

Transcript of Wilson Center Ground Truth Briefing

Today's Bleak Prospects for Israeli-Palestinian Peace: A Conversation with Saeb Erekat and Gilead Sher May 18, 2018

Operator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time, all participants are in a listen only mode until the question and answer session of today's conference. At that time, you may press Star 1 on your phone to ask a question. I would like to inform all parties that today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. I would now like to turn the conference over to Mr. Aaron David Miller, vice president of the new initiatives and director of the Middle East program at the Wilson Center. Thank you, you may begin.

Aaron David Miller: Tara, thanks so much. Good morning to all of you here in Washington, throughout the country, and good afternoon or evening as the case may be. To those of you coming to us from the Middle East and around the world, I'm Aaron David Miller, vice president for new initiatives and director of the Middle East program at the center. Jane Harmon was originally scheduled to introduce the call, she was called away, but she wanted me to extend her personal greetings to both Saeb and Gilead, and she regrets that she couldn't be here this morning.

This is an issue about which she cares deeply, and let me welcome all of you to what is now our 117th ground truth briefing series, which is now in its fifth year. This program was initially designed to both interpret and analyze both the headlines and trend lines of major foreign policy developments by relying on the expertise and the experience of analysts and practitioners who are actually physically present on the ground. Often, participants themselves in the events that we're actually analyzing. And I'm very much a believer – the Wilson Center is, too, in the notion that you need to understand the world.

And to do so with great honesty and clarity before you can ever have a chance of trying to repair it. I would draw from my own experiences that when we failed in diplomacy, and particularly in the pursuit of Arab- Israeli negotiations, it was almost always because Americans – let's forget the Israelis and the Palestinians

for a moment. Chose to see the world the way they wanted it to be, rather than the way it actually was. Today's call obviously deals with the tumultuous events of this past week.

The opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem, and confrontation and violence along the Israeli-Gaza border. I'm very much hoping that our two presenters who are both friends and colleagues with whom I've spent years working on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, won't just analyze this week's events, but perhaps look forward to in an effort to try to avoid getting stuck in the status quo that is increasingly costly to both sides, and to look to identify a pathway forward. I do this, maintain a sense of hope, and not because I'm not aware of the grim nature of the current situation that confronts Israelis and Palestinians. It's *Falkner in the Requiem for a Nun*. The president is enough of a constraint, but as he said in that terrific novel, "the past is never dead, it's not even past." Still, I'm persuaded that without hope, there's no life.

And I may have abandoned my illusions when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, but when it comes to peacemaking in the future, I don't have the right nor would I ever say never. Last point, before you all joined, we chatted briefly with Saeb and Gilead and they chatted with one another, and I can only say again that the two of them have the deepest respect for one another still despite their differences. And the kind of relationship that is required between Israelis and Palestinians is critically important, that it occur on a human level, and both of these presenters understand that, feel that, and respect that. And in that regard, today's call, the fact that it's taking place is a positive development for sure. Let me just quickly introduce them both.

Erekat is a Palestinian diplomat who served as chief of the PLO steering and monitoring committee until 2011. He negotiated the Oslo accords with Israel and remained the chief Palestinian negotiator from '95 to '03. Before this, he served as the deputy head of the Palestinian delegation of Madrid. I remember those times well, Saeb, and in 1994, he was appointed the minister for local government for the Palestinian national authority. He is one of the most prominent Palestinian spokespeople in the western media. Saeb completed his PhD in peace and conflict studies at Bradford University of England and serves as professor of political science at An-Najah University.

There's much more to say about Saeb. Gilead Sher, a senior researcher and head of the Center for Applied Negotiations at Tel Aviv Institute for National Security, (unintelligible) was chief of

staff and policy coordinator to former Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Between '99 and '01, he served as the Israeli chief and co-chief negotiator at the Camp David Summit. Saeb, Gilead are here together. Gilead is an IDF colonel who served as an armored brigade commander and a deputy division commander. He co-chairs the NGO Blue White Future as well as Sapir Academic Collge, the largest public college in Israel.

So with that done, I want to turn to Saeb for ten minutes of presentation. Then to Gilead. I may have a question or two to ask them both, and then we'll go to your callers' questions. Let me remind callers to queue by pressing Star 1 on your phones. Saeb, over to you.

Dr. Saeb Erekat:

Hi, good afternoon, good morning, Aaron. Good afternoon, Gilead, and good afternoon and good morning to everyone who is listening to me. Aaron, I just want to look forward. What happened, the tragedy, the massacre that happened last week in the Gaza border, it's just a reminder for all of us. This is the absence of peace. This is the result of Palestinians and Israelis unable to make the deal which is doable, which is we don't get to reinvent the wheel or (unintelligible) that from the start.

We all know it's going to be a two-state solution. The state of Palestine with East Jerusalem's capital to live side by side and peace and security with the state of Israel from the 1967 line. Okay, I know that today, the anger level is higher than any time before. I know that people like me, the moderates among Palestinians that are being destroyed by the actions of the Trump administration and the actions of the Netanyahu government.

We cannot deliver anything in our hands. I know that. But to those Palestinians who tell me to shut up, tell me not to take about the solution anymore, and they want me to talk about one state equal rights, I always tell them this will not be acceptable to Israelis. To the Israelis who believe that they can impose on us one state, two systems Apartheid like what Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Kushner and Jason Greenblatt and Sheldon Alderson believe they can do. Dictate a solution by moving embassies, putting (unintelligible) settlements and so on, this will not work for Palestinians.

