

Talking for Peace – A Karl Kahane Lecture Series

The Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue
in co-operation with the Karl Kahane Foundation

PEACE NEEDS PARTNERS UNILATERALISM BRINGS DESTRUCTION AND VIOLENCE

Hillel Schenker in dialogue with **Ziad Abu Zayyad**

Welcome address
Patricia Kahane

Moderator
Gudrun Harrer

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Hillel Schenker is co-editor of the *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, a Jerusalem-based independent English-language quarterly, initiated and maintained by a group of prominent Israeli and Palestinian academics and journalists (www.pij.org). It aims to shed light on, and analyze freely and critically, the complex issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians. Hillel Schenker served for 13 years as an editor of *New Outlook*, the Israeli peace monthly founded in the spirit of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue that served as a vehicle for understanding Israeli-Arab affairs and as a catalyst for dialogue and initiatives for peace. He has written for *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *Los Angeles Times*, *L.A. Weekly*, *Tikkun*, *Israel Horizons*, *In These Times*, the *Israeli-Hebrew-language press* and many other print and electronic outlets. He was an activist and co-founder of the *Peace Now* movement and has served for many years as spokesperson for the Israeli branch of *International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War*. He is an International Advisory Board member of the *Global Majority* center for non-violent conflict resolution based at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Ziad Abu-Zayyad - born in April 1940, a resident of Aizariyeh (Bethany), a Palestinian suburb of East Jerusalem, Ziad Abu Zayyad (Attorney at Law graduate of Damascus University 1965) has been a long time advocate of a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. In 1986, Abu-Zayyad founded the bi-monthly journal *Gesher (The Bridge)* of which he was publisher and editor. The journal was published in Hebrew and was devoted to promoting the dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Abu-Zayyad was co-author of *The West Bank Political Lexicon* (together with two prominent Israelis, Meron Benvenisti and Danny Rubinstein) which became an invaluable reference document. He is also co-editor and publisher of the *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, a quarterly journal, which he co-founded in 1994 with a prominent Israeli journalist, Victor Cygielman, as a joint Palestinian-Israeli venture. Abu-Zayyad has participated in numerous Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. He was an advisor to the Palestinian negotiating team in Washington DC. following the 1991 Madrid peace conference, and he was a member of the post-Oslo negotiating team that concluded the 1994 Israeli-Palestinian Agreement that began the implementation of the Oslo Declaration of Principles ("The Cairo Agreement" that led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and Jericho). He also headed the Palestinian delegation to the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group of the Middle East multilateral peace talks and is former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (1996-2006), representing Jerusalem District and has also served as Minister of State in the Palestinian Authority (1998-2002) and coordinator of the Ministerial Committee on Jerusalem

Gudrun Harrer - journalist, managing Foreign Editor of the Austrian daily *Der Standard*, during the Austrian EU-Presidency Austrian Special Representative in Iraq.

Patricia Kahane

Dear friends, good evening, welcome again to the Bruno Kreisky Forum and to today's Karl Kahane Lecture. As usual most of us here could be called peace activists in one form or another, concerned with or trying to do their best towards bringing our two peoples, Palestinians and Israelis or Jews, closer to a peaceful coexistence within the framework of two neighboring states or countries. Last week we had a very interesting encounter with a guy called Dr. Amal Jamal who is the new head of Tel Aviv University's department of political science. What struck me amongst his many comments was his resumé that we don't need to meet and sit down together again and again in order to get to know each other better, or in order to understand each other better because we know each other very well already. What we need according to his view is to review each for himself or each people for itself the narratives of the conflict, apart of the iceberg that lies under the water, and learn to accept the other as a reality in all senses. It means space, ideas, people etc. But today we

are going to listen to a discussion between Hillel Schenker and Ziad Abu Zayyad. Ziad is a law graduate of Damascus University and a longterm advocate of a peaceful resolution of the conflict or the dispute. He founded and co-authored several publications promoting the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue since 1986. He has also participated in numerous Palestinian-Israeli negotiations around Oslo, around Madrid and Cairo. He was a member of the Palestinian legislative council for ten years. He is not only an activist but also somebody who had real political influence and responsibilities. Hillel Schenker is a very senior journalist and also peace activist, co-founder of Peace Now, co-editor of the *Palestinian-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture*, and a longtime editor of *New Outlook Magazine*. He has written for many British and US newspapers over many years. Gudrun Harrer will moderate your conversation. She is a journalist. Somehow she is far more than a Middle East specialist. She is fluent in Arabic and has a deep inside into the culture of the region. Have an interesting discussion.

Gudrun Harrer

Good evening, thank you Patricia. I am very happy to present to you my two distinguished guests who have much in common, but who belong to two different communities. My feeling is that we don't see so much Palestinians and Israelis now touring together and being present in panels together. I have the feeling there was much more of that in the 1990's. And it stopped during the last years. I hope we will see and hear more of it again in the future. Together they are editors of the *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economic, and Culture*. Our theme is "Peace needs Partners". If we follow the line of the Israeli government today it seems they have less partners than ever on the Palestinian side. There is now the tendency not to speak even anymore to Abu Mazen, to President Mahmud Abbas, after he agreed to try to stop the violence in the Palestinian territories. We don't see much of a dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians on the horizon. I give the floor first to Hillel Schenker.

Hillel Schenker

Thank you. I am honored to be here at the Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue together with my colleague Ziad Abu Zayyad. I would like to say that before I came here, over the weekend, I spoke with a number of Israelis who some of you may know who were the winners of the Kreisky Prize for Human Rights. I spoke first with Arie (Lova) Eliav who won it together with Dr. Issam Sartawi in 1979. I also spoke with Latif Dori who won the Prize together with Benazir Bhutto. Another Kreisky Prize winner was the late Simha Flapan, the editor of *New Outlook Magazine* for many years, who I consider my mentor in many ways. Just one little story that Eliav told me. When he was coming here he was told that Dr. Sartawi had been warned, asked by a number of leaders of the PLO at the time not to come to speak together with Eliav because he was a Zionist Israeli. Dr. Sartawi did not listen. He said, this is very important, we must have dialogue with the mainstream of Israeli society. He went ahead and met with Eliav. Eliav says he was one of the most impressive and sincere and honest people that he had ever met.

Something else about Chancellor Kreisky. In the 1970's, of course, from the Israeli perspective Kreisky was involved in two things. One was the fact that he helped to arrange for Russian Jews to be able to come to Israel. And the other was to help facilitate Israeli-Arab dialogue. I don't know if you know the story that is well known in Israel. Prime Minister Golda Meir once got into an argument with him. And to explain the argument she said, he wasn't a nice man because he didn't offer me a glass of water. I would add that Golda Meir wasn't always a nice woman because she did not recognize the Palestinian people's right to national self-determination, among other things. That was the 1970's. We move ahead and we had Oslo in 1993 and the Declaration of Principles and we had mutual recognition between the PLO and the Israeli government. We felt we were really making progress. There were many encounters with dialogues. People thought it was inevitable that we are going to resolve the conflict, there is no turning back.

