

Meeting Minutes

Jerusalem
27 January 2008
09:00 – 11:00

Attendants

Palestinian side:

- Ahmad Qrei' (Abu Ala')
- Dr. Saeb Erekat
- Salah Ilayan

Israeli side:

- Tzepi Livni
- Tal Beker
- Alon Bar

Livni: What's your vision to end the conflict and establish a Palestinian state?

Abu Ala': Before beginning serious talk, we should clean the table of all violations and obstacles that impede the easy flow of negotiations without exception, especially the siege, incursions, assassinations, killings, and arrests in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The closure that has been recently imposed on Gaza and the disruption of fuel and basic goods is a serious act that can in no way be accepted or disregarded. The act is a breach of all international customs and agreements. Additionally, it presages a human tragedy.

Under no condition can we accept the continuation of settlement activities on West Bank territories occupied in 1967 including occupied East Jerusalem. We can't accept the Israeli forceful measures taken in this respect, particularly the settlement expansion on Jabal Abu Ghneim and Ma'ale Edomim settlement, plus the settlements built in Jerusalem and its outskirts. The declaration of Jerusalem mayor to build 7300 residential units in five settlements in East Jerusalem is also unacceptable. We can't continue to negotiate in light of the Israeli policies and violations.

Negotiating issues whose future Israel has already determined by imposing new realities on the ground is meaningless. We'll never accept the construction of the wall, settlement expansion, keeping settlement outposts, and the continued closure of institutions in Jerusalem.

This calls for a meeting of the tri-lateral committee to put a program and a timetable for the implementation of the first phase of Road Map Plan.

Livni: What's your position about removing settlement outposts and moving them into existing settlements? Will you denounce this act or keep silent about it?

Abu Ala': All settlement outposts and all settlement activities on Palestinian territories are illegitimate. The outposts should be removed in accordance with Road Map Plan, since we're talking about a final settlement. We've always refused the transfer of settlements that were in Gaza into the West Bank.

We can't go on with the negotiations in light of these policies and practices, and if we're serious about reaching a comprehensive peace agreement, we must conduct intensive talks.

Besides, we can't disregard our past experiences in the final status negotiations that took place in Stockholm, Camp David, and Taba. We must take them into consideration as a springboard for serious work.

The formation of committees to do research on each issue separately is the best way to give each case its due right. If this isn't feasible, I suggest, in addition to our periodical meetings, giving Dr. Saeb, from our side, and Tal, from your side, more privileges to look into the core of all issues without making any public statement and far-off from the mass media.

Livni: I agree, perhaps we can hold two meetings during next week.

Abu Ala': The understandings President Abu Mazen has reached with Prime Minister Olmert must be considered and be part of the process.

Livni: I met will all previous Israeli negotiators and I don't want to waste time because there are differences in their opinions and assessment for what had happened before.

Abu Ala': Should we, for instance, take Clinton's parameters in consideration without saying whether we accept them or not?

Livni: We can take them into consideration but what's important is to talk about what's happening now.

Abu Ala': I'm not saying they are the terms of reference for the peace process but to take them into consideration.

Livni: All will take them into consideration. Did you develop a vision for the modalities of the solution, because I want to have a better understanding?

Abu Ala': Since we're talking about putting an end to conflict and reaching a comprehensive peace treaty and not a declaration of principles, our understanding of the solution is that it has to address all issues of conflict, to put solutions, and to respond to all issues that might surface. The main issues are those of borders, land, Jerusalem,

settlements, refugees, security, and water. In addition, though, there are other issues and details.

Livni: I agree to this.

Abu Ala': If we reach a solution to all these issues, we'll reach a peace agreement. These issues are the future and they'll determine whether the Palestinian state will be viable.

Livni: What do you mean by a viable state?

Abu Ala': A state that has adequate land space that is geographically contiguous and is able to absorb all civilians of whom refugees are a part. Such a state will have the respect of its neighbors and have full control of its own water resources, borders and holy places. It has also to be capable of developing its own economy.

Saeb: Road Map Plan says the goal of the negotiations is to end the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and to establish a democratic and independent viable Palestinian state coexisting side by side with Israel and other neighbors in peace and security. By addressing the issues mentioned above, we can develop a framework to achieve this end.

Livni: I said the goal is to put an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and end the claims. Will you conduct a referendum inside and outside on the agreement that we'll reach?

Abu Ala': Yes.

Livni: Won't you have problems as a result of this?

Abu Ala': The problem that we'll face is Israel's desire to cut off part of the West Bank and annex it to Israel. As for the refugees, if the Arabs will be part of the solution there will be no problem in this issue. We've to engage countries that host the refugees directly or indirectly.

Livni: How can we engage Jordan, for instance? Will Jordan accept to be part of the process?

Abu Ala': We'll coordinate together. Even the Syrians want to be part of the process, and they don't want to sit with you to discuss the matter but with us.

Livni: Can we use Canada in this matter since it's the sponsor of the work groups on refugees in the multi-lateral talks?

Abu Ala': Not now. Multi-lateral talks won't look for a solution to the refugee problem, but they'll help in the bilateral track. Let's begin with the water and environment committees.

Livni: What about borders?