These are the two options that are not doable in the absence of a two-state solution. And these are not doable and President Trump and Mr. Netanyahu are celebrating the variable of the two-state solution. I'm afraid to say we have the relevance of this in the Gaza borders last week, and this is a grim picture. This is a simple

picture of what we are going to be seeing in the future if we don't stand up as Israelis and Palestinians because I think Gilead and I and yourself, Aaron, have devoted our lives in order to save lives of Israelis and Palestinians.

In order to live, then let's live. I can assure you that Christian and Muslims will not move here to do this – they won't become Israeli, and Jews will not convert to Christianity and Islam and become Palestinians. What are they going to do with us? What are they going to do with us? We have more settlement activities, more dictation. You know, I remember Franklin D. Roosevelt once said that the White House is an office for international morality, and this office requires giant statement. Not real state agent. We've sat with these people for 35 times, and honest to God, I said at the end of the day these people are killing me. If they don't – they didn't say that to me, but I felt and I (unintelligible) that if you don't take 50 cents on the dollar this year, you may get 15 on the other year.

Peace is going to be based on justice. It's going to be based on one word. F-A-I-R. Fair. We have to strengthen the Palestinians. I have to go back to my people one day, Aaron and Gilead, and tell them look, we did not get everything we want, but what we got is fair. Please vote for this agreement. Vote for the resolution of the two-state solution of the 1967 line. We have recognized Israel. Our recognition stands. So far, look at the massacre. We lose 64 Palestinians in one day, and I don't see any condemnation coming from Israel. I don't hear anybody experiencing sorrow for these lives, or from the United States on the contrary.

The low morality has never reached this level when people try to blame the victims or when people try to blind themselves from the reason, the actual reasons why Israelis and Palestinians are clashing and still on the battlefield. We have to stop this, and the only way Netanyahu believes he can kill ideas with bullets, I don't think he can. I don't think even Trump did not develop the techniques to kill ideas with bullets.

He did not develop his technique to prevent ideas to travel with or without reason. If you want to defeat evil, if you want to defeat extremism, if you want to defeat desperation, you have to offer actual peace, and it's doable, between Palestinians and Israelis. We have to make the two-state solution, and I don't need just the Jason Greenblatts or the Kushners. I and the Israelis are the ones who need to stand up and make the decision required for peace. That is the honest truth. This administration has put us back at least 20 years.

This administration has really – the only achievement they did so far in this region is to destroy the moderate Palestinian camp. They're destabilizing Jordan. They're destabilizing all other moderates. They're giving so much strength to extremism in this region. People may not notice this, but I notice this, and I know this because I have to follow with all of my colleagues (unintelligible). How much we are being under pressure and how much we are losing. But at the end of the day, do we have a partner in Israel for peace for the two-state solution in Israel now? Is Mr. Netanyahu a two-stater?

I can't tell you, Aaron. You know it. Gilead know it. Everybody knows it. He is not a two-stater. He is not a two-stater. Because so far, everything he did since 2009 until now, he has demolished any agreements signed, abandoned them. He's just dictating on the ground, and he really believes by doing such policies that he can have glittery solutions and if he has the backing of the Trump administration, he will get away with it. He is not going to get away with anything.

He is going to complicate matters. If you are in a ditch and you dig deeper, you don't get out. You go down. And that is what Netanyahu is doing. That's what Trump is doing. So at the end of the day, it's really up to us. It's very easy for me to stand up and say, "Okay, I give up." But you know what that means? I'm a father of four. I was telling Gilead I'm a grandfather of seven now. He's a grandfather of two. You know if we give up on the two-state solution on peace, we are giving up on our children and grandchildren because it's their lives. They are the fuel for this fire.

So for our sake, our children's sake and grandchildren's sake – and this is not emotion. This is the truth. We want our children, I'm sure the majority of Israelis and majority of Palestinians want their children to live like children in the United States, Aaron. Like the children of Britain, like the children of any country on earth, normally. We became now the daily (unintelligible) to each other. No one is safe, and that must stop, and we must break the cycle. And I hope that they will rise in Israel a leadership that is willing to engage in direct negotiations.

Palestinian and Israeli direct negotiation. On the basis of agreement signed, terms of difference agreed upon, and we have agreed all of us, all of us have agreed that, okay, issues like border settlements, Jerusalem refugees, water security, no one should take

any steps that may preempt or prejudge this resolution, and then comes Trump to decide that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.

And then he abandons the longstanding American position that (unintelligible). He abandons – he told us personally when we met in 2017, White House over lunch, that he would do his best to make the two parties to come to a conclusion or an agreement on all issues, and then he comes and decides that Jerusalem is Israel's capital. Well, if that's what he is going to do, and then drop the refugees from the negotiating table and then accept Netanyahu's annexation of settlements and then accept Netanyahu's (unintelligible) responsibility for air space, water, passages, and then just keep us as prisoners of this situation, this will not fly. Because at the end of the day, those who try to score points on both sides, I could care less if someone is pro-Israel or someone is pro-Palestine. The real reality on the ground to save lives is whether you are pro-peace or whether you are against peace. And if you are pro peace, it means you have to stand tall for the two-state solution because this is the only option. The state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as capital to live side-by-side, the state of Israel in peace and security, and only Israelis and Palestinians can do that.