I want to jump to June of 2006. At that time Dr. Ron Pundak, who was one of the architects of Oslo and is now the Director of the Peres Center for Peace, said something in a roundtable discussion that we had at the *Palestine-Israel Journal*. He said, the Olmert-Peretz government is the best government that we could possibly have in order to move forward to peace. We have people who left the Likud because they understood that greater Israel was no longer possible. This is after the disengagement, after the precedent had

been set of dismantling settlements and leaving Gaza. And here was Prime Minister Ehud Olmert who had replaced Sharon saying, we must resolve the conflict, we must make major withdrawals. He was talking about 90% at least from the West Bank. And we have Defense Minister Amir Peretz, who was also a co-founder of Peace Now being the head of Labor. This was the ideal government, he said. I disagreed. I am talking about June, this is just half a year ago. A few weeks later first there was an across the border attack in Gaza where a few soldiers were killed and Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier, was kidnapped. A few weeks after that, on July 12, a similar raid happened on the Northern border and this time two Israeli soldiers were captured. And Olmert and Peretz led a military response which was a tremendous – in my view – overreaction to the situation, and which completely undermined their political standing within Israeli society. If at that time they clearly had a majority in the polls and in the first week of the war also were gaining tremendous positive reaction from the public, by the end of the war both their popularities had plummeted, similar in a sense to what happened to President Bush. If at the beginning of the Iraq War people thought this is something we are supporting, today Bush has the lowest rating that an American President has had in history. Thus, the fact that Olmert and Peretz had lost their political standing meant that Ron Pundak's prediction that this would be an ideal government to move forward for peace was clearly not being realized.

Here I want to look at the reality in Israel today. First of all, Israeli society is a society under tremendous pressure. There are corruption charges which have been levelled at President Katzav who had to suspend himself, at the former Minister of Justice Haim Ramon, the Chief of Staff resigned, the Police Commissioner resigned. And then you also have investigations going on behind the scenes without yet a charge against the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. There is a general sense of a leadership which is facing tremendous difficulties, and which has lost the confidence of the people. Amir Peretz, the Defense Minister, the head of the Labor Party, is considered a very honest man. He is not under investigation. His problem is, he is considered someone who simply assumed the wrong position. He took a position beyond what he is capable of doing. That is the general perception of Amir Peretz both as Defense Minister and as head of the Labor Party who promised to focus on social concerns, on socio-economic issues. He was tempted to be the Defense Minister because he thought that would give him credentials next time around to be a candidate for Prime Minister. So you have what writer David Grossman called a hollow leadership. That was the phrase he used at the anniversary rally in memory of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in November. This reverberated throughout Israeli society. It was the at the top of the headlines. Every one said, David Grossman, the writer, hit it exactly. This is a leadership in great crisis.

And then there's the economic situation. On the one hand there is ongoing economic growth. But on the other hand the gap between rich and poor is growing. One quarter of the Israeli population lives below the poverty line. One third of the Israeli children live below the poverty line. This is a general situation which creates a tremendous amount of pressure within Israeli society and a lot of stress.

Alongside of that there are tremendous fears which have been generated within Israeli society. This is because of the anxiety concerning the fact that Iran may realize its nuclear potential. And that is accompanied by the fact that President Ahmadinejad has made statements which Israelis interpret as a desire to eliminate the state of Israel. Alongside that Hamas was elected to the Palestinian Authority leadership, a movement which by its own declaration does not recognize the state of Israel. All of that has added, generated a sense of fear and anxiety. I know that many Palestinians find it very difficult to believe that Israelis are fearful. After all, a country with the fourth or fifth strongest army in the world, and according to all the international reports 200 nuclear weapons, how could such a country, how could the people be afraid? But they are. There is today a level of almost existential fear that many Israelis feel in terms of their vision of the future. And yet, there is a window of opportunity today.

There is a window of opportunity because there is a Palestinian national unity government. Or may be one. At least an agreement was reached in Mecca on the Palestinian side based on what is known as the Prisoner's Document. There is a revival of the idea of the Arab League or Saudi Initiative, if Israel would withdraw to the 1967 lines, a readiness of the entire Arab world to recognize Israel and normalize relations with Israel. You have a number of countries, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States all trying to promote this. Jordanian King Abdullah recently gave a few interviews to Israeli press and TV about this. And we still have an Israeli government backed by seventy Members of Knesset (out of 120) from Kadima, Labor, Meretz, and

the Arab parties who would sign an agreement if there were an agreement on the table. I say this is a window of opportunity because according to the polls, because of the discreditation of the current leadership, if the elections were held now, that majority of seventy Members of Knesset would drop to fifty. They would become a minority and would be replaced by a right wing government led by Likud chairman Benjamin Netanyahu, Avigdor Lieberman of the Yisrael Beiteunu Party who is in many respects a racist in terms of his attitude towards the Palestinians, and the oligarch Arkady Gaydamak, another Russian Israeli. They would probably form the government . We have a short time to move forward. If only we had a strong courageous leadership on both sides which we don't have right now, and if only we had an international community which would be ready to help facilitate movement forward – we don't have that either. We have unfortunately President Bush. The topic of our dialogue is about unilateralism or negotiations. Bush has been practising a total unilateral foreign policy. Iraq and everything else. He simply does not work with the international community, and he has not made a serious attempt at trying to facilitate an Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

Let me close my introductory remarks by quoting two people in our latest issue. The latest issue of the *Palestine-Israel Journal* was devoted to The Role of the International Community. The first person I want to quote is the former American Ambassador to Israel and to Egypt, Daniel Kurtzer. He wrote an article for us which he called “The US must get tough in promoting Arab-Israeli peace efforts”. The subtitle was “The table is set and the guests are ready, the conditions are ripe, the US should act”. The second person I want to quote is Meretz Party leader Yossi Beilin. Yossi Beilin who was one of the architects of the Oslo Accords and of the Geneva Initiative gave us an interview. And in that interview he said, Europe made a mistake in joining the quartet. You know, there is the quartet of America, Russia, the UN and Europe which is supposed to be helping to facilitate an agreement. Because the Americans are taking the lead, they have essentially paralyzed the quartet. Yossi Beilin said, the Europeans have two options: either to push the Americans to be more active or to act on your own to help move the process forward.

I would just like to end my introductory remarks by saying that those people who I spoke with at the beginning, Lova Eliav and Latif Dori, spoke to me also about Karl Kahane. They said how much they appreciated his role in trying to facilitate Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and peace. I would like to tell you that Israeli author David Shaham, another winner of the Kreisky Prize, actually wrote an autobiography in which there is a chapter about Karl Kahane and his efforts. Thank you.

Gudrun Harrer

Thank you very much. I want to add, Europe did not only join the quartet, in a way they invented it. But then they lost it. They let the Americans take over. To be honest, I don't see how this construction can be revived. Ziad Abu Zayyad.

Ziad Abu Zayyad

Thank you. I was a Member of Palestinian Legislative Council (TheParliament) from 1996 to 2006. During the last four years of that period there was a debate in the council whether we will have elections, or should we have elections, or do we need to have elections.

