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PIJ - FES Roundtable
"Challenging the Israeli-Palestinian Stalemate"

March 19, 2013 from 2 pm until 5 pm
at the Notre Dame Center in Jerusalem.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jerusalem (FES) **Palestine-Israel-
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On Tuesday March 19th, an Israeli-Palestinian Roundtable Discussion on the future prospects of the two-state solution in light of the current impasse facing the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations was held, on the eve of U.S. President Barak Obama's visit to the region, and after the Israeli Knesset elections and the recognition of Palestine State as a non-member of UN.

What follows is a summary of the discussion, held under the Chatham House Rule, which focused on future options and the urgency of taking responsible, determined and immediate actions to achieve a breakthrough and a positive change in this situation, before it's too late. The summary describes the points made by the participants, without identifying them. The names of the participants appear at the bottom of the summary.

- 1) Israeli – The recent speech by Turkish PM Erdogan about Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation may be more important than President Obama's visit, in terms of its implications on the region. He doesn't have any great expectations from the Obama visit - it will only contribute to the Israeli tourism industry. According to the Israeli election results, only 10% of the Israelis voted for parties who consider the peace process and a two-state solution a priority, and only 25% of the MKs in

the new parliament support that. Knowing PM Netanyahu, it will take an earthquake to achieve an agreement.

He listed concrete steps he felt could be achieved now:

- 1) A campaign for labeling settlement products (don't call it boycott because that's against the Israeli law);
 - 2) Revive the momentum for the acceptance of the State of Palestine as a full member state in the UN at the UN Security Council. Force the U.S. either to veto or abstain;
 - 3) Increase the harshness of the criticism of the current situation, by using the term Apartheid to describe Israeli policy.
- 2) Israeli – Doesn't agree with the above assessment of the anticipated results of the visit. President Obama has come now to correct the original impression that he created, to increase his credit with the Israeli people, and to emphasize that the U.S. is Israel's best ally. This will create the basis to enable Secretary of State Kerry to follow with an initiative to revive the process. If that approach fails, the U.S. will get much tougher towards Israel. This will either involve a presidential plan or a UNSC resolution on Israeli-Palestinian peace. It will contain demands, with broad parameters, including international parameters, which will be both general and clear. Although Justice Minister Livni has supposedly been given authority for the negotiations, she will have good vibes and zero power. Bennet and Lapid have the power, not clear what they will do with it. Netanyahu will not be a player in this, while the Europeans are "castrated". The Palestinians should have patience.

When Palestinians objected to this comment about "having patience", it was clarified that this meant not to start a 3rd intifada.

- 3) Palestinian –He has no expectations from the Obama visit. The Israeli government has to be made to feel that Israel is paying a high price for continuing the occupation, not by blood-letting, but by growing isolation. It should be made clear that the Israeli FM is not warmly welcomed in a growing number of countries. The voices of enlightened Jews around the world should also be heard, alongside enlightened voices in Israel. The activities of the One Voice movement are a good example of this. Reason should be used to overcome the extreme voices, and we have to create a strong joint front for peace. In his interview to Channel 2, Obama said that peace-making is an Israeli, Palestinian and American interest. This has to be given substance. Both the EU and the Americans can make a contribution, by bringing their true values to the fore, and teeth to their policy. If there is a will, there is a way. We can approach third parties to help move things forward. And he asks, does Netanyahu recognize the Wye River agreements that he signed?

- 4) Palestinian – The question is what can Israelis and Palestinians do on the ground? If the Americans see that things are happening, they will act. The fact is that the First Intifada led the international community to act. And nothing is irreversible. The situation on the ground can be reversed. The Berlin Wall came down, and the current wall can come down too. What is needed is a combination of diplomatic efforts and non-violence on the ground. The EU Heads of Mission Report should also become EU policy. The siege on Gaza should be lifted. Freedom of movement should be allowed between the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