I don't think anybody – I can sit and talk with Gilead. I don't need the Jason Greenblatts. I don't need the Kushner. I don't need anybody. He knows it. I know it. It's our decision. It's our lives. I'm not – I don't have children (unintelligible) behind me. I have Ali and Mohammed (unintelligible) to protect their lives. And Gilead is not going to do me a favor if he wants to sit and negotiate with me as an Israeli. He's trying also to give his children and grandchildren a normal life, because that's what peace between us is all about. And that's the only option for us.

Now can we do it today? No. Tomorrow? No. Is Netanyahu willing to do it? No, but we have to keep hope. We have to continue having Israelis and Palestinians talk, meet, provide (unintelligible). I know, I know it's impossible to talk now. I know. I know that it's costly for me to talk or to Gilead or to anyone, but we should not give up. We should not give up for – for extremism because extremism would mean desperation, desperation would lead to desperate acts. Desperate acts means lives of Israelis and Palestinians with it.

Aaron David Miller: Saeb, thanks so much. Nothing would make me happier or serve this process better than a legitimate and authoritative dialogue directly between Israelis and Palestinians to wrestle not just with

the political horizon, but how do we navigate through the tumultuous times we are now passing. Gilead, over to you.

Gilead Sher:

Thank you, Aaron, and Shalom to all of you. Let me start by reiterating what Saeb just said. Despair is not an option for us, and there is a majority in the respective societies for a two-state agreement. Even in these very days. But let me start with the analysis of last week's events in Gaza and Jerusalem and the way forward. Last week was one of the most explosive weeks in a decade. Israel had to face simultaneously to vulnerable and dangerous fronts in the northern front with attempts to prevent the Iranians from further settling down militarily in Syria and counter Iran's retaliation.

In Gaza, the idea had to stop Hamas from penetrating Israel while breaking through the fence and we had to avoid catastrophe and keep deterrents. All this was combined with lies and distorted facts and incitements and intense anti-Israel propaganda and anti-Semitism. So maybe militarily Israel succeeded in protecting its border with Gaza, but the price paid was high, was a loss of human life, numerous Palestinians casualties, and the political denunciation. I am personally of course not oblivious to human suffering, to Palestinian bereavement, to collateral casualties and damages.

I deeply regret the loss of innocent lives. But Israel gave numerous early warnings by all communication panels, and it used non-lethal means while it was still possible. No other state on the planet would have acted differently. And please note that Israel did not face a peaceful resistance. It was not popular peaceful protest by a cynical abuse of an incited frustrated population led by Hamas terrorists, fighters, activists. These were not demonstrators. These were attackers controlled by Hamas, paid for by Hamas, organized by Hamas. Iran's proxy.

Thus replacing other violent terrorist activities such as the terror tunnels and the launching of dozens of thousands of rockets and missiles in civilian Israeli population. Let me just quote Yahya Sinwar, from one of the heads of Hamas, "We will rip off the fans and tear the hearts off Zionist's bodies." Hamas bears responsibility for this tragedy. Sophisticated, manipulative, Hamas is using women and children as human shields. Worse even, as front row assaults. They sanctify death on both sides as it serves them for their anti-Israel campaigns worldwide. So, what lies in the near future?

I believe that June is as explosive as May. More so with the months of Ramadan. I do not expect an all-out confrontation, but I think that this is the time for de-escalation for self examination on all sides. We have two million Gazans who live in unacceptable humanitarian conditions, and they need to be provided with medical assistance and treatment. Alleviation of all restrictions possible without taking risks in security. We have to provide humanitarian aid, and we have to get a ceasefire, and here I believe the – that Egypt is a key. Let me move on to Jerusalem, and first state the obvious.

For 2,000 years, the Jewish people had no land or sovereignty, and from a very scant Diaspora. We were oppressed, persecuted. The Jews all over the world remember Yerushalayim Jerusalem, cherished it and prayed facing the old city from wherever their communities were.

And since Israel's establishment 70 years ago, Jerusalem as its eternal capital has been what I call a self-evident fact. We Israelis did not need Trump to tell us that Jerusalem is our capital. I therefore support the relocation of the US embassy on its own merits. However, as I've said, let a coherent and reliable context of an eventual Israeli- Palestinian peace process. The inauguration provided, in my eyes, a very unfortunate image in split screens all over the world. The United States embassy inaugurated with euphoric I would say, messianic even, ceremonial instance on one side of the screen. And on the other, the confrontations on the Gaza border.

The worst that could happen, if escalation is not subsided, is that the political conflict turns into a religious war over Jerusalem. So in that matter, all of us parties concerned need to do the outmost to lower the flames and subside violence and incitement. Now the question that you've put to us, Aaron, is there a way forward. In the long-term, in the mid-term, ever. First let me give a very brief statement. I have no question whatsoever on the Jewish peoples' right to set determination in its own state (unintelligible). And Israel has the right to defend itself from invasion and crossing its borders with malicious intentions.

I don't have any doubt that the Palestinian people have the right to self-determination in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And Aaron, you said that the status quo is costly in your opening words. I think that the status quo is linked to one state which is a euphemism for demographic destruction and a tragic future for Israelis and Palestinians alike because there's no other way but the

two-state solution, and we have to divide the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Our conflict can be resolved.