There were Members who were against elections. They said that according to the Oslo Agreement this parliament is the parliament of the interim period. Therefore, as long as we do not come to an agreement with the Israelis and there is no Palestinian state, why should we have elections ,we don't need elections. But I myself had a different opinion. I believed in elections. Because some of the Members became old ,others were not attending the sessions regularly , some died ,and others where in jail. So when I was elected as Chairman of the Legal Committee in 2003 I initiated a new law of elections which was approved later with some changes . But I managed to have in this law articles limiting the term of the Council to four years instead of unlimited term till the end of the interim period of the negotiations, so elections should be conducted once every four years. We also had a quota for women which guarantees that women should have more or less some 20% - 25% of seats in the parliament. We had a quota for the Christians because the Christians are a small community. If we leave them to the general elections maybe we would not have

Christian MPs. So we said that in the cities where there is a majority of Christians there must be MPs representing the Christian community in the Palestinian parliament.

We had elections in 2006. The elections were very democratic, transparent . These elections brought Hamas to power. This is democracy. Unfortunately some people who were pressuring us, and even the Americans who funded a project which I was carrying to legislate a new law including a seminar in Sharm el Sheikh with experts from Egypt, Norway, and 18 MPs of the Palestinian parliament to reform our elections system , they were against the elections when the results were not to their satisfaction . But this is what happened, this is democracy. You cannot decide the result of elections in advance.

However, because we wanted to develop a democratic tradition in our society, we wanted to teach our people that democracy is very important and that every four years anyone who is elected to the parliament will stand in front of the people and tell them what he did and what he did not, and the people will decide whether they want him to continue or they want to kick him out. We wanted to teach our people this tradition. We were punished. There was a siege on the Palestinian Authority and a boycott of Hamas government. The indirect result was that Hamas government was given the opportunity not to fulfill the promises they gave to the people who have voted for Hamas.

Hamas went to the elections under the slogan “change and reform”. They were accusing the former government and the former regime of Fatah that they were corrupted and Hamas was not corrupted, and that Hamas wants reform, Hamas wants a change. And instead of putting them on trial and examining whether they would be able to implement what they promised , they got busy with how to break the siege and how to get money to pay the civil servants. And they did nothing in the area of reform and change.

In my opinion the idea of siege on the Palestinian Authority because of the success of Hamas was a big mistake. Always when you are in opposition you are not afraid to take the extremist position and to say whatever you want but if you are in government and you know the restrictions of the responsibility , you behave according to your responsibility. You cannot isolate yourself from the world. And the Hamas government should have been treated normally in order to adapt themselves to the new situation where they found themselves in the front of the international community, and not to put conditions on them and tell them that they have to fulfil specific conditions, otherwise nobody will speak with them.

Usually agreements are made between states and not between governments. If we accept the principle that every time there is a change inside a country and a new party wins the elections, we ask the new government to ratify all the agreements which were signed by the former government the whole international relations would be in a big mess. You cannot say, every time there is a change in any country , the new government has to accept the agreements signed by the former government. Commitments and obligations are between states and not governments .

In our case it is true that we are not a state, but the agreements were signed between the PLO and between Israel. The Palestinian Authority does not represent all the Palestinian people. It is the PLO which represents the Palestinians inside the Palestinian territories and in exile. So no one can say that the Palestinian Authority represents all the Palestinians and can sign an agreement on behalf of the Palestinian people. And that is why we insist that it should be the PLO which negotiates and signs agreements because the PLO is the umbrella and it represents the Palestinians inside and outside. The Palestinian Authority is the product of the Oslo process. If the Oslo process fails the Palestinian Authority will disappear because it is an outcome of Oslo. But the PLO will not disappear and should not disappear because it represents the Palestinian cause, and the Palestinian national identity, and the Palestinian struggle for independence. So to come and ask the Hamas government to accept specific agreements was not a fair and wise step. They are still saying that Hamas has to recognize Israel and abandon terror and accept all the agreements signed by the Palestinian Authority. Here there is something misleading because the agreements were signed by the PLO and not the PA government .However , all of you know that Fatah movement which formed the previous government recognized the state of Israel. The former leadership of Arafat, the Palestinian Authority, and the PLO, recognize Israel.

What did we get in return from Israel? We got nothing. Now, if you speak with Hamas, they will tell you, you did that, you recognized Israel, and you stopped all kinds of violent acts, and you stopped the resistance what did you get from Israel? You got more settlements, you got the wall, you got confiscation of land, collective punishment, and all kinds of restrictions. Therefore I believe that the international community, mainly the quartet, must be fair in their demand from the Palestinians to accept the conditions of the quartet. And if they want to be fair they should make mutual obligations on both sides. If they say that the Hamas government should recognize Israel they must say on the other hand that Israel should say that they are ready to withdraw from all the occupied territories in 1967, and recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people including their right of self-determination and having their independent viable contiguous state in all the territories occupied in 67 including East Jerusalem the Capital of the future Palestinian state, and solve the problem of the Palestinian refugees. The usual traditional argument of Israel is security. Let them put on the table all their non-territorial demands to guarantee their security. However, we are those who need security. We are the weak partner in this formula. But still, the Israelis say we want security. Okay. Tell me what are your demands, what are your conditions that will make you feel secure and relaxed, and satisfied and happy? The obligation should be on both sides. But we do not hear anybody asking Israel to make any concession, anything. All the time we are subjected to blackmail, we are subjected to demands, we are subjected to conditions while we don't see any similar conditions on the other side.

Now we are talking about the national unity government. As a matter of fact, there is the Jihad Islami movement which will not join this government. They say very clearly that they will not be part of the national unity government but they will support the national unity government. There are now talks and negotiations between all the parties. Why should you jump in front of the carriage and make a judgement on that government before it is formed, and before it functions, and before you see how this government will behave? I think it is, again, a big mistake to say how the national government should be formed and make conditions and obstacles to prevent the formation of this government.

There were reports that the United States don't want Fatah to be in the national unity government, because they are waiting till Hamas fails and leaves the government. This is an illusion, because Hamas will not allow itself to fail, and will not leave the government. We should not forget that this is the first time that an Islamic movement comes to power through democratic means. They will exhaust every single second of their term and they will not resign. On the contrary they argue that there are signals about a change in the position of the international community towards Hamas. According to Hamas spokesmen, there are some Europeans who speak indirectly to Hamas, others speak behind the curtains with Hamas, and there are some countries who are having contacts with Hamas. If anyone expects that Hamas will take their luggage and say goodbye, we failed, we don't want to be in the government or in parliament, this will not happen. But in the same time, dragging this situation will only cause more suffering to the Palestinian people who are paying the price. Our hospitals don't have enough medicine. Sometimes they don't have food supplies. Sometimes they cannot cover their running costs. It is because of the boycott. It is the same with our schools. Now we are in February. Until now the schools did not have textbooks because in the beginning of the year the Minister of Education thought they will have money and they will buy textbooks, print textbooks and give them to the students. Therefore he gave instructions for the stores of the Ministry of Education to give all the textbooks they have to the private schools. Most of them are Christian schools mainly in Jerusalem. All of a sudden we don't have money to print books and our schools in the West Bank and Gaza are without books. Why? It is because of the siege and the boycott on the government of Hamas.

This boycott is punishment to the Palestinian people because they wanted to practice democracy and have a democratic regime. This is a punishment for our democracy.

