

Weisglass – Erekat Meeting Minutes
June 1, 2005, 5:00 PM to 6:00 PM
Tel Aviv, Crown Plaza Hotel

Attendees:

PA: Dr. Saeb Erekat, Habib Hazzan,
GoI: Dov Weisglass, Shalom Tourjman

Background:

The government of Israel decided on Sunday to approve the release of 400 prisoners. Apparently 16 of them are “collaborators” with the government of Israel. How this definition was created is not clear (Accused, Charged, Convicted, Sentenced). In any case, Sufyan Abu Zaydeh declared they will not be executed and immediately after that Mohamed Dahlan said they will. This resulted in a petition to the high court by a Human Rights Group and Dov Weisglass asked Dr. Erekat for a clarification about the issue. Saeb made the calls to Abu Mazen and Abu Alaa and assured Weisglass there is no intention to execute. Weisglass asked for this in writing to present to the court to defuse the petition and this was done by Dr. Erekat.

- DW: Thank you for your help with the letter regarding the execution of prisoners. It would have been a disaster for the Palestinians if they were executed. I thank you for reacting very promptly and efficiently.
- SE: Personally I am against capital punishment. I do not think the decisions against those people were taken in due process. Even if they were, I am against capital punishment. I called the president in Tunis and confirmed there is no intention to execute. We did not want to delay the prisoners release.
- SE: I heard that the Sharon asked Livni to examine the files of those prisoners that spent more than 20 years in prison (The pre-Oslo prisoners). Is this true?
- DW: True. But you must keep this in very low profile. Otherwise so many players will work hard to ruin it. In 2-3 weeks the work on this issue will be behind us and we will be able to deliver something. But for now keep it out of the press statements.
- SE: The timing should be before Abu Mazen – Sharon meeting.
- DW: Yes, we think the same. We next week can not have the meeting. We have Jack Straw, Jerusalem Day with all the festivities and I am going away for two days. The week after that we have a holiday (Shevo'ot) and the best time to meet is the week of June 19th. This will allow us time to organize every thing before the meeting. We have the ability to meet twice or three times before the summit. The

Ministry of Defense is preparing a very impressive package of CBMs which we will of course present to you before the meeting. It will make a difference. We will also try to have the work Livni is doing presented to you.

SE: This is the direction we want to go in.

DW: Maybe the 22 or 21?

SE Called Abu Mazen and Abu Mazen approved the 21st. SE handed the phone to Weisglass and Abu Mazen and Weisglass spoke for the first time ever. Quote of the conversation Weisglass to AM “ We will win together against all the bad guys” !!!

DW: But please help us and do not mention the prisoners’ issue.

SE: On the issue of elections. Help your self by not appearing as the party that is hindering the democracy. You committed to it in the Road Map and you should not continue to hinder election related activities.

DW: In the next meeting we will issue a statement jointly that the government of Israel is in favor of democracy and welcomes the democratic elections in the PA. When the elections are scheduled we will start the coordination to facilitate it.

SE: On June 4 the decision to postpone the PLC elections will most likely be announced. Regardless, we can not ignore the closure of the voter registration centers. We in the PA, me personally are under a lot of pressure even from my team at the NSU to do something about it. We need to allow them to operate.

DW: I understand. We have a problem here. We do not want to look as if we had anything to do with the postponement of elections. We had nothing to do with it and we do not want to issue a statement about the election today and then to have the decision to postpone the elections declared on Saturday. Let us wait until the next meeting. We are always torn in our position to your elections. On the one hand we want to support the process stated by this government. On the other hand, we can not imagine or accept dealing with a PA government that includes a fully armed Hammas. A fully armed Hammas can not be part of the Palestinian political system. If the elections were to happen on July 17th I do not know if we would facilitate them or help them happen. Your decision to postpone the elections is a relief because we do not need to deal with this issue now and before the disengagement. We also do not think this harmony between Abu Mazen and Hammas will continue.

SE: We will leave it for now. Not before June 5th because of the wrong impression it might create like you said, I agree. But after that, sometime after one of our meetings to prepare for the summit we will issue the declaration but the GoI and kick start coordination.