The core issues that all of us – the three of us, and I'm sure that many, many members of the audience know the core issues are resolvable along the Clinton parameters, along other negotiations. Results for instance in Annapolis in 2008, et cetera. You know, how to get there is the problem. What is the way to get there and counter all the spoilers on the way? So the way out of the political deadlock, you know, I don't know when the administration plan would be laid out, but I know for a fact that no ultimate deal could be attained shortly, and no full-fledged agreement is in sight. We should aim to – as I believe the following:

First, preserve the conditions for a two-state solution. To preserve them and not to negate this outcome of negotiation. Secondly, I think we have to differentiate the main settlement blocks and the Jewish parts of Jerusalem that wouldn't be in any event part and parcel of Israel. And the rest of the land needs to be negotiated. We need to move gradually with transitional processes and transitional phases. Not a one off standalone symbolic act of signing. We need to gradually build a reality that would eventually turn into becoming a two-state solution, and this should be done with a three-prong approach. First, a regional dialogue between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Namely Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, et cetera. Second, the Israeli-Palestinian bilateral track which has not been used during the last decade. Okay? And third, I believe that we need to have independent steps that are constructive and that lead, compliment the two first negotiation tracks. And that lead towards a two-stage reality, that contribute to making this happen.

I believe that Israel needs to state that it has no long-term sovereignty claims. Israel (unintelligible) of the security fence and outside the Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem. I believe that it is not for America alone to be facilitating this process. I believe that the quartet should be reestablished and revisited and have the EU and the UN and Russia along with America providing a continuous negotiation process on all tracks and binding one.

I believe we need to change side what we used to have as the formula for our negotiations of permanent status, which was nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This is not valid anymore. We need to agree that whatever is agreed or mutually

coordinated is implemented. And we need to provide a process that would provide the cessation of terror, the cessation of settlement activities outside of the large settlement blocks. We need to provide a future that is clean of incitement, of international and diplomatic and BDS and anti-Israeli campaigns.

And if you would like me to elaborate on what should be the parameters for a future permanent status in Jerusalem, I will do that now or later, Aaron.

Aaron David Miller: Thank you so much. I hate to lose the flow here, so if you – because Jerusalem is much on everyone’s mind, particularly the administration’s mind as they struggle I think with the final problem of what exactly this long and detailed plan, assuming it services actually says about Jerusalem, Gilead, it would be very helpful if you could -

Gilead Sher: I’ll do it in bullet points for Jerusalem and the holy sites in permanent status, the permanent status parameters, I would say the following. First, I believe that both sides should acknowledge each other’s deep religious and historic links to numerous holy places in Jerusalem. We have to provide the freedom of worship and full access to holy sites that should be guaranteed to people of all faiths. We have to have the Arab majority neighborhoods in Jerusalem come under Palestinian sovereignty and of goods. We have to have the Jewish majority neighborhoods in Jerusalem to come under Israeli sovereignty.

It’s not exactly east and west, but it’s you know, we look at the population and not at the east and west dichotomy. The Jerusalem area should include two capitals for two states. Yerushalayim for Israel and Al-Quds for the Palestinians. The old city, within the walls, will come under a special regime, much like Olmert’s proposal to Mohammed Albus in 2008 (unintelligible) which Saeb knows very well. Especially impossibly run by a council – by some kind of a council to include representatives of the three religions and regional players including the parties, of course. Israelis and Palestinians, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco.

And I believe that the arrangements in the holy sites should be as follows. Israel will have control over the sites holy to Jews. Palestine, once established, will have control over the sites holy to Muslims and Christians. Respect the Christian status quo. And finally, no excavation will take place underneath the holy sites without mutual consent. That’s it. Basically, we divide – we

urbanely divide Jerusalem, and we keep a special regime over the old city and possibly over the historic basin.

Aaron David Miller: Gilead, thanks. Saeb, before I ask a question or two – and let me remind callers to please press Star 1 to queue for questions, we have a couple. Saeb, is there anything you'd like to say and/or respond to what Gilead has laid out?

Dr. Saeb Erekat: I just want to say two things. I really think that what happened in Gaza was not self-defense. You know, Palestinians – I said from the beginning I don't want to score points, but you know, Palestinians were killed in the land of Gaza strip. And by the way, Israel has no borders. It doesn't define its boundary. And could you imagine how many tens of thousands refugees crossed countries in Europe coming from Syria, Iraq, I don't know where? At every country on earth, start shooting people when they enter the border. It's not even thinkable. If Palestinians wanted to cross to Israel, they could be arrested. Israel has the strongest army in the Middle East. The strongest airports. They have tanks. They have everything.

So it's absolutely – and I hope that no one will justify such killing of Palestinians, that's number one. Number two is on Trump's move in Jerusalem. And I agree with Gilead. Look, we have never denied Judaism, and to me, Judaism is one of God's great religions. Similar to that of Islam, like Christianity, and my conflict with Israel is not a religious one, and it should not be in comparison to a religious one, I fully agree.

Because I don't fight the Israelis over something written in their Holy Book or something written in my Holy Book. It's a political conflict, a rhetorical conflict, national conflict. So we should avoid religion. We should avoid religion whatsoever. And then to move the embassy, why would you move – why should you say Jerusalem is the capital with Israel? Why couldn't you say they are not (unintelligible) maintain its position. That is Jerusalem is (unintelligible). But they said, "No, we recognize that Jerusalem – that Israel government define." And he said to Netanyahu on that was that Jerusalem is off the table.

