

**8 June 1999**  
**Regional Disarmament and Arms Control**

**Summary:**

The meeting held between official representatives of the Canadian government, from the department of Disarmament and Arms Control, with Palestinians experts in the field of security and disarmament, was organized to exchange ideas and views on the prospects of security arrangements and disarmament in the region. The Canadian diplomats presented their government's official view on the issue also presented in the Committee on Foreign Affairs Report. A copy of the report was given presented to PASSIA during the meeting. The Palestinians included a representative of the MoPIC, a Brigadier General and a researcher. They presented their views on disarmament, discussed past experience, and prospects for future talks and security arrangements.

The main points discussed in the meeting can be summarized as follows:

The relation between the political peace process and security confidence building measures (CBM). The Palestinian view presented in the meeting was that the two are complementary and parallel to one another and that no security arrangements can be achieved in a political vacuum without addressing the existing political problems and resolving political conflicts.

The brick-by-brick or step-by-step approach in dealing with security arrangements was discussed. The view of the Canadian representatives was that in addressing security arrangements, this is the only functional approach.

The two sides discussed the prospects for future settlement and security arrangement and the best means for enabling confidence building measures. The Canadians, after presenting their official view on the issue, listened to the Palestinians overview of the major political obstacles facing disarmament and security talks.

**Proceedings of the Meeting:**

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, in his opening remarks, greeted the attendees and stressed the unofficial nature of the meeting and described it as an exchange of views on disarmament and Arms Control in the Middle East.

Mr. Robert McDougall, Director of Non Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament Division, at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International trade gave a briefing on his department's specialty and interests. He added that the department deals mainly with global disarmament (nuclear, biological, chemical) and views regional conflicts resolution as the base to global disarmament. A number of regional concerns including UNSCOM, the Middle East Peace process and other issues are the focus of the department. Mr. Mc Dougall stated that his knowledge of the Middle East is limited and introduced his deputy, Mr. David Viveash, who is

an expert on the Middle East. The two complement one another in their knowledge of the Middle East Disarmament and the Peace Process.

Mr. Mc Dougall elaborated on his department's international concerns as follows:

Nuclear Affairs: Mr. Mc Dougall referred to the report of the Committee of Foreign Affairs on the Canadian Government policy in this regard. The report, as stated, was tailored on two years hearings of the formulation of the Canadian official policy on the issue. The report outlines the major concerns of the Canadian government; universal application of the NPT which is a priority interest to the Canadian government and the CTPT which has been open for signature since 3 years and still not ratified by the already specified 44 states; including Israel.

The FMCT Treaty: while the ultimate goal is to eliminate nuclear weapon, the immediate target is to ban nuclear explosives.

Biological and Chemical weapons: The immediate need to arrive to a verification of the Biological Weapons Convention.

Missiles: the Missiles Technology Control Regime aiming to develop a broader understanding of the missile problem.

Land Mines: Although the department does not handle the issue of land mines, it is the main interest of another department. The Canadian government concern with human and individual security is the base for the great interest in land mines as well as sub machines and small weaponry. The main threat of small weaponry is their easy access and large amounts.

Regional topics of interest include: UNSCOM, Confidence Building Measures (CSBM), Maritime safety and other regional concerns.

The Palestinian view on the issue of regional disarmament was unanimous.

All stressed the importance of a change in Israel's nuclear strategy and armament policies. Israel's reliance on its vague nuclear strategy as a deterrent factor in the Arab Israeli is expected to change as Israel seeks peace. The Palestinians also expressed interest in the international community's pressure on Israel to disarm.

They also emphasized the dependence of disarmament talks on political achievements. They stressed that no serious disarmament or security arrangement talks can be achieved before serious political dialogue starts again after stalling for 3 years due to Netanyahu's government.

The Palestinians expressed skeptical optimism from the new government. This optimism relies mainly on the formation of the next Israel's government.

The Palestinians also expressed concern about the Demona radiation threats, as the Gaza Strip is close to the nuclear arsenal.

Over the past few years, there has been an increasing awareness among Middle Eastern countries to the need for disarmament. This has been achieved through numerous discussions and background channels. The Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians, Saudis, Iranians, have all been active in these discussions.

*Jamil Rabah from JMCC stated that:*

Nuclear disarmament is a main interest for the Palestinians as regional stability require Israel's amendment of its nuclear 'vague' strategy. Israel's reliance on its deterrence capability destabilizes the region. During the multi-laterals, Israel concentration on Arab Confidence Building Measures led to the failure of these talks. The Arab view has always been Israel's serious efforts to NPT ratification and disarmament. Mr. Rabah added that the Palestinian position is similar to the Arab general position.

*Brigadiur General Nizar Ammar stressed*

The need for action. He added that the Palestinians have so far been highly involved in international meetings on security arrangements, prepared work agendas and presentation. However, all these talks were geared toward laying the foundation for security arrangements. No agreement has been reached yet.

