

Meeting Minutes
Dr. Saeb Erakat Meeting with the Negotiations Support Unit
June 2, 2009

Attendance: Dr. Saeb Erakat (SE); NSU.

SE: The purpose of this meeting is to brief you on our meetings in Washington. Much of what I say to you today is just between us. The Washington I went to last week isn't the Washington I knew before. I went twice in preparation before Obama meeting. We met with Biden, Jones, Clinton, Mitchell, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Admiral Mullen and Abu Mazen (AM) met for 30 minutes. Mullen said he has 230,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Every week he has 10 troops coming home in wheelchairs and body bags. He is going to get them out politically, not militarily. He told AM, "you are the most important man in the Middle East." He said the Palestinian state that will happen will not be a failed state and that we should focus on our obligations – authority, lawlessness, 'one authority, one gun' – and that eventually Israel will realize it has to live up to its obligations. This argument was endorsed by the NSC, Jim Jones, and recently I read General Petraeus saying the same thing in an interview in Al-Hayat.

There is a growing sense in the U.S. that something must be done soon. Washington is very concerned about the state of the Middle East. Palestine is an issue on the minds of Arabs and Muslims everywhere. Washington is speaking with one voice, from the White House to the Congress. So what do we do to build on this? We have to do something that speaks in the language of their interests.

I went to Syria and met with real people. Several Arab countries are saying 'get rid of AM, Hamas is the card that will deliver. I don't care if they have Mish'al and others. These are cards that Syria can play and they know that. I advised AM to go to Tehran. To solve our problems, we must work with Tehran and Syria and break the ice between Mubarak and Assad. We can't do anything with the Iranians until the elections, but we must do something.

Palestinians are speaking with 2,000 voices just when we need to be speaking with one.

Netanyahu is going to burn the West Bank. He will give the green light in Gaza, let Hamas run loose, while burning the West Bank to show that AM can't deliver. Netanyahu is capable of anything.

We are hearing new language from Washington on Iran. They are referring to Iran as a "growing threat" instead of a "threat." This is a big difference. They are saying that they hope Iran will seize this historic opportunity, signaling that they are working on something big. My analysis is that Washington may offer to move the Iran file from the SC to the IAEA so that Iran, in turn, will allow inspection of their nuclear facilities. I talked with El Baradei, he said Iran is 12 years away from making a nuclear bomb.

Abu Mazen did a fantastic job in Washington. He gave a very comprehensive, focused presentation to Obama and to the Americans. There were two meetings. In the closed door meeting (Obama, AM, and notetakers) AM said, "I have one question: are you serious about the two-state solution? If you are, I cannot comprehend that you would allow a single settlement housing unit to be built in the West Bank. If Israel refuses to stop settlements, what is the alternative? A) 1 state or B) chaos, extremism, violence. You have the choice. You can take the cost free road, applying double standards, which would shoot me and other moderates in the head and make this Bin Laden's region. Or say we are not against Israel but against Israel's actions. If you cannot make Israel stop settlements and resume permanent status negotiations, who can?"

Obama responded that the "the establishment of the Palestinian state is a must for me personally. In an expeditious manner, we will get to the two-state solution" Obama said he appreciated the formation of the new government, and said it was courageous of AM. He asked AM to continue reforms and institution building and asked when Fatah would convene its conference. He said he spoke to Netanyahu in a tough, candid, and focused manner and that what was seen in public is what was said in private. Obama told him that if the Israeli gov't coalition can't deliver, that's their problem. The U.S. needs an answer by July 1st. Shapiro, Hale, and Mitchell will be the team to get the answers from their counterparts, Meridor, Arad, and Malcha. Obama said "I cannot report anything to you, what we heard from the Israelis doesn't deserve your time."

Rami Dajani (RD): Why July 1st?

SE: Obama is going to Moscow on July 6th for US-Russia Summit. He wants results to be able to declare – in terms of a timeline and an endgame. If there is going to be a Moscow conference, they don't want a photo-op only, like at Annapolis.

Obama said that Netanyahu is not ready to resume negotiations so we should stop saying that we have preconditions for negotiations.

Ehud Barak is going to DC to present on road blocks, settlements, and outposts, but what he will really be talking about is the restrictions of his coalition.

Abu Mazen told Obama that he will shoulder all of his commitments (1 authority 1 gun, Dayton security, EU-BAM, etc.), will continue reforms, will hold the Fatah Conference no later than July, and prepare for elections.