And then he moves to cut the aid of UNRWA, \$300 million, 75 percent of Gazans who suffer more than anybody on earth in order to receive the help from UNRWA. And Trump's administration cuts 75 percent of its aid to it. And then getting Greenblatt at the conference in Washington to speak about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. What he's trying to do is trying to put us back in

1948. That's we sort of (unintelligible). And then when it comes to permanent status issues, no, we came a long way, Gilead. You know that.

We came a long way, and on security and Jerusalem, on borders, and settlements, and refugees. We came a long way on swaps. We exchanged maps, for God's sake. We exchanged maps in 2008. Maps were exchanged. Israel offered a map of 6.5 percent swaps. President Mohammed Albus offered in return a map of 1.9 percent. So reaching an agreement had the Trump administration – wanted to reach an agreement. They would have had what's between 1.9 is not written in the Quran and 6.5 is not written in the Holy Quran (unintelligible). So the bridging was supposed to be done in this way. We exchanged map. We came a long way, and I know – I know that all core issues are doable. And Jerusalem should be the example for peace. Yes, we have in Jerusalem as our capital, with Jerusalem as capital of Israel, and then we can have an open city. We don't need to close the city. We need to look at the after peace. Of course every religion has a right to pray and worship and reach their religious (unintelligible) we would allow people to come to religious places.

We have a synagogue in Jericho now. You know that every Gilead knows that, and you know that, Aaron. Every month, you know Jews come to pray among the protection of the Palestinian security forces. That's the truth. People have the right to worship not only in Jerusalem. Anywhere they think that they are – they have holy sites in Hebron and Jericho and whatever. Religious freedom must be the basic thing for all in this region. Christian, Muslim, and Jews. But the point is today what we are facing is that the Trump administration and the Netanyahu government believe that they can dictate on me – and once they agree among themselves, they come here, boy, and if you don't accept this, you are a terrorist.

We have stellar force against you, we're going to close your office, we're going to cut your aid, we're going to cut UNRWA aid. And what is left is – is this the art of negotiation? They're putting me in a position where I have nothing to lose, Aaron. They have put me in a position where I have nothing to lose, I have nothing to show.

Gilead Sher: Aaron?

Aaron David Miller: Yes, Gilead.

Gilead Sher: Just a few words about Gaza. You know, we left Gaza in 2005, that's almost 13 years ago in the disengagement, unilateral

disengagement. It was—you know, can criticize it, but that's a fact. There's no Israeli – a single Israeli civilian or military in Gaza for almost 13 years now. We don't have any foothold in Gaza, and 40 – 50 out of the 60 people who were killed were Hamas people. This comes out as a Hamas executive statement of the last few days. We protect our borders, as any other state would have in such circumstances. So regrettably, the outcome of what happened last week, especially on Monday, which was one of the worst days since operation "Protective Edge" in summer 2014.

But the results are – the consequences of the results are tragic in a way. But I don't want to assign blames here between Israelis and Palestinians, but I believe Hamas bears the vast majority of the responsibility for what happened.

Aaron David Miller: We've got quite a few questions. First, Marc Ginsburg, are you there? Marc?

Marc Ginsberg: Yes.

Aaron David Miller: Marc Ginsburg, former ambassador of Morocco, now with the Counter Extremism Project. Marc, go ahead.

Marc Ginsberg: Can you hear me?

Gilead Sher: Yeah, we do.

Marc Ginsberg: Thank you very much, Aaron. I wanted to ask my good friend Saeb Erekat just update me on the following. I just returned from the region, and one of the recurring issues that came up was the status of the Palestinian authority's efforts to consummate a takeover of the governmental structures in Gaza. The point being is that this has been in the works for some time, and there's questions over whether or not the failure to consummate a coalition or a transition is one of the reasons why Hamas has acted the way it has, and is PA in and of itself responsible for not doing enough to consummate an effective takeover of the government authorities in Gaza as a result has helped enable this violence to break out.

Dr. Saeb Erekat: Marc, it's really good to hear you and good to talk to you – let me say the following. We had Hamas take over in Gaza in 2007. And I know, and I'll be very frank. We cannot have a state, a Palestinian independent state without Gaza. We cannot have a state in Gaza and we cannot have a state without Gaza, and we cannot have a Palestinian state without one authority, one (unintelligible). That is the honest truth.

So in this regard, that's why I'm disagreeing with Gilead concerning who is moving the people because Hamas cannot move these people. The demonstration – it's all peaceful demonstration. There's not a single gun there. What we're telling Hamas, anyway, we differ, and once we differ and we differ, we resort to ballots and not bullets. And yes, we are going to base our system on political cronyism but we have a policy of zero tolerance to authority cronyism. These are the guidelines we set up in agreements in October 12, 2017. Before that in 2012, 2011, and Egypt has been doing a fantastic job on this.

And we have now just last week formed a special committee – May 13th, actually, on eve of the tragedy, a special committee to go again and remind the Hamas leadership and others of that 12th of October 2017 agreement that the government, the national consensus government, which was actually formed with the consensus of all Palestinian political parties, including Hamas, to be fully responsible for Gaza. Because you cannot have multiple authorities. You cannot have multiple guns.

