

Meeting Minutes
Dr Saeb Erekat – Sen. George Mitchell
State Department
October 20 2009

Attendance:

Palestinian: Dr Saeb Erekat (SE)
Amb. Maen Areikat (MA)
Rami Dajani (RD)
Khaled El-Gindy (KE)

US: Sen. George Mitchell (GM)
Amb. David Hale (DH)
Jonathan Schwartz (JS)
Mara Rudman (MR)

GM: Give us your account on where things stand.

SE: The president sends his best wishes. In the meeting with Hosni Mubarak three points were discussed:

1. Reconciliation – since Hamas did not respond they won't follow up so much
2. AM asked Mubarak: next time before sending us a paper make sure the US has seen it and it will not cause another siege
3. Discussed your efforts and the peace process

GM: We spent a lot of time on reconciliation discussions with the Egyptians.

SE: I told Daniel we can't deal with this kind of pressure. This time, let them sweat. So you said they told you it was OK. Then they sent us the document – take it or leave it. So AM signed it. Following Goldstone we could not say no. So Azzam went to Cairo and signed. We know you are having talks with the Egyptians, at your level, and maybe higher ...

GM: At all levels.

SE: We knew Hamas would not come. So we said whatever is in the paper, here it is. Past midnight, it is off the table. In real life, you know, it cannot be accepted – contradicts the basic law and re-imposes the siege. This is a joke – taking us for granted. So we need to stop this behaviour with us. We have the previous example of Saudi Arabia and Mecca. They force us in that positions and we get punished.

GM: I assure you our effort was intended to prevent anything bad...

SE: I know. Egypt did not want your efforts. They wanted to put a paper that both us and Hamas reject. So they avoid any responsibility. So we have come out ... they need to be aware of their responsibility.

GM: AM said in a press conference – was it with Amr ...

SE: Amr was not there. You should understand the power of the Moslem Brotherhood and Hamas, with all the satellite channels directed at us – it's a parallel government in Egypt. You need to sort this out with the Arabs. We started with Egypt and told them we know what happened with you and the US. Things need to be said to AM...

GM: We know how they treated you.

SE: Abul-Gheit was candid. He said in public "Goldstone finished you. You're finished". Then he goes to Jordan on the 5th with Nasser Joudeh, and dares to say Egypt had no knowledge. Then hell broke loose – because this was Egypt ...

GM: It's not true?

SE: Of course not. Hisham Bader was in the meeting. They were consulted. We are not even a member. It was the Pakistani who read the resolution on behalf of the three groups. Instead they said AM sold out – and the story about Wataniya. I know life's not fair – but this was despicable. The Emir of Qatar going on the phone personally, calling intellectuals telling them to attack AM – calling Azmi Bishara and Abdul-Bari Atwan. This is because AM wouldn't go and do reconciliation in Qatar like the Lebanese. But there is nothing you can do with Qatar ...

GM: We do talk to them.

SE: I know it's about interests and your base. They do the opposite of what you tell them. On Goldstone, we have an internal investigation. It's not about individuals. We could resign if needed. AM said the decision was with consultation of all who were there. No one objected. Now they even deny the mere fact they were there. Joudeh goes like a lion in front of the Muslim Brotherhood – verbatim – he says it's not true Jordan said resume negotiations without settlement freeze... The Egyptians today told AM their position is no negotiations without full settlement freeze – unlike the paper I saw here. On the first point they agreed not to court Hamas on this. Second, in the future, if there is a paper, instead of putting us in this situation, share with the US – because if the siege is re-imposed, we will be punished, not Egypt. Third, they agreed that negotiations cannot resume without a full settlement freeze including East Jerusalem – not that I care about their position.