In the past three years, there has been growing awareness to the need for disarmament in the Middle East. A number of Arab countries now have special governmental divisions and research centers on the issue. For example, Jordan has a new center: opened by Mohammad Shiyab. The Arabs have been highly active in background channels and talks on the issue of security arrangements and disarmament in the Middle East. The Iranians showed interest in banning the biological weapons. They participated in the multilateral security arrangement. A biological expert participated unofficially and in Dawha the representative of the Foreign Ministry. Saudis have been very committed and they have a good expert in the field.

Since the Multilaterals started, donor countries initiatives for supporting background channels and talks have been numerous. Yet, unfortunately, the only thing achieved has been a definition of priorities. A number of initiatives have failed due to the unresolved political conflict and due to the differences in perceptions of priorities. A number of proposals sponsored by donor countries did not materialize due to lack of consensus between Israel and the Arabs on basic points: In 1995, it was agreed to establish a Regional Security Information Office in Jordan to which Terms of Reference were set but did not materialize. The Communication Network funded by the Dutch, the OSCE system with the hub in Dawha as well as 'Initiatives for Peace' funded by American organizations.

The Palestinians agreed that the major obstacle in achieving a security settlement in the Middle East, and arriving to basic understanding, is the debate on what comes first. While Israel aims at gaining Arab CSBM's first, the Arabs see the need to start with the resolution of the main conflict issues; whether political or military issues, such as the settlements, occupation, Jerusalem, etc. They strongly believed that once the Arab and the Israeli agree to return to the

negotiation table, there shall be considerable available material and information that would speed the talks.

*Rob McDougall (Question):*

*What comes first: peace or disarmament, is a critical issue. There are two different views promoting each. How much advanced commitment do we need to start disarmament. What can be done in parallel to peace discussions in building bricks towards settlement?*

*B.G. Nizar Ammar* answered using the brick model. Brg.Gen. Ammar said that we have to lay the foundation first, build the concrete base before building the house. IN the past three years we have established the foundation for talks on a bilateral and regional level. The concept of disarmament has been new to the region, as we were in a process of regional armament. Misperceptions on disarmament had a number of reasons including the US introduction of the concept to the region, by giving the USSR example, which is actually an invalid example. However,background channels have been better than real negotiations. We have achieved basic agreement on:

(i)General principles (ii)CBMs (iii)Peace vs. Disarmament.

Now that we have an understanding of the main concepts, continuous dialogue , workshops, etc have been important in promoting the concepts. The next stage should be taking steps forward.

Mr. Rabah interviened and gave the ‘Helsinki Final Act Principle’ as an example for the need to start with laying the political foundation for security settlements.

*Question:*

*The Canadian Reps. asked what should be done to resume talks: Is the NPT going too far too soon?*

*Basel Jaber from MoPIC answered:*

The Palestinians have actually revealed commitment for the peace. Palestinian weaponry is under strict control, whereas Dimona is close to Gaza and poses a highly potential threat. It is the interest of the Palestinians to have arms control. But Palestinians want to see Israel controlled. On a bilateral basis, there is no serious arms control talks. It is rather the multilateral track. We cannot be certain of Israel’s rational leadership. There should be an international pressure on Israel to disarm.

Canada may have an active role. Israel gets the support of Canadian organizations.

*(the Canadian representative interrupted and referred to its policy stated in the report : against Israeli’s nuclear arms).*

According to statistics of an Israeli expert, Jerald Steinberg, 88% of the Israeli population agree to use of nuclear power in case needed. Israel's signature of the NPT is not obsolete. Israel has enough material and technical knowhow: no need for proliferation. Israel is supported from IAA because of the strike against Iraq. So, it is difficult for the Arab Public to accept proceeding with CBM before Israel changes its strategy.

The bilateral track should move faster. There should be a reversal of settlement activities. Oslo is the basic and even the basic is not being implemented. A real progress is required.

In General, as Dr. Abdul Hadi stated in the closing remarks of the meeting, CSBM are viewed as a concession to Israel – the conflict is not over. With that concept we are not interested in normalizing the relation. Opening the house to the enemy especially that we haven't achieved anything on the issue of Jerusalem. The PA has been struggling for internal legitimacy due to the peace process, while Israel has been gaining international legitimacy and support.

### **Final Recommendations: Future Prospects:**

1. The Palestinians have proved their commitment to the security arrangements, on the expense of the PA's internal legitimacy. Statistics reveal that in 1997 only 5 Israelis died from terror attacks ; therefore there has been an enhancement in the security on the Palestinian side.

No disarmament without the peace process

The need for a party to negotiate with on the Israeli side: 3 years of Netanyahu. Jordan, Egypt and all Arab countries have the same feelings.

Palestinians are optimistic with the new government ; once the government is formed, we'll have open channels.

The climate is currently appropriate to re-activate the peace process.

Background channels have achieved more than the bilateral talks and proved more successful. Background channels have been very active and achieved more than official talks. Yet, they're conducted in a non-committal fashion. The multilaterals were also intellectual with no substantial agreements. The bilateral faced difficulties. The entire majority felt that the peace process was giving Israel the legitimacy to its occupation for the last three years , PA officials had to gain internal legitimacy for the peace while...