, the reason you're saying they're being less enthusiastic, don't you believe it's because the Palestinians in Area C are left behind and the refugees? That's why they're less enthusiastic? Thank you.

Rabbo: Refugees?

Unidentified Woman: The question of the refugees. I mean –

Rabbo: Sorry to ask, I mean, what's the connection between if we go to the UN, it means that we leave – so what is it?

Unidentified Woman: No, I'm not saying...I mean they're being left behind. The question of the refugees is being left behind.

Rabbo: By whom?

Unidentified Woman: By the whole negotiations. It's not being addressed.

Rabbo: Okay.

Rød-Larsen: I saw, I saw one other hand right there. And then I will go back to the panel again.

Rabbo: No problem.

Kwesi Mends: I'm Kwesi Mends, DPKO. My question is for Yasser Abed Rabbo. Looking back, do you have any regrets, or do you regret as a missed opportunity the rejection of Yasser Arafat on the Camp David agreement that...well, that was brokered by Bill Clinton. Because events unfolded so that it really looks like a missed opportunity.

Rød-Larsen: Then I will give the floor to Yasser again to address the questions and views now voiced. Yasser.

Rabbo: Okay. In short, first of all, concerning the second phase of the road map, well, we didn't see that the first phase was implemented in order to move towards the second phase. And the whole thing had exploded at that time. And then, in a very selective way, we see people saying, "Well, maybe in the second phase of the road map we will find an element in order to overcome the deadlock that we are facing." Whether it's included in the road map, it's not included in the road map.

And by the way, in the road map, it's included as an option. Well, let's not deal with things in abstract, and try to search for some legal cover for our abstract option. We don't need that. Let's sit at a table where there's recognition as it was stated in the road map – and by the way, not as an option – saying that the aim of the process is to put an end to the occupation that started in '67. And then when we sit at the table, we might look for options like trying to find a way for withdrawal of the occupation in stages for a certain period of time.

By the way, this was suggested in Geneva itself to have a staged process. We might have so many creative ideas, but I cannot say that we – at least I'm talking about myself, because I'm in a different position than Yossi, I'm not responding to what he said – I sit here and say, "Well, I choose among all the elements in the agreements this or that." And then on what basis this process will begin, will start? On what basis? And what will be the aim, the goal of it? And this gap the road map tried to fill, you see, so this is the problem of today.

The question of the refugees, I don't know about what's the relation between this and that. If we demand the recognition of a Palestinian state, this means that we forget about the refugees? Or this will be a major step towards resolving the problem of the refugees. If we solve a basic problem, which is the occupation, this will help us to advance towards solving the problem of the refugees. But if we sit there and say, "I don't want to solve anything unless I solve everything immediately, the same moment, the same level," then life had taught us—we may be called Surrenderists sometimes by Hamas, Capitulationists, whatever—life had taught us that some kind of gradual ways of addressing the issues might be more helpful than putting everything at the table and demanding that everything should be solved at the same moment.

And by the way, what we are asking today is recognition of a State of Palestine to re-start the negotiations in order to address all the final status issues, beginning with the refugees, Jerusalem, and other issues as well: security, water, bilateral relations, whatever. But sometimes I know that there are things invented as pretexts, in order to cover the real policy that some people do not want to cover openly, which is: they hate our strategy. They don't want it to succeed! That's the policy of Hamas. They believe that if we succeed politically here, it means our strategy is credible, and viable. They want to undermine this policy.

As from the other side, Israeli government also intends to undermine it through so many ways. And they declare it. Look, anything related with Arafat and

history, and the last question and Camp David, et cetera, well, this will need another three days or three months seminar in order to discuss it. And don't depend on one story or one version of history, especially when it comes to very complicated and thorny issues like our problem. Thank you.

Rød-Larsen: Yossi.

Beilin: Especially if it is autobiographies.

Rabbo: Absolutely. That's why I didn't write one yet.

Beilin: Yes, we might write something together.

Rabbo: True.

Beilin: Well, about the position of the United States, I would say that there is a President who is saying all the right things. I think that the peace camps on both sides can identify with most of the speeches of President Obama. I think that he understands perfectly the situation, and that his solutions are our solutions. The question of policy is very different than that, and this is always the problem. The gap is frustrating and tragic. The mistakes were huge and inconceivable.

For example, I cannot understand how come that Senator Mitchell is appointed next day after the inauguration of the President, and when he resigns, nobody is replacing him. It's not, you know, that I understand it. I am saying I cannot understand. I don't understand! How come one gives up on the issue; the nomination was redundant, unneeded. What happened? Nobody even explains! It is very difficult to understand. And United States is very important, not in order to impose a solution, United States cannot and will not impose any solution. But when there is a problem between the two parties, when you don't have two parties, like you had in the '90s, which were eager to find a solution...I mean, we did Oslo without any American involvement whatsoever. We just told from time to time our friends in the administration, "Hush, hush," that we are negotiating. We didn't need them.

You know, I remember how afraid we were in August '93, when we went to Warren Christopher on his vacation, to tell him what kind of an agreement we signed. And we were afraid until the last moment that he would tell us, "With all due respect, with this paper that you did without me, make peace for yourself. Why do you need me?" And he was generous and clever enough to embrace us. But I remember the fear on me. It was a special flight to the West, and until the meeting we were afraid maybe he will say to us, "Do whatever you want. If you are not involving us..." So then it was another situation – not today. We need the United States. And it is not there for us. Not for the Palestinians and not for the Israelis, at least not for those who want to make peace, despite of the fact that their heart is in the right place.

As to the social protest, they did whatever they could in order to distance themselves from the political issues, for partisan issues, for the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The issue, which is so obvious, is that had Israeli governments invested much less in the territories and much more in social affairs, it could have been a different situation. They did not want to touch it. And it is difficult for me to focus what might be the ramifications of this protest, especially in connection to the peace camp. I can hope that people understand now that they can do things. Like in the Arab world, they empowered themselves. They did something which changed the situation. And since there is a majority for peace in the Israeli public

opinion, I hope that this majority might learn from what happened in summer in Israel, and do the same thing vis-à-vis the peace process.

And if I may just refer to the question of mistakes and missed opportunities, first of all, there is a tough competition between the Israelis and the Palestinians about missed opportunities. I don't know who might win. We are still competing, by the way. And if you ask me, "What was the moment at which we could change something, it was in our hands and we did not do that?" It is '93. I believe the '93, and I cannot prove that I was right, that because of the circumstances—Clinton, Arafat after the first Gulf War, Rabin committed to peace—we could do something which was much more than what we did in Oslo, much more.

And I went to Rabin, and I said to him, "Mr. Prime Minister, my feeling is that we have a partner. We can go for a permanent deal now." And he said, "Yossi, you are wrong. Because if you go now for a permanent deal, and you fail, forget about any interim solution. If you go for an interim solution and you fail, you can begin and try again later." Now, this was quite reasonable.

So here, this is an opportunity which was missed by two parties which wanted to have peace, which were ready to pay the price, but in a way was reluctant to go for the moment of truth too early. Feeling that, "Okay, five years, ten years, we will still be around, we can still do things," without understanding that if we are not seizing the opportunity when there is a small window, we might lose it for many, many years to come.

Rød-Larsen:

We are coming to an end. And I think I have everybody in the room with me when I say profoundly, thank you, to two very eloquent, outstanding personalities. Two very courageous individuals. Two individuals who are believing visionaries in peace, in compromise, in reconciliation. I think I can say to both of you, we all admire you for your passion, which we've felt so strongly this afternoon, for your will power, and for your staying power. So stay the course. And good luck to you. And thank you for being with us. And thanks to you all.