Having said this about our internal situation, I want to speak the Israeli policy of unilateralism. As you remember from the year 2002 the main argument of Sharon was that there is no partner, and there is no Palestinian side to speak with and therefore he will behave unilateral. He refused to speak with Arafat. He refused to negotiate with the PLO.

At the same time civil society organizations tried to show the world that this is not true, and there is a partner. Some Israelis and some Palestinians started talking together and developed the document known by Geneva Initiative. The main purpose of the Geneva Initiative was to show that there is a partner and that there

is a possibility for Palestinians and Israelis to reach an agreement and to make peace and to live side by side. When Sharon saw that there is a great concern and attention even in Israel itself about the Geneva Initiative he came out with a “new magic” which was the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza Strip. And everybody said okay, now put Geneva aside, don’t disturb Father Sharon, now he changed, he became De Gaulle, he will withdraw from the Palestinian territories, now he has withdrawn from Gaza, he will do it in the Westbank, please keep quiet. And everywhere we go , everybody was telling us, don’t disturb Sharon, he is withdrawing from Gaza.

It is true that he was planning to evacuate Gaza because it was a very heavy burden on the Israeli army because the number of the soldiers who were maintaining the occupation of Gaza and protecting the Jewish settlements in Gaza was more than double the number of the settlers in Gaza. And he was planning to evacuate Gaza because he thought that he will focus all his efforts on the Westbank Jewish settlements and to develop them to become an integral part of Israel. We tried to convince Sharon that this unilateral withdrawal should be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority .This will help the moderate leadership to claim that this is an achievement of the peace process and to use this step to revive and enhance political negotiations . And believe me, if we could have done that we could have done better in the elections in 2006. But Sharon refused to coordinate the withdrawal with the Palestinian Authority and refused to say that this is the product of the political process. He insisted that this is a military act and therefore he will not coordinate military acts with the Palestinians,. Until the last two or three weeks before the evacuation of Gaza, then he accepted some military contacts between us and Israel. We guaranteed to Israel that the Israeli army will not be attacked while they will be leaving Gaza. And they withdrew from Gaza without anything done against them. But unfortunately, though we welcomed the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and we thought that this is a very positive step, and we said that we welcome any withdrawal from any single inch of Palestinian land, the Sharon government continued its policy of assassinations in the Westbank which they call targeted killings. And, of course, any political movement which is in the Westbank has its extension in Gaza Strip. When the Israeli Army kill someone in Jenin who belongs to the Jihad Islami or to the Popular Front or to any other movement you can expect that the revenge will come from anywhere in the West Bank or Gaza because it is the same political party. So through continued assassinations they undermined the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza Strip. And the Israelis were again attacking Gaza and there were military activities in Gaza. And the whole concept of withdrawal from Gaza became a disaster.

The situation on the ground now is very bad. During the last six, seven years the Palestinian Authority was destroyed. All the institutions and the infrastructure of the PA were destroyed. As a result of the military incursions very frequently to the Palestinian territories and the humiliation of the Palestinian security system .Now we have a situation of lack of internal civil security and public order. We have different kinds of militias, family militia, tribe militia. The level of crime is increasing inside the Palestinian community because the Israeli occupation do not allow even the police to function.

I want to say two more things. I don’t believe that there is an alternative to negotiations. Unilateral steps could only be positive if they are done by both sides. If we imagine a situation where Israel starts unilateral steps in order to build confidence with the Palestinian Authority and the PA starts unilateral steps to build confidence within the Israeli society and with Israel then unilateral steps from each side could go parallel in order to create a situation where they start to trust each other, and work with each other, and negotiate with each other. But what we saw was Israeli unilateral steps in a negative manner. I don’t think that there is any alternative to negotiations. Unfortunately there is no strong leadership in Israel which can take the initiative and lead a process of making peace with the Palestinian people. It is true that our President is not as strong as Arafat was. It is not a secret. Arafat could have done many things which many other people cannot do. But in spite of that President Mahmoud Abbas is willing and he is ready to take the initiative if he finds an Israeli partner to work together with . In the past when he visited Sharon he took two thirds of his government to Jerusalem and met with Sharon. And Sharon, instead of working with Abbas how to go further and promote the process, was lecturing Mahmud Abbas and ordering him what he should do and what he should not do. He did not go to the substance of any negotiations or any acts to promote the process.

Now Abbas is accepted by Hamas and their leaders said clearly that they will be ready to accept any obligation which Abbas makes. They agree and accept the fact that the PLO is the representative and is the negotiator in any political negotiations.

We don't have too much time. The situation is deteriorating. The concept of the two-state-solution is almost dying. If Israel continues creating facts in the occupied territories and enlarging and expanding new settlements and annexing the infrastructure of the settlements to the infrastructure of Israel itself we may come to a point where practically we will not be able to establish a Palestinian state alongside Israel. We should not miss that opportunity which is on the table the Arab peace initiative where 22 Arab states express their readiness to recognize the state of Israel and make peace with Israel. Here comes the role of the international community. The Israelis and the Palestinians alone don't have the guts to go ahead and negotiate directly and make peace. They need a third party not only to facilitate contacts between the Israelis and the Palestinians but also to pressure and push both sides in the direction of taking parallel practical steps on the way to making peace between them. I hope that while answering your questions I can elaborate on other things which I wanted to speak about. Thank you.

Gudrun Harrer

Thank you very much. Isn't there a certain contradiction of what you said. First of all you said hollow leadership. On the other hand you say it is a window of opportunity and if we don't do it now we are not able to do it anymore because after the next elections this government will be gone. But doesn't this simply mean that the government has a deficit of popular legitimacy and is not even entitled to do such important decisions?

Hillel Schenker

I don't think so. All the public opinion polls in Israel continue to say that the clear majority supports a two-state-solution, a major withdrawal from the West Bank. The general ideas which were raised in the Geneva Accords of essentially withdrawing to the 1967 borders with mutual territorial swaps is something which would be accepted by the majority of the public. The public has not changed its view of the longterm solution. It has lost its confidence in this particular leadership. I quoted before from our current issue. I want to go back to a previous issue. Our previous issue was entitled "Hamas and Kadima. Are they up to the challenge?". Here the question is in Ehud Olmert and the Kadima's party leadership's hands. If they don't move forward – and they may not be capable – they will disintegrate. Ehud Olmert has no chance to be re-elected in the next elections unless he takes significant steps which until now he seems to be incapable or afraid of doing. That is why there is a contradiction. There still is a possibility. The question is, will that possibility be realized?

Gudrun Harrer

The same question to you, Ziad. You said the PLO should negotiate. But also they lack a popular legitimacy. Otherwise Hamas would not have won the elections. We never hear about the opinion of the Hamas electorate towards negotiations with Israel. It is clear that the people elected Hamas because they are unhappy with the conditions. But would they follow negotiations and accept the result?

