

## 1996 DIPLOMATIC

### 21 May

*Meeting with Members of the US State Department and Army/Navy Officers (National War College/US Air War College)*

#### **Topic: Palestinian Perspective on the Peace Process**

*Participants:* Carolyn Bargeron; Mark G. Beesley; David H. Cyr; H.S. De Santis; S.T. Gilbert; G.G. Gisolo; Lora Griffith; Rich Holzkecht; T. Muckenthaler; Scott E. Nahrwold; J. Nay; J. Snell; J. Sporn; Donald Yamamoto; and Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Head of PASSIA.

## SUMMARY

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi began the meeting with a short presentation about the Palestinian view of the peace process, looking at the positions of the Likud and Labor parties on major issues as they outlined them for the upcoming Israeli elections.

On the issue of Jerusalem, the Likud's position is that any compromise is unacceptable, and that it will not honor any concessions made by a Labor government. Meanwhile, the Labor party has proposed to separate functional jurisdiction, with the Israelis keeping political sovereignty and security authority while sharing municipal and religious authority with various parties.

On security issues, the Likud insists that Israel retain responsibility for both internal and external security throughout the Palestinian Territories. The Labor party favors conceding internal security to the PNA, while maintaining control over security on international borders and settlements. With regard to the issue of Israeli settlers, Likud has promised to continue expansion of settlement so that the Jewish population will be doubled in Jerusalem by the year 2000. Labor favors the slightly different strategy of consolidating and annexing the settlements near the green line and then allowing settlers deep in the West Bank to retain Israeli citizenship.

On the issue of the Golan Heights, the Likud has stated that it is reluctant to talk about it with the Syrians and is unwilling to give it up. The Labor party, on the other hand, has expressed a willingness to return the Golan to Syria in exchange for a full peace treaty, with international observation forces and early warning systems to ensure Israel's safety.

With regard to Palestinian refugees, both parties are agreed in their unwillingness to grant the right of return to Palestinian refugees from the Israeli-Arab wars. As for the compensation of refugees as stipulated by the UN, both parties claim that this responsibility lies with the other Arab states and the West in addition to Israel.

Both parties favor the normalization of relations with the Arab world.

However, the Likud party considers Israel a part of the West and will try to further this concept. Meanwhile, the Labor party under Peres favors trying to make Israel a normal citizen of the Middle East, with the idea that regional economic cooperation will lead to regional security arrangements.

With regard to the Palestinian side in the peace process, most of the important issues have been postponed until the final status negotiations. These include land confiscation, the isolation of Jerusalem, the continued detention of Palestinian prisoners, the furthering of the separation between Gaza and the West Bank, the exclusion of West Bank and Jerusalem leaders from the PNA and the hampering of connections with Egypt and Jordan. This brought many disappointments.

As Palestinians look toward the final status negotiations, they are primarily concerned with the issue of Jerusalem and with assuring for themselves an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. On Jerusalem, their position is that it should be a city of two capitals, meaning two sovereignties, two municipalities, two peoples and two flags. There should be no division of responsibility for the Christian and Muslim religious sites, as both are Palestinian.

## **Discussion:**

**Question:** It seems there are really no economic structures upon which to build in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. How will you rebuild economically?

**Answer:** The Palestinian economy has been utterly destroyed by the Israeli occupation. We need Israel to leave us alone. They still interfere with price controls and other measures. We need to focus on our connections to the Arab world. Those in Gaza have concentrated on the relationship with Egypt, while those in the West Bank have focused on Jordan. We need to stop struggling internally on this matter and cultivate relations with both, as one entity and with one economy.

**Q:** Is the Israeli market crucial to your recovery?

**A:** If we can make it without them, we will. This is because there is still a mutual lack of trust. Additionally, with Israel still divided over whether it wants to become a real member of the Middle East, we do not want to tie our economy to that of Israel's.

**Q:** The example of East and West Pakistan shows the difficulties of states with non-contiguous territory. How will Palestine be able to deal with this?

**A:** This is a key point. Israel has been trying to increase the autonomy of the Gaza Strip while suppressing autonomy in the West Bank in the hope

that Gaza will become an independent unit, while the Israelis will then share the West Bank with the Palestinians. There have to be measures to counteract this trend and to increase the coordination and links between the West Bank and Gaza. There is a need for practical measures that can help close the gap between the two.

**Q:** Would the Palestinians reject the peace process if they were unable to achieve concessions from Israel on Jerusalem?

**A:** No Palestinian politician or party could ever survive if they surrendered Jerusalem to total Israeli control. Jerusalem also cannot be divided in the way that Peres wants, according to which it will remain under Israeli sovereignty. We do not accept this. All the different functional areas must be treated simultaneously and there must be a compromise by Israel that respects Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem and recognizes its current status as occupied territory.

**Q:** What about the area in the Golan that you claim as part of Palestine?

**A:** This area, Al-Himma, is something that we have to work out with the Syrians once the Golan Heights are returned to them.

**Q:** You said that the Palestinian agenda is secular. What are the chances that this will remain so in the face of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in depressed areas throughout the Middle East?

**A:** A Christian friend of mine told me he would join Hamas if the Islamic movement could guarantee the return of Jerusalem. The divisions between Christians and Muslims are only those fomented by the Israelis. As for Hamas, there is a political wing with community organization and grass roots support that wants and must be encouraged to join the peace process. There is also the military wing. Unfortunately, the lines of communication between these wings have been cut as the leaders of the military have been imprisoned, exiled or killed. Many of the younger radical members of Hamas are uncontrollable because they have no leaders, and there is thus no way to bring them into a dialogue. This is all the more reason we need a Palestinian state; so that we can build something positive that these young people can feel a part of and channel their energies into.

**Q:** We hear a great deal about land confiscations from the Palestinians but very little from public sources. Is this because the Palestinian leadership wants to take pressure off Peres until after the election? Also, is there some sort of pattern to the confiscations - do the Israelis have some sort of a larger plan?

**A:** The Palestinians are nervous that there is a hidden agenda: if the Israelis are for separation, why have they continued confiscating land and building settlements?

**Q:** What about the relationship between the Arabs living in Israel proper and those in the Palestinian territories?

**A:** From 1948-67, the Arabs in Israel were portrayed as traitors and collaborators. But after 1967, they were seen as heroes for having kept their identity and struggled against the Israeli authorities. Then, after the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982, the Arabs inside Israel became a bridge between the Arabs in the territories and those living elsewhere in the Arab world and other places. They portrayed a message of moderation and helped the Arab cause tremendously. Since the return of Arafat to Gaza, they have been more concerned with gaining equal rights as Israeli citizens. We do not really have much to offer them, but we have tried to keep communications open.

**Q:** How important will the Arab vote be in the coming elections?

**A:** Traditionally, Arabs have represented 14-19% of the voting population in Israel. They have, however, always been fragmented and weak. This year is a different story as they have put aside their differences: in this way, they will have an important impact on the coming elections. They may also increase their representation in the Knesset, but they will not be able to make any headway in reducing the power of Likud or Labor.