Now, we don't want to surprise you. I saw the Israelis, Shimon Peres, on the 4th. Two days ago I met with Amos Gilad and Etan Dangot -- delivered a strong message. I told them the hell with you. After 19 years we are still being taken on a ride. Now you insinuate about Goldstone. You think you can punish AM! In no time you will have Aziz Dweik as your partner. 19 years of promises and you haven't made up your minds what you want to do with

us. Lieberman is too precious - while you have Livni there, the head of the largest Zionist party. Instead you will get Qatar and Iran. Maybe Abdallah can drive Meshal and bring him to you. That's it. 19 years. We delivered on our Road Map obligations. Even Yuval Diskin raises his hat on security. But no, they can't even give a 6 month freeze to give me a fig leaf to see, to find out, what we can do ... on swaps, but no. You don't see me on the same ship. Your focus is on PR, quick news, and we're cost free. You know my word is nothing compared to you, in congress. What good am I if I'm the joke of my wife, if I'm so weak.

Tony Blair goes and says he got Israel to remove a roadblock in Jericho. It was Dangot who removed it because I asked him. It was not Blair or Selva. What has Netanyahu done since he became PM? One thing? Jericho? Extending hours at the bridge? It was Etan and me. We have the Russian guns still in Jordan. BN has done nothing. I asked AG: what is it you have done? Show me something in the last 6 months. Nothing. Not a single step.

This is my situation with Israel, with Egypt, with Jordan, and with the US. What do you expect me to do? You are nations with power, with interests. We are the only ones that are cost free. If you want to look back to the past, you will not get what happened with Arafat - make him "no partner". We will not stop the rule of law - no intifada. That's what Lieberman began, the smear campaign - saying there were tapes about us organizing the Gaza war. Lies. Wataniya - it started with the Israeli government - Barak Ravid who works for the Israeli government.

All this I said openly to Shimon Peres. As a friend I told him that after 19 years we are in the same situation. I can't leave Jericho without an 18 year old boy's permission. And there is no light at the end of the tunnel. If you think this is what the peace process is about you are wrong. I told him to convey that to the PM. Maybe you don't need a partner. We don't want to go to another round of bloodshed. Livni gave him two conditions to join coalition: genuine two state solution, and resuming negotiations where they left off on all issues...

GM: Not rotating prime ministers ...

SE: To her credit, no. That was not on the table. She was decent and would not join coalition with Shas conditions on Jerusalem. I've been requesting to see the PM's people since April. They said no - they are still deciding if we're a partner or not. Let's see till later - how much they will be pressured into by the US, so we can come and dictate. I told them this will not work. I told Amos Gilad and Yuval Diskin the president will see them at any time as envoys. This is straight-shooting. No games. Officially, on behalf of AM. We are maintaining communication but with AG and YD - any time.

GM: Are you concerned about dictating who ...

SE: Not dictating. The PM's people chose to go to war against us. They won't talk to us! Imagine if I said such things about Netanyahu ...

GM: Aren't you concerned they would do the same in return?

SE: I don't care. These people have been coming to see him. Only recently Netanyahu is sending Molho. So AM is sending a message. He won't terminate contact. Any time they want to see him it's AG and YD. My quarrel is not with you and the US administration. Our quarrel is with Netanyahu. We know each other. They were honest with us. It's state with provisional borders – in area A and B – to put it bluntly. I could have done this without a peace process! It was better before Madrid. As a citizen of Jericho I could go to Gaza, to Jerusalem, even if we were confined to municipal borders. So we're back to the same arrangement of 89, 90. After 19 years. So if two states is no longer an option on 67 – we will talk about one state.

GM: We think it is an option ...

SE: Senator. I am just briefing you on my meetings with the Israelis. I am not giving you a message. They were good meetings. I told AG: you are Egypt's man. You know the Egyptians. 11 kms! What's going on with you and the US, the \$23 million and ditches – it's business as usual in the tunnels – the Hamas economy ... AG started laughing!

GM: What did he say?

SE: They don't want to say anything negative about Egypt. It's their strategic relation with them. But they make me pay the price. I am no longer there. I am not alone responsible for the coup d'etat in Gaza. Now what do you want? I asked AG – you are coming to me – you are angry that we accepted Egypt's paper! I was about to leave the meeting. Egypt is Egypt, and you are going to punish me. AG acknowledged the righteousness of what I said, and the honesty. He said we can't do anything with Egypt, so we are pressuring you. So Isaid let's not repeat the mistake of what you did to Arafat. I saw it happen. They even sent Palestinians to DC ... it's not going to happen to AM. Either they are partners – 67 border, swaps – anything short of that, that's it. This is a defining moment for the government. Don't listen to him [BN]. He's dead, if he has no engagement with us.