- 5) Israeli –The primary purpose of Obama’s visit is to coordinate on Iran, to ensure that Israel does not have a green light to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities. On the Israeli-Palestinian issue, Obama is primarily coming to listen to the positions of the two sides. The Americans won’t act until they feel there is a sense of urgency. However, they are concerned about the future of President Abbas. Progress at this stage can only occur through secret channels. With Abbas, there is still a chance, and perhaps a willingness to move forward. Netanyahu doesn’t make decisions without feeling pressure. The PM bureau may actually be more pragmatic, with Ron Dermer leaving, and National Security Advisor Amidror expressing more moderate positions. Senator Mitchell’s spent 90% of his time on process, and only 10% on substance. That was a mistake. What is needed is proximity talks, not necessarily direct talks, like Carter did in Camp David. The Americans should begin drafting an agreement. Camp David 26 drafts before an agreement was reached. Livni’s actions will be of value because they will create an atmosphere. Americans want to see gestures. For example, the release of pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners. The Egyptians also want and could play a role. President Morsi wants to be a mediator between Israel and the PLO. With Hamas, there should be no recognition unless they recognize the Quartet’s conditions about the process. Otherwise recognition would be detrimental.
- 6) Palestinian – Israel needs to be pressured. We should look at the South African model. In addition, in South Africa, there was a joint struggle with Whites joining the Blacks (An Israeli comments that it was mostly Jewish Whites). We need a joint struggle here as well. The Palestinians should struggle with peaceful means, and with a peace-oriented leadership. The Palestinians should continue to build a state on the ground. And Israelis inside Israel should join in the struggle. Our

brothers in the Galilee and the Negev who are of Palestinian origin should become full-fledged Israelis. It is understood that when Palestinians act, they will also have to pay a price. The protests at Bil'ien and Ni'elin are in some ways refined theater. What is needed is a mass movement. It should march to Jerusalem, and stop at the Notre Dame (where we are sitting today, if that's the border). After that, they should ask for a visa to enter Israel. It is also important to use diplomatic means, and here the Europeans should be more active than the Americans. And the Europeans would be Europe with Germany at its center. Europe needs a German catalyzer to move forward, together with the UK and France. Then the 27 countries of the EU will follow, and the Americans as well. Nothing on earth is irreversible (except death, says one of the participants). For example, the settlements were removed from Sinai and Gaza. It was costly, but it was done. It shake Netanyahu to see Israel become more isolated.

- 7) Palestinian – It is always hard to predict how things will develop. The first Intifada began with a traffic accident. The second with Sharon's visit to the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount). Who knows what will be the spark that will start a 3rd Intifada. There are slogans throughout the West Bank against the Obama visit. However, time is not on the Israeli side. Israel reached a peak with its arrogance, and it's only down from there. Punishment will come from abroad – from the Palestinians and the Europeans. After the Arab Spring, Israel is no longer the only democratic country in the Middle East. The Arab Peace Initiative is actually the Save Israel Initiative, and it's in Israel's interest to take advantage of it and to become a part of the Middle East. In historic Palestine there are now 5.5 million Palestinians, the demographic clock is ticking, and time is running on.

- 8) Israeli – The Obama visit is a preparatory stage for the real work, which will be carried out by Kerry during the next six months. Thus the current visit is essentially preparation to set the stage for serious work towards reviving an Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Contrary to pessimistic assessments about the new Israeli government's desire to be an active partner in advancing the peace process, in addition to Livni and her party, many of the MKs in Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party have a clear commitment to achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace. We should also encourage the MKs in Labor, to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian question, which they ignored during the election campaign. Concerning what can be done now:
- 1) While continued settlement expansion undermines the prospects for peace and a two-state solution, now is the time to put the cost of the settlements on the Israeli agenda. Yair Lapid based his campaign on the slogan "Where's the money?" and so far has only answered with challenging the *Haredim*/ultra-Orthodox extortion of government funds. There is another sector which receives a disproportionate percentage of funding compared to the average Israeli – the settlements. The time is ripe to emphasize the cost of the settlements, and the way in which they are an obstacle to peace, security and continued prosperity for the average Israeli.
 - 2) If the State of Israel is the focal point for the Jewish right to national self-determination, just as the future Palestinian state will be the focal point for the Palestinian right to national self-determination, then liberal Jews around the world have the right and even duty to speak out about the future direction of the country, along the lines of the appeal by Tel Aviv University Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal, "If you care about Israel, silence is no longer an option!"
 - 9) Israeli – There is serious competition over who suffers the most in our region. The Palestinians should not be patient, and should take to the streets. Right now it is difficult to aim for a total agreement and resolution of the conflict, and the most realistic approach is to aim towards interim agreements, incremental steps forward. The question is whether this will be seen as a betrayal or as building blocks to be welcomed. Unlike

those who predict that this new Israeli government won't last more than one or two years, predicts it may last a full four years. Possible examples of interim steps are:

- 1) Building new Palestinian cities in Area C;
 - 2) Freezing settlements outside the settlement blocks;
 - 3) New economic projects;
 - 4) Releasing Palestinian prisoners.
- 10) Palestinian – The Palestinian Authority is a hostage to its budget. There is a growing sense of being fed-up with the situation, and we are witnessing the beginning of another intifada. Only the efforts of the Palestinian security organizations are preventing it from spreading. If they stop functioning, everything will break forth. President Abbas is still gambling on the Americans. The current situation is a challenge to all Palestinians who still believe that the Americans can deliver. The Palestinian side is extremely tense, and might explode any minute. The settlement activity is very active, and there are a growing number of Israelis who think that Area C is Israeli, is actually Israel. In the new Israeli government, right-wingers control key ministries such as Housing and Defense, and also the Finance Committee. They will try to channel more resources to the settlements. This government will not survive for long. Netanyahu will be blackmailed, one could say “raped” by Bennet and Lapid. He's weak in his own government, which will only last for 1 ½ 2 years. Obama is not coming as a tourist. Iran is at the top of the agenda, but Obama is not stupid. Obama will make noise, and leave the rest of the work to Kerry. Obama won't attack Iran, Iran won't give him an excuse, and there will be a compromise. As for Syria, there will be a deal between Iran, the U.S. and the EU. On the Israeli-Palestinian track, the U.S. will do something, and not remain on the margins. What can we do?
- 1) We should already begin thinking about the next Israeli elections. We should look at Lapid's example, and create another Lapid who will be committed to peace.
 - 2) We have to ask what can Israelis do and what can we do for them, to change their government?

- 3) Obama has to be told about the urgency of the situation, and the Palestinians cannot be patient. Like in 87, if you light a match, it will explode.
 - 4) The people who are advocating solutions are losing credibility. They have to be helped by the starting of a process.
 - 5) We see the two-state solution disappearing, but the alternative is intolerable, both politically and logically. If we want to save the two-state solution, with land swaps, the price of evacuating settlements has to be accepted.
- 11) Israeli – Can we get the U.S. and the EU to send explicit messages about the situation?
- 12) Palestinians –Messages are not enough. We need facts on the ground. Read the Al-Quds daily. Facts, happenings are what have impact on Palestinian public opinion. We should draft a statement about the urgency of the situation.
- 13) Israel – Is Obama’s visit an opportunity? It might be. Both sides, both Obama and Netanyahu, are starting a new term. Obama is facing no pressure concerning future elections, while Netanyahu is forming his 3rd government, which is meanwhile stable. As for what can be done – past international initiatives did not succeed. The initiatives that succeeded, the Egyptian and Jordanian treaties, and Oslo, were all local initiatives. While 3rd parties helped, they didn’t initiate. Former U.S. Ambassador Dan Kurtzer said that the U.S. can’t want peace more than the parties themselves. So what can Israelis do:
- 1) Doubts that using the term Apartheid is desirable. It sends a message of delegitimization to the Israeli society. We should focus on the term occupation. PM Sharon used it in 2004, and that had a big impact.
 - 2) Peace has to have a positive component. We have to present the advantages of peace, the positive results in the economic and security spheres, while combining the mes-

sage with fears about international isolation if peace is not achieved.