Ziad Abu Zayyad

Let me clarify the point that it was not the PLO who lost the elections to Hamas. The PLO is a forum where you have all the Palestinian organisations represented. Fatah is one of the factions in the PLO. And the PLO did not participate in the elections as PLO. Fatah lost the elections. Why did Fatah lose the elections? One of the main reasons was the failure of the peace process. When I was campaigning for the elections in Jerusalem people asked me, what did you bring for us. I was in a small village in the Northwest of Jerusalem called Beth Soreek and an old man was crying like a child. He said to me, my olive grove is just behind this wall. Can you open a small hole in the wall and allow me to reach my olive trees and collect my crops? What did you bring to us? You, the Fatah, have brought to us the wall, the settlements, every bad thing. We will not vote for you. I think he was right. Because the failure of the peace process was put on the shoulders of the Fatah government. People said , you did not succeed, you did not deliver. Why should we vote for your? Of

course, there were other reasons. Associating the Fatah with the Palestinian Authority and the Authority with corruption. This was reflexed in the results of the elections. People said, now we want people who are not corrupt. We will vote for Hamas. There were many other reasons such as the dispute and the fight inside Fatah itself. When Fatah came to the elections they wanted to have primaries. And then they did not succeed to have clear rules for the primaries. When they ran the primaries they did not have transparent elections and were fighting between each other. And when they wanted to select their representatives to the elections there was a dispute and everybody wanted to be there. Many candidates from Fatah ran against each other. They caused the weaknesses and the failures of each other in the elections. This was also another element for the failure.

If you want the truth, many people tell me that they regret that they voted for Hamas. They said, we wanted to punish Fatah but at the end we punished ourselves. This is why Hamas will not accept to have elections. We wanted to have early elections but they will not allow that because they know that if there will be early elections they will not have the same results and they will loose. They will insist to continue to be until the end of the four years. And like it or not, this is democracy.

When I was chair of the legal committee I drafted an amendment to the basic law where I had six articles speaking about early elections and when are the cases when the President can call for early elections. Unfortunately we could not get a majority in parliament to vote for this amendments. Why did we not have the majority? Because the Fatah members were not coming to attend the meetings. So every time we call the members, we want to have a special session for the basic law, please come, because for amending the basic law you need two thirds of the Members of Parliament. But they don't care and they don't come. This is why I said there must be elections. If you feel that you have everything in your pocket you must learn that this is not true. And Fatah thought that they will be the government forever. The results of the elections were a shock and they deserve it. I think Fatah deserved the result of the elections because it was a lesson for them. But no one should believe that when he is on the chair he will be forever on the chair.

Question

Simon Deutsch. How comes that in this period nobody tried to disarm the organization. Every one of them has weapons and established an army. You have one organization and then the way to peace would be much easier. Because the terrorists who came into Israel came from different organizations, not from one.

Question

Claudia Coledi. You said the PLO should take over the negotiations. But the problem I see there is that they much more represent the refugees and there the refugee issue again would become very strong. How do you see this?

Question

Michael. My remarks are mainly addressed to Hillel. The Israeli society is more complex than you presented it because there was not a dissatisfaction with the fact that the war took place. The dissatisfaction was that the war was lost. Until today that is the main problem in connection with the Lebanese war. Not that it took place but that it was lost or did not achieve its aims. You are right with the polls. They show a great willingness on the part of the Jewish population to evacuate or withdraw. On the other hand the same polls show that there is no trust whatsoever in the Palestinians as to whether the Palestinians will keep a peace agreement. The same polls also show that the institution in Israel which has the most trust from the greatest part of the population is the army. So it is a very complex situation with a lot of psychological factors. The fears that you mentioned especially with Iran and also with Hamas, that is to a great extent manipulation. Israel already has a army unit which is planning the war against Iran. The politicians and the military leaders keep raising the fact how dangerous this is. What is needed is a very strong Israeli left. If you are still connected with Peace Now, that is a very problematic situation. Peace Now has been a traitor to the peace cause. My last remark about Europe. Europe has not fulfilled the role that we would hope. I remember the words of Ferrero-Waldner. When Europe decided to boycott Hamas she said we have to remain true to our principles. If European

principles mean bringing an entire people to their knees and creating a situation of starvation almost etc, then one can ask what are the European principles in regard to a peace settlement.

Hillel Schenker

I agree, of course, that Israeli reality is very complicated. There are factors in the Israeli body politic and in the media that fan the flames of anxiety. This is very clear. And the master at that is Benjamin Netanyahu. He went and said, we are back in 1938. We are on the verge of a holocaust. A tremendous exaggeration of the direct pragmatic reality in front of us. And yet, he is an expert at that. He thrives on fear. There is no question that he cultivated this – and the media works with it as well. The media likes headlines along those lines.

What happened on the eve of the Lebanon war this summer was that there was a transgression against Israeli sovereignty. Clearly. In other words, there is this general perspective throughout Israel that when someone comes across your legitimate international border and kills people and kidnaps people, this is something that cannot be accepted. The question is how should the Israeli government and the Israeli army have reacted? That is where I differ with writers Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua and the others who supported the initial phase of the war. Yes, the peace movement was very confused by this situation, and very conflicted. There were those who said, our sovereignty has been challenged. We have been advocating a withdrawal to the international border. And look what happens when we do that. We can also add the issue of the Kasam missiles coming from the Gaza Strip into the southern town of Sderot, the hometown of Defense Minister Amir Peretz. So you had a serious problem within the peace movement. The Israeli peace movement found it very difficult to cope with this complex situation. This was also true of the left wing Meretz party. There were people in Meretz who supported the war for the reasons I am explaining and there were those who opposed it. I was part of an initiative towards the end of the war when there were Peace Now and Meretz activists who said, if the Peace Now leadership and the Meretz leadership is not going to come out against the war we will act as individual activists and we will make a demonstration opposite the Kirya which is the Israeli Pentagon in Tel Aviv calling for a stop to the war. Yael Dayan, another winner of the Kreisky Prize, the daughter of Moshe Dayan, today Deputy Mayor of Tel Aviv, was there at this meeting. She said, if we organize such a demonstration the leaderships of Peace Now and of Meretz will eventually join. And that is what happened. It was belated. And we all have been mutually traumatized by this situation. This is one of the difficulties that both Israeli and Palestinian peace activists have. We have been mutually traumatized. And it is very difficult to rebuild the positive, constructive energy necessary to do what we are doing. And yet, we at the *Palestine-Israel Journal*, and everybody who is involved in civil society activity are continuing. As far as I am concerned this is the challenge of my generation. If we do not achieve a peaceful resolution of the conflict within a foreseeable future I am not sure if we have a future as an independent Israeli state.

On the other hand, just to comment on what Ziad said about the window closing soon if we don't achieve an agreement on a two-state-solution, I also don't see a one-state-solution. I look at the world and I see what happened in the Soviet Union, and what happened in the former Yugoslavia, and what happened in Czechoslovakia, and what is happening in Belgium and in Canada. I am a great believer in the principle of the United Nations. I think the EU is a very constructive step in the right direction. with all of its problems. But the Europeans learned this lesson from countless wars you all experienced. We, unfortunately, in the Middle East have been so mutually traumatized that I can't see Israelis and Palestinians at this stage living together in one state in peaceful co-existence. We first have to have two separate states and then hopefully I assume we will reach a situation of some sort of a federation, confederation, the old vision of a binational state which Martin Buber and Hashomer Hatzair believed in. I think eventually we will move in that direction. But the first stage has to be, if there will be a solution, a two-state-solution.

