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A STATESMAN'S FORUM WITH  
PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY PRESIDENT MAHMOUD ABBAS

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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Introduction and Moderator:**

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**Featured Speaker:**

PRESIDENT MAHMOUD ABBAS  
Palestinian Authority

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much for joining us this morning for this very special event brought to you by the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution. I am Martin Indyk, the director of foreign policy at Brookings. And we are very honored today to have President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian National Authority joining us for this special Statesman's Forum. I've very glad to welcome some distinguished guests this morning, both members of President Abbas' delegation and distinguished ambassadors, and we're very glad to have you here.

Abu Mazen, as he's known universally, was born in Safed, educated in Damascus and Moscow, worked and raised his family in Doha, Qatar. I mention that in particular because we're being joined today by satellite with our Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, where an audience is watching and will be e-mailing me questions, which is another way of reminding you to put your phones on Quiet, please.

Abu Mazen became a leader of the Fatah Palestinian National Movement, rose quickly through the ranks to become the secretary-general of the PLO Executive Committee. He led the Oslo Peace Negotiations for the Palestinians, oversaw that effort. In 1993, on September 13th, he signed the Oslo Accords on the White House lawn, together with Shimon

Peres in the presence of Chairman Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister

Yitzhak Rabin. That was when I first had the opportunity to meet you, sir.

Since then, he has overseen all of the negotiations for peace that have taken place between Israel and the Palestinians. He became the first prime minister of the Palestinian National Authority. And then, in 2004, was elected president in a free and fair election, which he won 61 percent of the vote, a resounding mandate. In the meantime, he also became chairman of the PLO. And those are the two official positions which he holds today: president of Palestinian National Authority and chairman of the PLO.

He has been a pursuer of peace all the days of his life and it's in that context that we are very honored to have him address this Statesman's Forum today. This is, I believe, the first time that President Abbas has ever done a public event in his many visits to Washington, and so we're very grateful that he has honored us with his presence today.

He will speak, make some formal remarks in Arabic, so I hope you have your translation for those of you who need it, for simultaneous translation. And then afterwards, we will have a conversation and questions from the audience in English.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming President Mahmoud Abbas. (Applause)

PRESIDENT ABBAS: (Speaking Arabic)

(Translated) -- Jordan and Egypt and the United States. These two issues -- now that we agreed on what was described by the EU as proximity talks, these two files are with Senator Mitchell, the U.S. Envoy, for him to discuss them with the Israeli Prime Minister in the hope that the discussion of these two files will end within the specified framework, which is four months. Then after that we must not forget the other issues, the final status issues: the settlements, the refugees, Jerusalem, water. And we added another item which is the prisoners, the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

I'd like to add that these other topics were also discussed with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. I cannot say that we reached an agreement on them, but I can say that both sides, the Palestinians and the Israelis, identified each other's positions regarding the remaining files.

Now we would like to reach a solution on the two initial issues, meaning the borders and the security. If Mr. Netanyahu agrees that this is the groundwork that we had agreed upon with the previous government and that there are proposals on our side and on the Israeli side, then we could start direct negotiations to complete the remaining issues, complete discussion of the remaining issues.

This is what we discussed yesterday with President Obama in details, in addition to the fact that we talked at length about what happened recently

against the Freedom Flotilla that set out to help the Palestinian people in Gaza, to end the unjust blockade on the people there. Here, I do not deny that we are under other types of blockades in the West Bank. There are many issues in the West Bank including the daily incursions, the road blocks and so on. All these issues fall under the name of a blockade, but primarily the discussion focused on the blockade that has been going on for over three and a half years on Gaza.

We discussed two main items in this regard. The first relates to the international commission that has been talked about to conduct a probe, an investigation, because the investigation should not be left in the hands of Israel. Israel cannot investigate itself. The investigation should be international as proposed by the U.N. Secretary-General. This is the first item.

The second item is that the blockade, the Israeli blockade on the Palestinian crossings in Gaza should end once and for all. In other words, all items needed by the people in the percentages that they need should be allowed in. In other words, if the people need 100 percent medicines and they're given 20 percent, that's not enough. They should be given 100 percent. They should be given 100 percent of wheat, sugar, food supplies, medicines, et cetera.

So our main demand is how to end the blockade on Gaza, and I

believe that the world now, the entire world, stands with us because there are people. More than 32 countries took part in this flotilla, and many world countries sympathized with what happened, particularly since Israel first of all attacked with convoy in international waters which is unlawful, unacceptable internationally, in addition to the fact that they attacked innocent people who had no weapons or aggressive motivations but were simply carrying humanitarian goods to Gaza.

These are the issues at hand. Now we're here. As I said, we talked with President Obama on all these issues, and we will continue the dialogue in the near future when Mr. Mitchell comes to us once again. And we hope that he will bring with him positive, encouraging views to continue the dialogue.