And that is the issue. This is on us. And we are telling Hamas once we differ, and we differ, we're going to go to ballots. We're going to election. Just empower the government to have its full responsibility as far as the Gaza strip is concerned. And then in six months, whatever time we agree upon, we go to presidential and just did the elections immediately. We resort to ballots, but never to bullets. And we cannot have multiple authorities and then ask to have an independent Palestinian state. I think – I don't want to say or project hope or anything, but I think if we don't help ourselves on this as Palestinians, nobody else can. So that is the split and the division and the situation in Gaza is really a tragic and needs –

And nobody can handle Gaza but us and Gaza. Gaza is like Nazareth. Gaza is like Jericho. Gaza is like in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, (unintelligible). It's one single territorial unit. This is what the agreement with Israel said (unintelligible) in Gaza constitute a single territorial unit. And I hope that Hamas leadership – because yesterday, I heard Mr. Sinwar speak on Al Jazeera in which he alleged to have full peaceful resistance. That's the first time I hear anyone from Hamas saying that. And pledged to talk about as the Palestinian – one Palestinian authority, but we want to see these.

We really have this committee now, which will meet next week, which will go to Gaza, and I hope we – they will understand that

without the implication, without the one authority, one gun, and the rule of law, we cannot move on.

Aaron David Miller: Just a brief comment on this. Sinwar gave an interview I believe this morning in which he indicated fighters from all Palestinian factions were involved in these demonstrations. Interestingly enough, he was interviewed not with a Hamas flag in the background, but with a Palestinian flag in the background, and I think Saeb's point is exactly on target. Without a monopoly over the organized forces of violence within a society, there is no way that statehood can become a reality because you lack credibility both with your own constituents and with your neighbors.

I'd also point out that in reporting here from a variety of sources, not just the idea that there were the debate over whether these were peaceful demonstrations or demonstrations designed to provoke violence, including the use of firearms and/or explosives. Not an effort to justify the Israeli response. And I was going to ask Gilead, mindful of a conversation I had with my friend Dr. Dan Kurtzer, who reminded me that a charm in the fall of '01, Clinton asked Barack, "Well after all these years, isn't there an easier way, a better way to deal even with the situation along the border?"

And I just wanted to ask you, Gilead, and I thought your presentation was quite compelling. Whether or not there was a different set of tactics that deployed that would not have led to the kind of deaths that we saw.

Gilead Sher: Well, you know, I must stress that Israel really gave early warnings by really all the communication means. And it used non-lethal means while it was still possible. Let me repeat that because it's very important. There is premeditated killing or something like that, never by Israeli combatants. And by Israeli forces. I believe that the paradigm for Gaza should be the following. I think that we need to tackle the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

I think that we need to handle the rehabilitation of Gaza, the reconstruction of Gaza, and revisit all the possibilities to obtain a normal – kind of a normal infrastructure for water and electricity and energy, et cetera. Provide for employment, et cetera. But look, the equation needs to be that in consideration for that, in a concerted international effort in which Israel will take a key role, of course, but this concerted effort should be even in consideration to a long-term truce or ceasefire or lull.

Whatever the expression in Arabic is for that. It's not "ahudna," (unintelligible) which you just wait for the next opportunity to attack. We need a rule – a real good ceasefire that would allow us to help the people of Gaza. And by the way, you know, the ceasefire agreement in 2014 after the operation Protective Edge in Gaza that was brokered by El-Sisi and Egypt, it anticipated the PAs regaining control over Gaza, first in the crossing points and then the border, and then inside Gaza. This never happened.

So all these repeated attempts to have a reconciliation accord between Fatah (unintelligible) and Hamas, they should aim at least doing that because without that, I don't believe that all the aid and the assistance that would be given to Gaza in order to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and to subside the problems in Gaza will be, once again, channeled to dig tunnels and under our settlements or (unintelligible), et cetera, and to terrorism. So we need to have this monitored and that's I think the right – the correct situation.

Dr. Saeb Erekat: May I, Aaron?

Aaron David Miller: Sure, Saeb, briefly because I want to get to more questions. Sure, go ahead.

Dr. Saeb Erekat: That's exactly the October 12th agreement. And the question again of violence. Israelis have been saying that Hamas has thousands of missiles, tunnels and so on. Had these people been pushed by Hamas, Hamas would have used missiles and guns and tunnels. These demonstration were really peaceful. I know that. I know that. And for the question of how to solve Gaza problem, I said this is on us. And you said Gilead that Israeli with Gaza – Gaza is under total siege. We know that Gaza is under total siege. Hardly a day goes by without Israeli planes hitting Gaza and striking Gaza and so on.

But then the question of relocation of Gaza, one authority, one gun, and the rule of law. That's what I said. I said this is October 12 agreement. We take over the passages, police stations, and gradually they (unintelligible), and then we merge everything to have one authority, one gun, and the rule of law. But we need a chance to give this now.

Gilead Sher: Saeb, I don't want to argue about the peaceful demonstrations, but you know, Salah Bardawil, one of the most senior people of Hamas, the most senior executives of Hamas, gave a television interview in which he said that 50 out of the 62 people killed in the

demonstration the past week were Hamas people. So it's not Israel inventing that.