Ziad Abu Zayyad

Towards the end of 1967 I went to learn Hebrew in an Ulban(institute)in Jerusalem. And by the way my Hebrew is much better than my English. I lecture in Hebrew and write articles and participate in many debates on the Israeli radio and TV. At that time there were new immigrants coming to Israel from all over the world. One day we had a fight in the class speaking about terrorists. The teacher said stop, you are

terrorists until you have your own state. When you have your state you become statesmen. When you define somebody as a terrorist it depends from which angle you are looking. We see ourselves as freedom fighters. We see ourselves as resisters. We want to achieve our rights. Menachem Begin was a terrorist wanted by the British mandate. Even until he became Prime Minister he was still on the list of the wanted people by the UK. It depends who is defining you as a terrorist and also how you define yourself.

On principle the Palestinian organizations – did not abandon the option of resistance against the occupation or the military struggle against the occupation. What happened? We wanted to try the political option. Fatah went to Madrid and went to Oslo after the talks in Washington became a game without any results, and they tried this parallel secret track to achieve an agreement with Israel. The Fatah wanted to try the political option. So they suspended, or put aside the military struggle. They did not abolish it, they did not give up the military struggle. The point is, you have a goal. If you can reach your goal by peaceful means that is great. You save the lives of your men and you save the lives of the others. So you try the political option. The other Palestinian organizations tried for a time to stop the military struggle and to see what will come from the political process. There were attempts by the Islamic movement to undermine the peace process between 1994 to 1996. But then after that and as a result of that the Americans made more efforts to keep the process going, from 1996 until almost 2000 there were, no suicide attacks against Israelis. Because there was an active American involvement and there was hope with the people that maybe something will come out from these negotiations. And with the collapse of the negotiations in Camp David we again witnessed another wave of violence and suicide attacks against Israelis. But at the same time you must understand that Israelis were not sitting kindly and politely doing nothing. The Israelis were practising state terror against our people

Take the last report of the United Nations about the apartheid regime in the Palestinian territories. In the Westbank there are roads which are only for the Jews. I as a Palestinian cannot drive my car on these roads in the Westbank. What is evolving now in the Westbank is another example of South Africa. The killings. In the last few days the army was destroying Nablus saying that they are looking for wanted people. Daily killings of Palestinians by the Israelis. To kill a Hamas activist in Gaza ,they bombed an apartment building killing sixteen people, children, women, old men, sleeping in their houses after midnight . Isn't this terror? This is the situation. We feel that the outside world do not see what Israel is doing against our people , they see only what the Palestinians are doing. Why? Because we don't have a Jewish lobby and because we cannot say that you are anti-semitic or anti-Jewish. We don't have that argument. So people criticise us. But if they dare to criticise Israel they will become anti-semitic.

Question

You did not answer my question.

Ziad Abu Zayyad

I answered your question. I told you that we did not abandon, we did not ... and say that's it. We are still under occupation. What do you want from us? What do you want from a people under occupation? To fight with roses? We tried it. Believe me, Gabriel Baramki, the President of Bir Zeit University with a group of musicians from Ramallah came to the checkpoint in Qalandia between Ramallah and Jerusalem to sing and to play music to the soldiers as a peaceful protest against their presence there.

Interjection

...

Ziad Abu Zayyad

Do you think that all over the world when there is resistance it should be one organization? The Israelis had the Etzel, the Lehi, and Haganah. They had all kinds of organizations which were fighting together. Some of them were extreme, some of them were pragmatic.

In our situation honestly what made the problem was the collapse of the negotiations in the year 2000. Until the year 2000 Hamas and the Jihad Islami were not a real challenge to the PLO and to the Palestinian

Authority. The vacuum happened after the year 2000. From the year 2000 onwards every time there was a suicide attack by Hamas or the Jihad in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem or anywhere in Israel the Israeli army was attacking the Palestinian Authority and attacking the Fatah. They did not target Hamas or the Jihad. This is a fact, you can go and check. This period between 2000 and now, it was the Israeli policy which gave a chance to the grow and development of these organizations. Because there were always targeting the Palestinian security system, and the Palestinian Authority, and Arafat who was held as a prisoner in his compound "Al-Moqata'a", was condemning the activities of Hamas and the Jihad and the suicide attacks. Israel was responsible because it created the conditions and it created a green house for the growth and the development and the strengthening of these movements.

You asked about Camp David and the right of return and the refugees. We were a people living in our country and all of a sudden we were uprooted and expelled. And some of us fled from their houses because they wanted to protect their lives. There is nothing which obliges a civil society, a civil people to stay in a battle field. But always, when there is cease fire, it is the right of the people to go back to their homes. The last example in that regard was what happened in north Israel. When the Hezbollah was shelling the Northern part of Israel all the population of the northern part of Israel fled down to the center of Israel and even to Eilat. When there was a ceasefire they came back to their houses. In our case we were not allowed to go back to our homes in 1948. Now, we have this right, the right of return, the right of the Palestinians to go back to their homes and their lands. We have Israel which says that it wants a Jewish majority. Practically, we know that if there will be an actual return of about four to five million Palestinians to Israel it will not be a Jewish state anymore and will disappear. We know that. And we cannot ask the Israelis to commit suicide and to give us their state. But we have a right. Let us put it on the table and negotiate. We cannot give up this right in advance. It is a card in our hands. We cannot give it in advance. We say, we are ready to negotiate it.

Once I was going to see the Israeli President Moshe Katzav. This was three years ago. I went to Arafat and said to him, what should I say if Katzav asks me about our position regarding the right of return. He said to me, that is not a problem. Tell him that we will negotiate on this issue and we will reach an agreed solution to the problem of the refugees. I said, what do you mean by agreed solution? He said, do you think that the Israelis will agree on something that they don't want or that endangers their existence? So the code was an agreed solution for the problem of the refugees which means that we will accept more or less something, but we want this right to be addressed, to be discussed, and to have a solution. I can give up on the national right of the Palestinians to go back to their country. But I cannot give up on their individual rights or their property or the compensation for their suffering for their loss of property. I don't have the power of attorney to decide on that. Therefore, this is an issue which has to be put on the table, negotiated, addressed, and then there will be a solution for this issue.

Hillel Schenker

I would like to make a few brief comments about this exchange. First of all, I would really wish as an Israeli peace activist that the Palestinian national resistance would be carried out in accordance with the principles of Ghandi in India, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Martin Luther King in the United States, but this is the Middle East. In the Middle East I think it would be possible to do more so but still unfortunately violence is used by both sides. Here I want to add, on the one hand I would wish that in terms of the Palestinian national resistance. On the other hand, I am very critical of the Israeli military mindset and the fact that the Israeli military has too much influence on Israeli political decision-making. The perfect example of that was this past summer. I am a great believer in civilian control of the military. But this summer, after the kidnapping and the attack over the border, we had a situation where we had two inexperienced civilian leaders, Ehud Olmert and Amir Peretz, and the army came along with its plan, which was not a good plan. The fact is the army was essentially what determined the policy that would be carried out. Given Jewish and Israeli history, we need the ability to defend ourselves. But on the other hand it is frequently overdone. As Ziad said, the targeted killings are carried out by the military without any connection to the political situation. And they frequently undermine the possibility of political negotiations that are about to take place. It is the civilian government which should control and determine what happens within Israeli society. You were talking about complexities within Israeli society. This is one of the issues that at least in academia people are discussing.