GM: You mean politically...

SE: Yes. We engage on security with you [AG]. He [BN] could not give us a moratorium, even if only a fig leaf to engage for a few months. So come on Amos – he needs us! Dan Meridor is saying we are close to resuming PS negotiations. I had to respond on the radio – Galei Tsahal – from the Tel Aviv airport. I told Dan, you are a friend, but what is it that you see that I don't see. And Barak, we're in touch with all his people. Now David Ben Simon resigned – his resignation is related to Barak's authorization of settlement activity. Barak has 13 members. He can end up with 5. I'm in touch with all of them. He killed Herzog.

I need to discuss with Egypt. They were there for all the dialogue. And not one Egyptian can say that Hamas sabotaged the talks? They don't want to anger the Moslem Brotherhood. I asked: is there a parallel government in Egypt? It's similar in Jordan – the foreign minister attacking in New York – and in the media and the parliament. Then there's Syria. All the steps we took and the discussions with you... then Meshal delivers the speech under Bashar's picture.

Internal situation: we have elected the Fatah revolutionary council. PLO executive committee had its meeting... AM will call for elections on the 25th.

GM: For January 25th?

SE: Yes.

GM: I recognize and understand the concerns you expressed and the feelings you have with what you have experienced. I want to help, to find ways to move forward, to help you and your colleagues and President Abbas – for the creation of a Palestinian state. I can't put myself in your shoes entirely, but as someone who served a long time in public office I can understand. It is important to try to move together toward the objective we want and that we believe is the right one. You repeated president Abbas said about moving to another alternative – one state. We have expressed our view before. You said we tried and failed, you said there is no light at the end of the tunnel. We are saying negotiations with an objective and time limits. We recognize and are humbled by the complexity you face and the difficulties you describe. We have exerted so much effort on this reconciliation thing, and ended up with the Arab effort you commented on. But we do want to be helpful. We want to continue efforts on the language for recognition of 67 which you asked for. It is a difficult effort – so far we have not found language agreeable to all. So I would like to spend some time on the document you submitted to us [the draft ToR]. The goal remains the resumption of negotiations. I don't know the basis of Meridor's statement ...

SE: Internal consumption. They are under pressure. Livni told them in the Knesset – we are with you on opposing Goldstone, but what have you done for peace? You have done zero – other than eliminating everything we've done with them.

GM: And there is another report I read this morning. Netanyahu announced we have an agreement.

SE: With Zapatero – I have the article here – Barak Ravid, he works for the PM office.

GM: I've seen it. The situation remains as it was – as I reported it to you. There remain issues of disagreement – primarily about the length of the moratorium.

SE: So there's no truth to a joint plan?

GM: We've agreed on a number of issues, but some areas are not resolved: length; when it begins; circumstances under which it begins – but we have agreement on other aspects over which you have expressed disapproval.

SE: President Abbas is being asked about this report. He said SE is in DC and we will find out.

GM: As I said, there is tentative agreement on many issues ...

SE: I won't repeat our position. You know it.

GM: Yes. We have your point of view on that and have expressed our view. To be clear: there is no formal agreement on a total package. There is agreement on substantial parts, which I have informed you. I am well aware of your objections, but continue to believe that the package would be helpful if it is in effect for a period of time. It will lead to substantially less construction in the West Bank, even though it will not halt all. I appreciate the concern it does not cover East Jerusalem ...

SE: Take note of Ben Simon's resignation. He said it's over the 24 settlement expansions ordered by Barak ...

GM: On East Jerusalem we will issue a statement that disagrees with Israel's policy in East Jerusalem. I recognize it is not sufficient for you ... so to resume our efforts in the current situation, continue our efforts on agreeing ToRs. We propose the possibility of side letters, for you and for the Israelis on issues that you don't agree and don't want to be seen agreeing. So for you that would be on Jerusalem and for them reaffirming our commitment to security. So these would be 'independent' issues in each side letter.