Obama said he supports talks between Fatah and Hamas but that we should not surprise him with a unity government that doesn't recognize the two-state solution, and accept Quartet conditions

Abu Mazen told Obama that Israeli obligations don't just include settlements. They also include going back to the Sept. 28 lines, allowing EJ institutions to function, ending the siege on Gaza.

Then we said “thank you for everything, now we want to give you something”: the Regional Road Map (RRM). You will make our life a lot easier if you let our people know the endgame. With respect to the issues of settlement building, East Jerusalem, etc., the endgame is an end to the occupation. We came a long way with Olmert, we do not need to start from scratch. The RRM already has approval from many countries [SE noted states that have been consulted and have approved the RRM]. Abbas told Obama that once the borders are defined then borders, Jerusalem, settlements and water will be settled. On security, we have the work done by Gen. Jones. On refugees, AM said we need a credible number, not 5 million but not 1,000. Abu Mazen said “I am ready for the endgame. I know there are lots of painful decisions to make, but I am ready to make them. I hope I have a partner in Israel.’

Then Obama brought up incitement. We told him that in the Wye River Agreement an incitement committee was established. We should revive it. We should prepare for them a file on who is actually inciting. The demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state is incitement. [To the NSU] Look very carefully at incitement. Bring as much evidence as possible on Israeli incitement against us, including legislation, speeches, books ...

Gabriel Fahel (GF): Do we want to entertain this distraction?

SE: We want to isolate this issue and take away pretexts

Abu Mazen told Obama, “I will do security, reform, institution building, Fatah convention, and win the elections. But Israel needs to agree to two-state solution, stop settlement, including “natural growth.” Natural growth in Ma’ale Adumim is building on my roof in Jericho. What you need is a matrix of interests and responsibilities. You also need to help me pay salaries. When we resume negotiations we want to resume from Dec. 2008. We can’t ask less of the Israeli government than Livni does: discuss all core issues without exception and accept the two-state solution.

Obama was impressed with AM. He said there needs to be Fatah reforms. If you run on the treadmill and don’t sweat you don’t get rid of the poison.

US wants steps from Arab countries. I warned them against this. It is unfair of the U.S. to pressure Arab countries to make concessions vis-à-vis Israel without pressuring Israel as well.

Obama said he got Israel to commit to stop construction in E1 but nothing yet on home demolitions.

Andrew Kuhn (AK): We could help with monitoring on E1.

SE: Yes, and we’ll send the reports to Jones and share with Selva and Mitchell.

[To NSU] Also, give me a one page summary of RM obligations for both Palestinians and Israelis and their status (by 10:00 am June 3rd)

Clinton said the next 5 weeks leading up to Obama's visit to Moscow will be a crucial period. Mitchell said Obama was very tough with Bibi, Clinton said the same. The meeting with the Israelis did not produce anything besides the commitment to stop E1 construction, but that is secret.

Our strategy is that we want to see real steps on the ground from the U.S., Israel, and the Arabs and we will focus on our obligations. Abu Mazen's presidency is the most important thing in the region

RD: Was there any mention of the June 4th speech?

SE: It will not be a plan. It will be a rapprochement with the Arabs and Muslims. They like what is being done with Cairo University.

Hala Rashed (HR): If Obama said Netanyahu is not ready for negotiations and will focus on a settlement freeze, but he is not ready to use sticks, what is he expecting?

SE: I wouldn't go that far. When I sat with several congressmen they are all bringing Obama's message – "Bibi must stop settlements." The U.S. knows very well how to deal with Israel. How and what? I don't know.

HR: Is there concern about pressuring Arab states to offer carrots?

SE: We told Obama not to make Arab states give carrots without Israeli action. We need to focus on the bigger picture. I told Solana to come here and get his act together. He should confirm and commit to the U.S. that Europe will be the needed third party.

Arab states have different agendas when they go to Washington, they don't like when Palestine dominates the agenda. They are worried about the billions they receive. But in the media they beg us to praise their leaders.

RD: Building on Hala's question, what are the scenarios if Netanyahu doesn't meet his obligations?

SE: That's none of my business. We didn't talk about it. We want Israel to meet its obligations. If an Israeli Prime Minister fights with almost any world leader, Israelis will side with their Prime Minister. If an Israeli Prime Minister fights with a U.S. leader, they will side with the U.S. I've been watching closely what leading Israeli journalists like Akiva Eldar and Nahum Barnea are saying.