There have been a number of books written about the relationship between the military and the civilian and the government. The civilian government has to regain control and also has to regain the initiative.

Question

Joanna Nittenberg. When we watch and listen I have the feeling that both peoples are threatened. Both peoples are afraid. Last summer was really a crucial point for the Israelis and for the whole world. Till that point Israel was invulnerable. At the same time Iran came. I would not neglect what Iran says. I can't understand the world that the official member of the UN wants to destroy another member of the UN, and nobody is really discussing it. They discuss the nuclear bomb but not the fact that it was published that they want to destroy Israel. And nobody reacts. I think it is very difficult. I think it can only be a two-state-solution. There is no other way. We have to find it soon. But we have to see the fear on both sides. If Iran says there was no Holocaust and not much protest, quite the opposite.

Question

I cannot and I do not want to give any advice. I only want to give my impression of the situation. The big majority of the Arab and the Jewish people living in the Near East want to have peace. But my impression that policy is being done by a minority who have extreme positions. There are extreme positions on both sides. There is one position on the Arab side to destroy the state of Israel, and there is an extreme position on the Israeli side which believes they can rule the whole country. They cannot integrate the Westbank. If they would integrate the Westbank the Arab people would have the majority in this state. Therefore they think if they make life very hard for the Arab people on the Westbank many Arab people would leave the country. Both extreme positions have no future. We have to solve the basic problem. I have fully understand the fear of the Jewish people because my parents left their life in the Holocaust. But if the Jewish people claim to have a right to live there because they lived there 2000 years ago and they deny the right to the Arab people to go back to their homes in Haifa or Jaffa, this will not work. I ask you what do you think can be a solution? You can't wait until a solution will come from the outside, not from the European countries and not from the Americans. You have to solve the problems yourselves. As I don't believe everything which is written in the newspapers, is it true that the former Israeli government did support Hezbollah and Hamas against the PLO? If they did it was a big mistake.

Question

I am afraid that the discussions go from worse to worse. I wanted to ask Mr. Schenker, when he talks about the sovereign borders of Israel were attacked by the Hezbollah. We should not forget that the Israelis constantly defy the sovereign borders of Lebanon, Syria and provoke these countries. The overreaction, as you said, by the Israeli military then attacking Lebanon, it was decided long before this kidnapping of the two soldiers that there should be a third front for the United States in the area. You cannot disconnect the imperialistic aims in this area. Bush says, we have a new shaping of the Middle East. Both the Israeli population and the Palestinian population are the victims of this imperialistic policy.

Question

We read in the local press that the Israelis want the Palestinians to accept Israel as a state. According to the UN Resolution 1948 with fixed borders? Up to the 1980's there were 25 UN resolutions which were not accepted by Israel, they were just completely ignored. For the population of Israel and Palestine it might become dangerous if one country intends a provocative stroke. That means they strike before somebody attacks them. Which means that other countries could do the same thing and which might be very harmful to the population of Israel and the Arab countries.

Question

Viola Raheb. You seem both to agree that there is a window of opportunity and that there is a need for a certain party. Do you think the political agenda of the so-called third party, whoever that is, corresponds with a peaceful solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? My second question is more to Mr. Abu Zayyad. I would like to hear your assessment on a national unity government. It is not only Jihad Islami who has

opposed it. What are really the concrete opportunities for a national that would help the Palestinian people heal their inner political disputes at the moment?

Question

Ulrike Lunacek. I am the foreign affairs spokesperson of the Greens in the Austrian Parliament. As a European politician I ask you what you would want or would want to see Europe to do? You said it was a mistake that Europe joined the quartet or accepted that the quartet was taken by the US. What very concretely would you think is necessary? To push the US? Before the US elections next year I don't see a lot of chances. For the EU what? To accept to negotiate with the unity government and also with Hamas? What about the idea of having a wide Middle East conference together with Saudi Arabia, for example? Would that be something that you would like the EU to do?

Question

Peter Kreisky. I visited Israel and Palestine for the second time in my life some weeks ago. I regret this lack of fantasy for the different preconditions for the people living in this area. Besides this terrible remembrance of Shoah there is a big difference between everyday life in Palestine, in the so-called autonomous territories. To experience this Apartheid-like situation is not comparable to the everyday life besides all fear and military surveillance and partly siege-like situation in Israel. But everyday life is strangulation of normal functioning of life. You can't compare the situation of everyday life in Israel with that of most of the Palestinian people. If you don't take into account this quality difference you can't come to a reasonable account of the situation where people live without hope, with fear of the occupation army, with the wall situation. Another thing, unemployment of 60% or more of the Palestinians. I am not hopeful. I remember my father's appeal two years before he died. He appealed to me to become much more active in this Apartheid-like development in Palestine. I think he would be very grateful for you both being part of this very important dialogue in everyday life of the Palestinians and the Israeli Jews, taking into account the very difficult and different situation in everyday life.

Ziad Abu Zayyad

The Israeli government contributed first of all to the establishment of Hamas movement and to the growth of power of Hamas. In the mid-1970's the Israeli security was encouraging Palestinian prisoners to challenge the representation of the PLO. This was after 1974 when the Arab summit in Rabat recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The Israeli security was encouraging some prisoners to identify themselves with the Islamic movement and say that the PLO does not represent them. Most of these people when they came out of jail, they were the founders of Hamas movement. Then the Rabin government gave the opportunity for the Hamas activists to have an intensive seminar in South Lebanon when they expelled about 200 leaders of the Islamic movement to South Lebanon for several months where they had intensive courses and teaching and ideologizing each other. Then they came back to Palestinian territories. This also gave a boot to the ideological activity of this movement. Also the failure of the Fatah and the peace process gave power to Hamas. Targeting the Palestinian Authority and leaving Hamas to act freely also contributed to this development.

About the question if the international community is concerned about solving the conflict? I am not sure. But there is a role for the international community. This world is becoming smaller and smaller. There are interests, for Europe at least, in the Middle East and what happens next door may influence your own house. We think that it is the duty of the international community to help and push towards a solution. We noticed that there is growing fear and concern in some European countries about what is happening in our region. We feel that they are worried more and more about what is happening. What is happening in Iraq is also giving a red light to some other countries, be careful, what happened in Iraq may happen again in Palestine. Gaza Strip is becoming like a small Iraq. This is very disturbing. It is true to some extent. Of course, there are no suicide attacks between the Palestinians against themselves. But it is a process. The lack of public order and the lack of social security and the absence of the rule of law in the Palestinian territories will produce many, many negative trends which may develop to affect outside the borders of the Palestinian areas. So I think it is in the interest of the international community to take this issue more seriously. Europe within the quartet may

be able to push the Americans to act. We understand that these coming two years will be a disaster. Bush is sinking down in the mud of Iraq and Afghanistan, and other areas and is doing nothing in the Middle East. The visits of Condoleezza Rice to Israel and the meetings are only a show to claim that they are doing something, but they are doing nothing. Europe can play a role, Russia can play a role within the United Nations and pushing the Americans in the right direction.