- DW: Leave it for now, let us learn when the new date for the elections is and then we will start coordination two months ahead of it. That will leave us enough time.
- ST: Last time we managed very well until third parties, monitors etc. interfered. We do not need them.
- HH: Maybe you can give your clearance to an informal meeting of PA, GoI and third parties to discuss creative ways to improve the elections.
- ST: We do not need third parties. When coordination in the official track begins we will bring along all the top brass of all the branches. You do not need a second track with low level officials. But we will start engaging after June 5th we will discuss how to start coordinating.
- SE: Good enough for me. We will know better about the possible date then and work from that date.
- SE: What about fugitives?
- DW: The meetings of the fugitives committee are not going well. The PA either can not or does not want to collect the weapons from them, the distinction is not important now but we need to face the reality of the end result, Thus, the Ministry of Defense is thinking of new ideas on how to deal with all the issues of Sharm El Sheikh understandings that did not work well. The city handover, the fugitives issue, the deportees. We want to come with new ideas and present them to you and see what you think we can do to move the process forward. What we had so far is not working.
- SE: This will be applicable to handover of cities? To move the process forward.
- DW: Yes.
- SE: Great, look forward to hear about it in the next meeting.
- SE: The next issue we need to discuss is the Gaza Disengagement coordination. I am very worried about the crash landing the process is leading us to, to wake us the day after and to have a big prison in Gaza. We need to prepare for a soft landing. We need to tackle the difficult issues. I am worried about the security situation in Gaza after disengagement, what security measures need to be in place. Not only during the evacuation and handover but after it is all done and over. But we will let Nasser Yousif coordinate security directly with Mofaz. Regarding the other matters the Israeli side dealing with coordination told us repeatedly that the decision regarding the airport, the safe passage and Rafah is political and is for Sharon to take. Not Peres, not Ramon, not any professional level. We need to reopen the Airport. It is not comprehensible that you allowed an Airport in Gaza during the occupation of Gaza and now that you are leaving it, when it is

“liberated” you are not allowing the airport to operate. Security concerns can be addressed, if your problem is cargo there is a technical answer involving third party. If it is people there are also solutions but do not cut off Gaza from the world. Same applies to Rafah and the same applies to the safe passage between Gaza and West Bank. You allowed it in the past. Why do you need this stupid Back to Back system, why not to allow the convoys again.

Economic recovery does not come from a project here or there. This is Gaza with 1.3 million starving not Jericho. I was so disappointed when Wolfenhson started lowering my expectations in my meeting with him and talking about 6 projects. I can ensure six projects for Jericho in 6 hours. Is this what we are all about ?

We do not want a crash landing. This is in the hands of Sharon. We should not repeat our mistakes from Camp David. I asked Gilad Sher then to prepare for a soft landing and we did not. Look what happened.

ST: What are the things required by you for such a soft landing? Can you tell us?

SE: We will send you a letter tomorrow with a list of these decisions. The NSU team prepared this. Habib will send it to you tomorrow*.

DW: We will push the process forward.

SE: This is needed. Essential. What about the issues of Tirawi and Shubaki and Saadat.

DW: Tirawi issue is stupidity. We will do something about it. For the two others the answer is negative.

SE: The house demolitions in general in Silwan go against all what we are trying to achieve. They must stop. You can not allow 1000 Palestinian to be homeless and pin on the municipality.

DW: Ok we will check it.

ST to DW in Hebrew: These are illegal buildings and the law is clear. They is little we can do, it is in the hands of the municipality.

DW: The more important question about houses is what is your position regarding the houses in the settlements.

SE: I can tell you my personal position.

ST: Please do so but we want the official PA position. This is the request of the Prime Minister.

- SE: If this is the case I will not give my personal position. I will give you the president's answer or the PA official position.
- ST: In the last cabinet meeting. Some ministers involved in the work told us that the PA official position is not to demolish the houses. Yet while we were in the meeting you were quoted to say that as far as you are concerned "let Israel demolish the houses".
- SE: OK, we know we need to take a decision. We will communicate it to you when taken. Soon.
- ST: What do you plan to do with the areas if the houses are demolished.
- HH: The ministry of planning has its plans, regional plans. But there is not one answer to this question. There is a process and scenario planning. There is a distinction between short term and long term. All these considerations are done in a professional manner, based on proper planning principles. And if your fear, which you are not saying out loud, is the propagandist claim that the houses are going to be given to Hamas people or to martyr families then you need to know the planning is done on professional basis of urban planning and design, economic considerations and not on emotional basis.
- SE: Once again I think you should hear the NSU presentation about the preparations.
- DW: We should do it as soon as possible.

Next two meetings of the group scheduled for 14th and 19th of June.