- 14) Israelis – We should use the term apartheid on a conditional basis. We want to both frighten and convince. We have to think creatively about new steps. A good instrument that can be used is the facts accumulated by Shaul Arieli, with maps and figures. And 65% of the Israelis were ready to support PM Olmert on an agreement over Jerusalem. We see determination to move forward on the Palestinian side, and not yet on the Israeli side, though there were disagreements about Lapid, some saying he wants to move the process forward, and others not. And we don't yet see an active 3rd party either, though Kerry may become one, like Baker in Madrid, and Rice in Annapolis.
- 15) Palestinian – The Arab Peace Initiative will be on the table, and the Palestinians will support it. Also, Palestinian reconciliation could be a positive contribution towards peace-making. Egypt will play the role of facilitator, and an agreement will be reached with Hamas only if it accepts the PLO recognition of Israel. Neither Fatah nor Hamas have to recognize Israel, but the PLO. As for the gradual approach, if steps are taken and settlements continue, everything will be destroyed. Gradual steps can be useful only if all the other factors are on hold. The goal is not to modify the occupation, but to end it.
- 16) Israeli – Obama's agenda has little to do with us. He wants to reposition the U.S. worldwide. With China, it is becoming a bipolar world. Netanyahu is a complex personality, who doesn't bend with pressure. He is ideologically driven, like Begin and Ben-Gurion. 100 years ago another Obama visited – Kaiser Wilhem II. He wanted to see part of the wall around the Old City pulled down, and it was. We here are left with the job of keeping peace alive. And in finding opportunities in Obama's visit. What we can do includes:
 - 1) Returning to the message that the two-state solution is the solution. Peace between Israel and the Palestinians must

be based on the two state solution. This will provide Palestinians with dignity, and the application of their right to self-determination. Only after that is achieved can we move on to other possible formulas.

- 2) We must find every possible way, before, during and after Obama's visit, to emphasize that the two-state solution is our vital interest.
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- 17) Israeli – Palestinians speaking directly to the Israeli public will help. The interview that Abbas gave to Channel 2 was very important.

 - 18) Palestine – We have to ask who we are. Are we policy-makers, or can we affect policy-makers? He is cautious, worried and anxious. Hearing a representative of the younger Israeli generation carried with it help. We are currently at a dead end in the political arena, and the Israeli elections demonstrated that. Both the Palestinians and the Israelis are victims of international interests. Our interests are how we can live together. There gaps in the understanding of the political leaderships on both sides. We need pioneers, who will take the people either to safety, or to disaster. The Palestinian leaders have much progress in their positions, from the early 70s, in 1974, 1981, Oslo and then the UN resolution. We should also reframe the Arab Peace Initiative, to emphasize what our role is in it. Since all of these positions were taken, many preparatory meetings have taken place, but we are still talking to ourselves. The Israeli leaders, except under Rabin, have been obstacles. We can make things work only if the parties have pioneers on both sides. The Palestinian leadership can carry the majority with them. When Hamas took part in the elections that was part of their acceptance of the Oslo accords. Even they are talking about peace. We have to convince Israeli society and the policy-makers that we are serious about peace. There are two lessons from Abu Ammar (Arafat):
 - 1) Any session which does not produce a result, is like sitting around getting high;

- 2) When the Palestinian leadership deals with peace, they are adamant, and the Israeli government is not.

We the Palestinians are ready – and we have to convince the Israeli society that security comes through peace. And we have to think how we can approach the Israeli leaders about this.

Participants in the discussion:

Israelis:

Dr. Ron Pundak – Co-Chair Israeli-Palestinian Peace NGO Forum, Geneva & Oslo

Ilan Baruch – Former Ambassador to South Africa & policy consultant

Dr. Alon Liel – Former Director General FM and Ambassador to South Africa & Turkey

Prof. Elie Podeh – Dir. Dept. of Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies Hebrew U.

Dr. Gershon Baskin – Co-Chair Israeli-Palestine Center for Research & Inf. (IPCRI)

Tal Harris – Executive Director One Voice Israel

Hillel Schenker – Co-Editor Palestine-Israel Journal

Palestinians:

Muhammad Madani – Member Exec. Comm. of Fatah, former Gov. Bethlehem District.

Abdallah Abdallah–Head of Political Comm. of Pal. Legislative Council, former Amb.

Saman Khoury – Co-Chair Israeli-Palestinian Peace NGO Forum, Geneva Initiative

Ali Abu Shahla – Vice Chair Al Aqsa U. Board of Trust (Gaza)

Walid Salem – Dir. Palestinian Center for Democracy and Community Development

Ziad AbuZayyad – Co-Editor Palestine-Israel Journal, former Minister and negotiator

Moderator:

Ingrid Ross – Director, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Jerusalem

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