The chances of the national unity government. There are talks, but they are very difficult and very complicated. I don't want to go into details. But Hamas is very opportunistic and they want to achieve as many gains as possible from these negotiations. The issue now is not only the government, how many ministers will be for Hamas and how many ministers will go to the other factions. It is not even the platform of the government. They have created a new term which is called partnership and they want to take their share in many aspects and many organs of the Palestinian Authority and the PLO. They are not restraining themselves with their demands. But, of course, if there will be a chance that the world will deal with the national unity government positively this will help to put more pressure on Hamas to accept to go the government. Because the people are fed up. The Palestinian people are very tired. They want to see an end to this situation. They want to see a national unity government and they are pressuring Hamas. And Hamas knows that their credits are going down within Palestinian society because of this situation. And they are loosing. The fight which was in Gaza between Hamas militia and the Fatah and others caused great damage to the popularity and credibility of both Fatah and Hamas, but mostly to Hamas. Our people are so much enlightened, they care, they understand. You speak with old women who never have been to school, they will argue with you in politics better than any academic. Politics are part of our life. The people are so much concerned.

The best way to help everybody to climb down the high tree is an international peace conference. The Palestinian government and Israel will not be able to go ahead with negotiations. I believe that an international forum will provide an opportunity for everybody to say that he did not yield to the conditions of the other side. It is very important to push into the direction of an international peace conference.

What do we want from Europe? I spoke about the international conference. Europe should encourage any positive development on the Palestinian side and should not fall in the trap of Israel and the United States by repeating these conditions in advance to the Palestinians, that they should do this or should do that.

Thank you.

Hillel Schenker

The primary motivation of Israelis is to live a normal life. The way that is translated into daily reality is a lack of interest and concern in what is going on among the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. They also don't want to know what is going on with the settlers, which the settlers have a big complaint about. Many Israelis who have settler relatives say, I am not going to visit you, you come to visit me. This is a general fact of how Israelis live their lives.

Refugees. Israel should officially acknowledge the principle of the right of return. The practicalities of how this will be worked out, there was a model worked out in the Geneva Initiative. Probably the overwhelming majority of the Palestinians will realize their return to the sovereign independent Palestinian state. A certain percentage will stay in their host countries in the Arab world. There will be another percentage who will go to third countries, to the diaspora. And there will be a certain percentage which will return to the state of Israel. Now, which state of Israel? Somebody asked the question, what are we talking about. I think that what are we talking about is the principle of the recognition of the state of Israel along the lines more or less of the 1967 borders. Again, there are formulas which have been worked out about how the division of the two states in reality would be worked out, including mutually agreed upon land swaps.

Iran is a major concern not only in Israel but in the international community. Also you may have seen that Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States are also perhaps as concerned if not more so than Israel. All

of them have begun talking about nuclear programs to counteract what is happening in Iran. The leading Israeli academic expert on Iran said, the Iranians have a long history of running a society, a long history of being very practical businessmen. Does anyone really think that the Iranians want to commit suicide and will want to go and initiate an attack against Israel? This is the leading expert of Tel Aviv University on Iran. There have been reports, particularly in the British press, rather sensational, about Israel threatening to launch a nuclear attack against Iran. That is absurd. There is no possibility that Israel will do that. That would undermine its policy of ambiguity. It also would not work. Essentially that type of report is a statement by always anonymous figures, it is not being said by someone for the record. Those things are being said basically to say to the international community, hold us back, we might do something crazy, you must somehow deal with the situation. I believe the way to deal with the situation was described in the Iraqi Study Group, that there must be a diplomatic engagement with Iran. While working towards comprehensive peace we must also work for a mass weapons free zone in the Middle East. They go together. They are necessary. A diplomatic engagement with Iran is possible.

Third party role, whether they are capable. We look at the Bush administration and we see what a mess they have done in Iraq and the difficulties now in Afghanistan. It would be in their interest, if you want to look at their interest objectively, to have a success in moving the Israelis-Palestinian peace process forward. I don't know if they will be capable of doing it. It is the same with Europe. There is a fundamental interest to have stability in the Middle East, not only because of the dangers of military escalation but also because it is very important to neutralize, to de-escalate the conflict between the Islamic world and the West. Therefore, there is a fundamental interest which I would like to see both Europe and the United States acting on.

Finally, I would like to tell you about an Israeli artist who puts graffiti all over Tel Aviv. One of the underlying things that we are hearing today is the question of optimism or pessimism, what does the future hold? There are two ways of writing the two words "no hope". "No hope" is the ultimate pessimistic word. This artist has filled Tel Aviv with graffiti which says "know hope", you should know hope. And this is what we all have to have at the back of our minds and what we also have to act on in practical terms.

Ziad Abu Zayyad

I did not speak about Iran. I don't believe that all this fuss from Israel about Iran's nuclear option is because Israelis are worried that Iran will attack Israel. I think that the purpose of Israel is that they want to be the only state in the region which has a nuclear option in order to continue dominating and patronizing the Middle East and dominating the Arab countries. The answer for this should be that we must go towards a Middle East free zone of weapons of mass destruction. Israel must accept this demand. Israel must allow inspections of its nuclear installations, and must go in the direction of destroying its nuclear weapons, and accepting international monitoring and observing of their weapons of mass destruction. They are prompting other countries to develop a military nuclear option.

I was actually surprised and maybe disappointed that no one asked anything about Jerusalem. Before ending our discussion I want to deal with Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the key for peace in the Middle East. Israel is changing the image of Jerusalem converting it to a Jewish city ignoring the rights and interests of other monotheistic religions. Building Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem and surrounding the city with Jewish Settlements to isolate it from the rest of the Palestinian occupied territories will only undermine any efforts to achieve a political peaceful solution to the conflict.

If Israel does not understand this point there will never be a solution to the conflict in the Middle East. Jerusalem is important for the Christians and the Muslims as well as it is important for the Jews. Jerusalem is the symbol of the national dignity and national identity of the Palestinian people. No solution would be achievable if there will be no solution to the issue of Jerusalem on the basis of partnership, of sharing Jerusalem, of recognizing the right of the Palestinian people in Jerusalem, and having Arab Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. There are many scenarios and many ideas how to share Jerusalem, how to solve the problem of Jerusalem. But I say very simply that any solution for Jerusalem should be based upon mutuality, upon partnership, upon equality.

Thank you.

Hillel Schenker

I fill a number of roles, and one of them is being the spokesperson for the Israeli Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War (the Israeli branch of IPPNW). I would say to its credit that the official position of the Israeli government is in favor of a nuclear and mass weapons free zone in the end. Our responsibility is to move both processes forward simultaneously, the Israeli-Palestinian and the Israeli-Arab comprehensive peace process and the movement towards a mass weapons free zone.

As far as Jerusalem is concerned I would just like to add, I live in Tel Aviv. I lived in Jerusalem for half a year when I was seventeen, but today I commute because our office is in East Jerusalem. I agree very much with what Ziad said. I would just like to add that our next issue will be devoted to the question of Jerusalem and I recommend that you all read it.

Gudrun Harrer

Thank you very much.