AK: In the Israeli press, they are saying that the understandings between Bush and Sharon have been taken off of the table. Is this true?

SE: No. When bush reached that agreement we were very tough with the U.S. and told them it is none of their business. But we don't know what they did with it.

Fouad Hallak (FH): Do you have any comment on the recent statements in the press about the issue of Islamic sovereignty in Jerusalem?

SE: That was very stupid of Abdel Qader. If it wasn't for the difficulties in Fatah, I would have taken this issue up with him. The issue is about sovereignty and occupation, not about churches or mosques. [To NSU] Ask Fayyad be tough with them. It is selling out Jerusalem. I haven't visited the PM's office in ages because these people are so sensitive. Spend time with Abdel Qader, tell him this is very dangerous.

AK: What about Abu Rudeina's comments on two states for two peoples?

SE: I haven't heard them. I'll talk to Nabil.

HR: Alstom has won a bid from Saudi Arabia to build a railway, and are now bidding on a second one. This violates the Arab League resolution and international law. We should pressure Arab states to not do business with these companies and to respect the Arab League resolution. We have also heard that people in the PA are thinking of entering into a contract with Veolia.

SE: Who should I talk to about this? Tell Fayyad to get his act together.

RD: we can prepare a brief memo outlining the issues.

SE: Prepare it. Identify Arab countries.

HR: There may also be potential dealings by the PA with these companies.

SE: Please make sure with Fayyad no one in the PA does this.

Bader Rock (BR): There is a problem regarding asking Israel to expropriate land in Area C for industrial construction...

SE: You have a lot of assignments Hala. Take the case of Jiftlik. I cannot ask Israel to confiscate land, it would mean any land confiscated is legal. The government needs to pursue these sensitive issues with our help.

HR: My direct contact with the PM has been diminished

SE: I will ask him about this. We help when asked – we cannot force ourselves on him.

BR: Can we say it is the policy of the PLO not to ask Israel to expropriate land?

SE: Absolutely. Use the Jiftlik letter.

RD: [Handing SE Israeli military order] There is an issue of Israel revising the population registry, treating the WB and Gaza as separate entities. This is a fundamental breach of Oslo and an attempt to divide the WB and Gaza, and is illegal under international law.

SE: Hamas is the sword around my neck. What should I do? Prepare a letter to Amos Gilad on this issue and I will sign it. (Possibly a press release as well)

Sharif Hamadeh (SH): There are conflicting reports about what Abu Mazen and Olmert discussed re: refugees. Can you clarify?

SE: Olmert said 1,000 refugees over 10 years. Abu Mazen said “are you joking.”

SH: Was it Right of Return or Family reunification?

SE: I don’t know. But, if that is being reported, it’s good to say that Olmert agreed to the principle of Right of Return.

SH: AM used the figure 5 million refugees? This is not what we use. We will prepare a memo on terms and methodology for counting refugees so we can coordinate.

Tarek Hamam (TH): Could you shed light on why the issue of refugee arrangements is being discussed in public in the media?

SE: I cannot stand guard on the lips of every Palestinian.

Michael Talhami (MT): Obama opened the door with comments on lack of clean water in Gaza. Was there any further discussion on water?

SE: Abu Mazen said this issue will be solved if we figured out borders. We said the basis for water negotiations is international law.

MT: Water is the only issue that is win-win. Should we align it with the RRM and API framework?

SE: Why not? Make an internal document. I like to read all of your ideas.

Enas Abu Laban (EA): Do you think that when negotiations resume they will have the same structure as Annapolis?

SE: I don’t know. This time will be easier. I will head the delegation. Abu Alaa won’t be involved. I don’t even know if we will have negotiations. But you should be prepared.

EA: Regarding telecom, the situation is bad. We have a meeting tomorrow with the international community. It is a critical time for Israel to release the frequencies.

SE: I made a mistake in giving up this issue. I have no evidence, but I'm sure some Palestinians businessmen are making deals with Israel. We must find a way not to include businessmen in politics. Israel is making jokes about these big shots.

EA: We should request that the donors put pressure on Israel to release the frequencies

AK: Gabe and Azem met with John Murray to put together lessons learned on Annapolis. We will send you the recommendations. And I'm sure John will want to meet with you.

SE: Sure but make sure to send me the recommendations before the meeting.

RD: Will you be briefing Heads of Missions soon? We've been hearing many are interested.

SE: Yes I need you prepare packets for that – like the ones we gave out in Washington.

RD: [Summary of the Tasks]