Another point: after the meeting with President Abbas, I left to Egypt, then I came back and saw prime minister Netanyahu on Sunday. David followed up on elements of that discussion. I expressed President Abbas's concerns to BN, regarding some Israelis actions aimed at undermining him. I told BN that if he genuinely believes that AM is a partner, then he needs to take actions on current difficulties. In the discussion, AM said he believes Israel may be going to make a deal with Hamas because they will accept a state with provisional borders...

SE: The Israelis told me these are conspiracy theories, hallucinations, to use polite language ...

GM: I will use polite language as well – so I said you must do something to be of assistance. He agreed to discuss some steps. I specifically asked about a prisoner release; also, as I was aware from previous meetings with Palestinians, there is the issue of incursions – and I requested that they halt incursions into areas A and B. And I asked him to consider the redesignation of some of area C to B or A, to enlarge the PA jurisdiction. All these are consistent with improved security performance, so it's only logical to turn over more area. They agreed to discuss, not to do. Other ideas were conveyed to you by Daniel ...

SE: AM said he did not want to listen ... he was really angry. But I want to hear. I am a curious man...

GM: There is a checkpoint around Nablus, not sure which one ... [asks DH and MR for name of checkpoint, consults notes]. Can't find out which one...

SE: It's Beit Furik. [Discussion on various checkpoints around Nablus].

GM: Then there's 20,000 Gazans in the West Bank whose status is not approved.

RD: The issue is much broader than that. Israel is illegally using the residency in the population registry to prevent Palestinians moving to the West Bank from Gaza. We can brief your staff in detail on this issue.

GM: Then there are some people to get ID cards; and increase of some cards ...

RD: BMC cards.

MR: Increase from 1200 to 2000.

GM: We did not include the economic matters because President Abbas would not hear them – for example on Watainya or Rawabi. There is one more significant item, but I cannot discuss it yet. Regarding incursions, you have security people that discuss this regularly. Is there a way you can get them to, to encourage them to, get to an arrangement on areas A and B, and a redesignation ...

SE: On the first point, all that is needed is an Israeli decision. It's in the agreement. On the second ...

GM: But a discussion is the way to get to a decision.

SE: I will convey this to President Abbas. They meet everyday ...

GM: Should we elevate?

SE: I will convey to President Abbas. It's not for politicians to discuss security.

GM: What about a meeting with Molcho? Are you disposed to meet him?

SE: The question is: are they willing to touch me? They attacked me and the president. My message back to them is clear. We are not terminating contact, but the same way you chose not to touch us, our channels are AG and YD. They've been doing this to us for 19 years. This time we will do it – for a month or two. They rejected us, so for this time, the president will see YD and AG.

GM: But I'm saying *you* [SE]

SE: You went to them and they rejected!

DH: He said he is not "ready yet" – yet.

SE: He's a friend. He told me it's not personal – it's Netanyahu.

DH: I don't want to have him say yes and you are not willing.

SE: I will convey to the president. When AG called me, I had to consult with the president and call back. I told him if it's in his security role it's OK but not people from the PM office. So I have to go back. I work for the president. I don't say a word without his approval.

GM: I'm in the same boat. I want the process moving – you say a month or two ...

SE: We're saying for the time being – not terminating contact – but will only meeting with designated people.

[Break – Senator Mitchell leaves to take phone call. Discussion with JS on developments on the Iran nuclear file]

GM: Do you think it's worthwhile to continue on the course I suggested – agreement on ToRs with side letters, to enable the relaunch of negotiations?

SE: That's why I'm here. I want us to succeed. I want to negotiate starting yesterday but need two things for success: Netanyahu must come down to earth – moratorium on everything for 6 months – even less, 5. During that time, we discuss the issue of swaps based on the 67 border. We will be able to find out if we can come up with an understanding. Our advice: it's not the duration, it's his ability to invest in us. So a total moratorium, including East Jerusalem. He can do it – legally...

GM: OK. You answered my question. So, in the absence of a complete halt, there can be no negotiations?

SE: Yes.

GM: So you would no longer be satisfied with language on 67?

SE: We told you from the beginning – a full settlement freeze.

GM: I have a big folder of clippings of you taking this position for years, at least since 2006, you, President Abbas, Yasser Abed Rabbo and others – yet you were negotiating regularly. So it's true you've been clear – but that did not deter you for years.