Dr. Saeb Erekat: Gilead, the people of Gaza went out (unintelligible) Hamas (unintelligible) and so on. I'm saying that none of them had a single weapon in their hands. In 2014 when there was a clash in Gaza between Hamas and Israel, there were missiles, tunnels, killings, and so on. These demonstrations were peaceful, Gilead. Not a single Israeli was wounded. Not a single Israeli was killed. That is the honest truth, and no one should justify this, and Israeli army, you know, Ms. Haley saying – she thanked the Israeli army for being restrained after killing 64 and wounding 2,500. These are human beings, for God's sake. But anyway, in order to save lives of Palestinians and to save lives of Israelis, we cannot just continue complaining.

We cannot continue nagging, and we cannot continue scoring points.

Gilead Sher: Agreed.

Dr. Saeb Erekat: What we need to do is to have someone in Israel – I with a loud voice – say that we have recognized Israel's right to exist and live in peace and security on the 1967 line. We came a long way. We need someone in Israel to stand up and recognize the state of Palestine's right to live in peace. What President Trump did, he dropped this – all American administrations since the early 2000s said two states. Now Trump is saying two states, the two parties agreed, he gave Netanyahu a lead on it (unintelligible). He never said to us in any of that – none of them, Kushner or Jason Greenblatt have said two states along 1967 lines. They never said that.

They never condemned settlements. They considered them illegal. And that's the problem. The problem is you cannot change the terms of reference. You cannot take us back 25 years, 30 years ago. We came a long way. We need to begin where we finished. We came a long way. We know the parameters. We know the end game. We don't need (unintelligible) from the start. There is never – there will never be military solution to this problem. It's not military might. It's the power of our brains. Our minds. Our vision.

Aaron David Miller: On that, Saeb, I think we can all agree. I have a question from Eitan Gellar-Montague from Haverford College. Are you there? Eitan, are you there?

Eitan Gellar-Montague: Yeah, I'm here. Can you hear me?

Aaron David Miller: Yes, go ahead.

Eitan Gellar-Montague: How far apart have the sides been in the past on the refugee issue? And looking forward, do you think a Palestinian leader could ever accept a solution which is symbolic or turn, and if they could, would they be able to get it past a national referendum?

Aaron David Miller: Saeb, why don't you offer a brief comment on the second part of Eitan's question? Because it was specifically negotiating question about what Palestinians could accept, and then Gilead, if you could briefly lay out where you think the parties were on the issue of Palestinian refugees. Saeb?

Dr. Saeb Erekat: We were discussing this. I think you recall the Clinton parameters. The Palestinian refugees have the right to return to the state of Palestine, to remain where they are with compensation, to go third party or to go back to Israel. And we were discussing this and we were discussing this, and our proposal was is that we should form an international committee headed by the UN – by the US all (unintelligible) countries. Israel and Palestine, and then go to refugees, and give them these options. I think it's doable. I really think it's doable because the point is when you have all these issues, when we said nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, we know what Israel's position is under refugees, what Israel's position is on security. They know that we cannot have a Palestinian state without Jerusalem being a capital.

So we came a long, long, long, long way. All I'm telling you now, these issues are doable, but can we have a partner in Israel who say I accept the terms of preference that we agreed upon. We don't. We don't accept the terms of reference that were agreed upon. The Trump administration does not accept the terms of reference agreed upon. They're trying to dictate a solution. Now they began by getting Jerusalem off the table – refugees off the table, settlements off the table, and they can repeat between each other, Trump and Netanyahu, but not with me.

Gilead Sher: Let me refer to the question of refugees and the right to return. I believe that this was not, is not, and will not be the sticking point in the negotiations, unlike Jerusalem which probably will be the sticking point. So you know, we came a long way on the refugee issue in the Clinton parameters, as I had mentioned. And I believe that later on during the (unintelligible) negotiations in Annapolis, there was an agreement about that. And the question is, you know,

whether the formula of the right of return being applied and executed in Palestine once established, in the territory of Palestine, in the current places of residence of the refugees, and in third parties which will happen to host some policy and refugees.

About Israel, I would say the following. In Israel, there is a readiness to consider on a case-by-case basis a symbolic number of Palestinian refugees that on the basis of Humanitarian argumentation or for family reunification would come and settle in Israel proper. But this would be a small number, a symbolic number, just to make sure that this is not completely off the table. There's no right of return to be exerts in Israel proper. This – and I believe that what I would expect is that one day, a Palestinian leader will come out and say out loud, “Look, we're getting our state, we're getting our sovereignty, we are ending the conflict by an agreement with Israel. We'll have our dreams and our aspirations, but not all of them will be exerts in practice.”

Dr. Saeb Erekat:

Gilead, if some Israelis would stand up and say (unintelligible) independent Palestinians state of course all issues are global. By the way, we did not reach an agreement to be fair with Mr. Olmert. We came a long, long, long way. But for Israel now, they're telling us no Palestinian state, no right of return, no living independence, no freedom, more settlements, more dictation, more apartheid. Gilead, you know the situation in the West Bank today, there are roads I cannot use as a Palestinian. And such disease as bigotry and racism once they inflict underneath our skins, whether we are Muslims, Christians, Jews, white, black, we have a tendency to defy it.

Sometimes sociology, sometimes psychologically, sometimes economically, and now Israel is using intense security. This must end. The name of the demonstration is called the right of return. Because Israel is blocking the independence of Palestinians, the lives of Palestinians, the economic of Palestinians, they just want to continue dictating and gripping and forcing the apartheid system on us. So I believe that once we set with a leadership in Israel that is willing to accept the two-state solution of 1967 line, all issues will be doable. Yes, we disagree as far as Jerusalem.