Abu Ala': The minimum that we could accept is the 1967 Green Line borders, and any modifications, which will be for a very little ratio, will be reciprocal in value by the ratio of 1:1. If we reach an agreement about the borders and the land, then we'll be able to solve many problems. The problem of settlements will be resolved if we agree on the borders of the Palestinian state and land. What remains then is to determine the future of settlements in the territories and which will be part of the Palestinian state. We'll negotiate to dismantle them or keep them or give Palestinian citizenship to those who'll be willing to live under Palestinian law. In addition, we'll be able to resolve the problems of environment and water.

With regard to Jerusalem, the city is part of Palestinian land occupied in 1967. It's an issue that has two parts: the core of the issue is the land, and the modalities. If we reach an agreement on the land, negotiations can take place to determine the modalities that will have to be implemented. If we agree to keep Jerusalem an open city and a capital for two states, then we discuss the issue of municipal services, security and means of access to the holy places, plus other issues. All the unilateral measures Israel had taken in Jerusalem are not acceptable.

Livni: We have standards when we talk about land. The annexation of settlement blocs is not an ideological case but a reality on the ground. When we voted for the evacuation of settlements in Gaza, we were talking about the evacuation of 7000 settlers. But when we talk about settlements in the West Bank, we're actually talking about tens of thousands of settlers who live in settlement blocs. This will affect our decision regarding borders.

The holy places are a complex and sensitive issue, not merely in Jerusalem but also in Hebron and elsewhere.

There are two criteria in relation to security: (1) security on the borders; and (2) security from your side.

There are also the issues of the Jordan Valley and crossings and these will affect our position regarding borders.

In Israel we talk about a comprehensive solution and the acceptance or refusal of anything depends on our security needs. If our security needs are fulfilled, then all other issues, except the sensitive issue of Jerusalem, can be solved. When we talk about security needs, we must say that the Palestinian state should be demilitarized.

Does 'swap' mean also the swap of the inhabitants? I know this is a problem for you.

Abu Ala': We don't say 'demilitarized' but 'limitedly militarized'.

Saeb: This is part of the negotiations.

Livni: D'you think it's possible to invite people specialized in security to our meetings? Or d'you think they need to meet by themselves?

Abu Ala': I prefer to have a special committee to reach an agreement on the security issue.

Livni: For example, we invite Amos Gilead from our side and whoever you want from your side to participate in our meetings. Then they meet together to discuss security issues such as monitoring of crossings, airport, seaport.

Abu Ala': The deployment of international forces.

Saeb: Regional water, air space, electromagnetic field.

Livni: Alert stations, deployment of emergency forces.

Abu Ala': With regards to borders, we didn't approve the annexation of settlement blocs in any previous negotiations, and we can't accept them as a reality situation. We'll deal rather with each case separately, and the same goes for the wall. We'll never accept any change in the reality of the life of the Arabs living in Israel or their transfer. They're Israeli citizens.

Saeb: We know your position and you know ours with regard to all issues, and in the end we'd like to reach a package deal.

Livni: You didn't accept the annexation of settlement blocs and we never accepted 1967 borders. Therefore let's look at the maps.

Saeb: First, we ask where the borders are. Abu Ala' says 1967 borders with minor modifications by value and reciprocity. Let's first agree on the principle and not the criterion.

Livni: There are thousands of Israelis living in the West Bank and our capability to implement any agreement depends on us knowing where they'll end up at. Besides, 1967 borders are not sacred.

Saeb: The armistice line according to 1949 agreement is sacred.

Livni: In the end the whole matter isn't merely the value of exchange but the reality of those Israelis and where they live.

Abu Ala': For example, I can't accept Ma'ale Edomim settlement as a reality because it divides the West Bank, and the same goes for Giv'at Ze'ev settlement.

Saeb: There are many secrets of the negotiations that we've not divulged. One day the Israeli agreed to evacuate 130 settlements in the West Bank, including Kiryat Arba'.

Livni: I can't talk about ratios. If we say, for example, 2%, I may say I want Ma'ale Edomim and the old city of Jerusalem. Thus we don't want a principle that isn't feasible and waste time on details. Eventually, the government will give evacuation orders to the army. By looking at the maps, we want to know the places that will be evacuated.

Saeb: What's the area of the territories on which settlement blocs are built?

Livni: I don't know.

Saeb: We don't mind to have settlers live as Palestinian citizens who have all rights under the Palestinian law.

Abu Ala': Take into consideration that peace is peace, and thus deal with us as you've dealt with Jordanians and Egyptians to whom you returned all their land until the last centimeter. The same thing will happen with Syria when you reach a peace agreement with her.

Saeb: Whoever will be able to reach an agreement to solve this conflict will be the most important figure in the region after Jesus Christ!

Livni: Israel was established to become a national home for Jews from all over the world. The Jew gets the citizenship as soon as he steps in Israel, and therefore don't say anything about the nature of Israel as I don't wish to interfere in the nature of your state. The conflict we're trying to solve is between two peoples. They used to say there were no Palestinian people; my father used to say so too. They used to say Palestinians were Arabs so let them find a solution in an Arab country. The basis for the creation of the state of Israel is that it was created for the Jewish people. Your state will be the answer to all Palestinians including refugees. Putting an end to claims means fulfilling national rights for all.

The next meeting was scheduled to take place in Jerusalem at 15:30 on Sunday, January 27.