SE: Senator, I am going to be as honest as can be. I appreciate what you did and what you will do. But, the PLO executive committee has taken a decision – so did the Fatah central committee. It is the President's decision. So it's clear. This is not the end however.

[Meeting breaks. GM and SE proceed to closed meeting]

SE to GM:

1. President Abbas will announce presidential and legislative elections by decree on Oct 25. The elections will be scheduled to take place on January 25 2010.

2. He will inform the Fatah Central Committee on the 26th to choose another candidate to run in the elections.
3. If Fatah refuses, he has no alternative but to resign.

GM asked if this was serious. SE replied yes, noting the problem of the Americans thinking he is the black sheep. GM said this was not far from truth – that SE was the wise guy, but the one who knows his file most. He said he asked if SE was serious because he knew he did not play games. SE replied this was the message from the president – not SE's opinion. He said he personally did not agree with it, noting that AM is not doing the US a favour by staying in his position – he is doing it for the benefit of his people. Without AM, neither SF or SE would last. Without him only Hamas remains.

GM: So what can we do?

SE: It's your problem. You sat with the president many times. You know he is not a bargainer.

GM: OK. Let's go upstairs.

2. Meeting Summary
Sec. Hillary Clinton, Sen. George Mitchell, Dr. Saeb Erekat
US State Department
October 20 2009

[GM spoke to HC for 10 minutes before they came in together.]

HC: What is this? What's GM telling me?

[SE repeated the three points noted above, noting that President Abbas is not bargaining]\

HC said she would go to the White House to see the president. She said she knew AM and that he is not bluffing. She said that President Obama and she would call him – wont involve the Arabs. With this she said BN will be the heaviest person. The Arabs, his brothers, will rejoice – they don't want him, they don't want a Palestinian state, or democracy. She asked why Palestinians are always in a chapter of a Greek tragedy? She said you will harm yourselves and asked what led AM to think this way.

SE explained:

- Israel – after 7 months with BN we have nothing.

- He continues with settlements and fait accompli; provocations at Al Aqsa, home demolitions etc.
- Had BN wanted AM to be a partner he would have invested in him; he would have offered a moratorium for a few months to solve the swaps.
- With Goldstone, Lieberman announced the story of tapes and attacked AM
- BN's office leaked the story on Wataniya – AM got screwed by BN
- Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia denied any knowledge of Goldstone – they threw the towel in AM's face, blaming him alone. Abul-Gheit said "you're finished". Nasser Joudeh blamed him in the Parliament. The Saudis sent a message through Abul Gheit. Syria cancelled the meeting, Meshal gave the speech. Qatar's prince, your ally, is conducting a personal campaign against AM.
- The Egyptian paper – the way it was handled by Mubarak. They wanted both AM and Hamas to reject so they are off the hook, and we get punished.
- You go from no full settlement freeze to non-freeze with 3000 units. You know Ben Simon resigned over this. 9 Jewish organizations in the US are against Netanyahu. Why not get rid of Lieberman and bring in Livni. You are giving him the crown over the Middle East. Who will believe you in the region. It's too bad it's over for you so soon in the Middle East. AM wants your help – Clinton Parameters...

HC said she will go to the White House the next day. She and President Obama will talk to AM. The US is determined to get a Palestinian state. She asked 2 questions:

If no settlement freeze, no negotiations?

SE: Yes. Cut the story short. It is a non-starter. AM won't crown BN.

HC asked about prisoner release, incursions into areas A and B, redesignation of area C.

SE: These are security issues - let the security officials meet. GM is asking me to meet Molcho. Let the security people handle it – including the release of prisoners.

HC: If we were to move and develop our own map.

SE: 67 with swaps?

HC: Yes.

SE: The leadership would welcome this. This is the approach we encouraged in NY. Your approach in Northern Ireland – no trilateral there till 8 months. So if you develop the end

game, with 67 baseline map that would be welcome. Don't trust BN. He wants a state with provisional borders.

HC: Will speak to President Obama and we will call AM. AM not running in the election is not an option – there is no alternative to him.

Parties agreed to a meeting between GM and SE the following morning at 9am.