Yes, I disagree with what you said about refugee. Yes, you disagree with me about what I said about many things, but that's what we need to negotiate. That's -

Aaron David Miller: Saeb, we have time -

Male: We need to sit down and void violence, void of the settlement activities, and give peace a chance on the terms of agreed upon by us and you, Gilead.

Aaron David Miller: Talking not shooting, I would absolutely agree to that. We have one – time for one more question. Mark Jaffe from Global Foundries. Are you there?

Mark Jaffe: Yes, I am. Can you hear me?

Aaron David Miller: Yes. We're really at the end of the hour, so briefly please.

Mark Jaffe: Okay. Let's face it, the Palestinians are on the weakest position since perhaps the very beginning of the conflict. Albus is deeply unpopular with his own people. Netanyahu is stronger than ever. Assuming the Arab states are tacitly working with Israel, and frankly much of the world is tiring of the analyst Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The embassy move, the Gaza blockade, continuous construction settlements are certainly not counterproductive, but time is cooling not on the Palestinian side, and this is the current reality. For modern Israelis to feel the withdrawal from Gaza only led to more Palestinian violence. The biggest obstacle to peace talks is Hamas' continuing control over Gaza and unwillingness to negotiate with Israel. Dr. Erekat, giving the Palestinian's weakened position, isn't it time for the Palestinians to adopt a unified moderate leadership that is ready to negotiate the best deal it can get under these circumstances with no preconditions?

Dr. Saeb Erekat: I hear this argument, by the way, from Mr. Kushner. By the way, he told me that Israel is the strongest country in the Middle East, strongest navy, strongest air force, strongest economy, the strongest GMP per capita. They have good relations with India and China. And I asked him a question. What was South Africa in 1986? Okay, okay. You described my weakness in under occupation and so on. Look, you're speaking to an elected Palestinian official. I did not come down by my tank. We don't have tanks.

And when Albus was in – also came by tank, he was elected. We have a Palestinian moderate leadership that recognizes a state of Israel right to live in peace and security, and as a matter of fact, we came a long way in our negotiations. What we need people to understand in April 23rd, 2014, it was Mr. Netanyahu who stopped the negotiation. These are facts, and when we say that why can't you recognize Israel – I recognize Israel. But why can't you recognize Palestine and the state of Palestine? Why can't you say

that you recognize the state of Palestine? When I go to the United Nations to register to the future Palestinian generations that we have accepted Israel right to live in peace and security.

For two states along 1967, congress has written and wants to wage war on us. So the question to you, Mr. Jaffe, is do you – are you willing to recognize the existence of a Palestinian state to live side-by-side to the state of Israel (unintelligible) or not? Because you cannot tell me because I'm weak, because I'm this, I have to (unintelligible). No, this will not happen. All what's happening now is people like me, you're right, we're being weakened as moderates. We're being weakened by the actions of Trump and by the actions of Mr. Netanyahu. The settlement activities, dictation, massacres, and blockades, and so on.

There is no hope, and once hope is absent in the mind of Palestinians and Israelis, God help us. God help us. We must maintain the hope in the minds of Palestinians and Israelis that are peaceful settlements on the two state solution on the 1967 line is the only doable option. That's my personal belief.

Aaron David Miller: Thank you so much. We're at the end of the hour. I just want to say one thing. Gilead, do you want to respond briefly?

Gilead Sher: You know, the asymmetry is there. We know that. And the Palestinian camp, we have a deficient governance. We have corruption. We have political and geographical schemes that were mentioned in this conversation. We have this succession problem. We have the economic that were there, et cetera. But for Israel, we stand before the most critical decision in 70 years. This is what borders are going to encompass our core values as the Jewish democratic state of the Jewish people. And the only way to provide us with this future and the hope for this future is a two state solution or by Israel and Palestine would live side-by-side and coexist.

This is doable. This is attainable. As I said, gradually and with a three prong approach, with transitional phases. Because the status quo is untenable and it's leading us towards a disaster. Both Palestinians and Israelis will suffer.

Aaron David Miller: Thanks so much.

[Crosstalk]

Dr. Saeb Erekat: Aligned with 1967 line.

Aaron David Miller: I want to say something to both of you. Deeply appreciate the fact that both of you came on, deeply appreciate the fact that despite your differences – and there are clear differences – you represent honest narratives the way you see them. Both of you have tremendous respect for one another. And more than that, my analysis for 15 years since leaving government, my words here has been annoyingly negative based on what I've seen. And the fact that the two of you continue to believe that the six core issues that drive the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are in fact tractable, they can be resolved, is to me the most encouraging thing despite the fact I realize.

I will only conclude with one additional point. South Africa, as difficult a situation it now faces for many different political and economic reasons, no one ever believed that the South African situation, that apartheid would be resolved without a catastrophe, and it was resolved because of a leadership. And that to me still remains the key. Leaders on the Israeli and Palestinian and the American side who are masters of their political houses, not prisoners of their political ideologies or their politics. Realists and pragmatists who actually are committed to doing this. And I leave this call, again, and it's rare for me, uplifted by the fact that there are Israelis and Palestinians still, however much they may disagree, devoted and dedicated to that proposition. I want to thank both of you, and I want to thank all of the callers for your patience. And for your time and attention. Thank you very much.

Dr. Saeb Erekat: Thank you.

Gilead Sher: Thank you.