Here, I'd like to express some concern that the situation is extremely difficult and that the hope in a two-state solution -- a state of Palestine independent, contiguous, viable Palestine living side by side in peace and stability and security with the State of Israel -- this context, this concept, I fear is beginning to erode. And the world is starting not to believe, to distrust that we're able to reach this solution.

So we're seeing slogans coming out that we don't approve of, we do not accept. But we cannot muzzle the mouths of people. There are slogans in the West Bank, saying let there be a single state. This is something we

do not accept, and Israel also doesn't accept.

On this occasion, we are presenting to Israel through the Arab Peace Initiative a 57-state solution, not the 2-state solution. In other words, all the Arab countries, all the Islamic countries that signed the Arab Peace Initiative are ready if Israel withdraws from the occupied Arab territories, if it withdraws from the Palestinian territories, if it withdraws from the Golan, if it withdraws from Shebaa and what is around Shebaa. These are the three serious demands where the Arabs are asking for. I say "serious" between brackets because they're not really serious. Israel can do this within minutes. It can withdraw and get normalization of ties with 57 Arab and Islamic states.

We published this initiative in the press. I published it two years ago in the American press and in various Israeli media. We hope that it will be given attention. Why? Because many who signed this peace initiative are frustrated, are getting frustrated, for how long will this initiative remain on the table.

We do not want to remove it from the table, take it off the table. We have long discussions with those who are frustrated and tell them that we cannot take it off the table because it's the only call for peace. The other option is war, and we do not want war. Nobody wants war. No country is looking for war. At least I'm speaking on behalf of the Arab countries.

So what is left for us is only one path, the path of peace through a clear-cut specific initiative, unambiguous initiative, we hope. We hope that it will find open ears among the Israeli leaders.

At one point in time, I presented it to Mr. Olmert, and he said to me, there are many Arab initiatives. But I brought him the same initiative signed by the Arab League Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Conference, and he told me at the time, yes, it's a precious initiative. And that is why we were negotiating seriously with him.

Now, I mean we haven't closed all the files, and the reason is known -- because Prime Minister Olmert was the subject of internal judicial investigation, and I'm not at liberty to get into them, and he lost the cabinet, and Kadima lost the election. Kadima could not form the government, and that is why Mr. Netanyahu came to power.

Whether we like it or not, Prime Minister Netanyahu is the Prime Minister of Israel, elected Prime Minister of Israel, elected by the Israeli people. We have to negotiate with him because we do not choose their leaders nor do they choose their Palestinian partner.

I just wanted to convey to you these observations so that this would be a good groundwork for that. Thank you for listening. (Applause)

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much, President Abbas. I would like to get into the negotiations issues with you, but first of all I thought



perhaps we should focus on Gaza for a moment. What do you envisage the role for your government, the Palestinian Authority, in this process of easing the blockade and the closure? Is there something that you see that you can work with the Israelis on this?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I think our government is legitimate representative of the Palestinians and the West Bank and Gaza. So any procedures, any efforts from Israeli or from the international community should come through this government, and we are ready to do everything in our capacity.

MR. INDYK: Does that mean you could have Palestinian Authority monitoring of the passages, for instance?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Concerning the passages in Rafah, okay, but we have to return back to the agreement which had been signed in 2005 between the Palestinians, the Israelis, Americans, [and] Europeans. So one way to turn back, I think we will return with our presidential guard to Rafah. But this needs to talk about reconciliation. We cannot put them -- and the Egyptian part, they should return back to the Gaza Strip through reconciliation, and we are working on the reconciliation.

MR. INDYK: What's holding that up, and --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Holding?

MR. INDYK: -- that's gone on for years now.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes.

MR. INDYK: And various Arab states have tried to mediate this, but you never seem to be able to reach an agreement. And does the crisis now of the flotilla create a better opportunity for this?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: There is an opportunity, and only the Egyptians are authorized to make the mediation between us and Hamas, not any other Arabic or Islamic country, according to an agreement in the Arab League and even according to a Resolution here from the Security Council 1860 talking about the role of Egypt.

Now, Egypt, as you know -- or you don't know, I will tell you -- that Egyptians articulated a document in the beginning of last October, and they showed this document to Hamas. Hamas, in principle, said, yes, we will accept. After that, they send it to me and told me take it or leave it, because we don't want any remarks, we don't want to open this document. If you want to sign it, send it to us by the end of the 14th of October. I said okay. I send somebody from our side on the 14th in spite of all the pressures on us not to sign from here and there, but I will not mention --

MR. INDYK: Purely your advisors, probably.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I will not mention anybody, but there was pressures on us not to sign. But we believe that the interest, the unity of the Palestinian people is over anything else. I sent my colleague to Cairo

at 12 o'clock in the morning of the 15th; he signed. When he signed the document, Hamas said we have our reservations. We don't want to sign. They do now. They raised three, four reservations, and we told them -- even the Egyptians told them -- that we cannot open the document because if we open it, we will open it for everybody, for all reservations, and it means that it will be open forever.

We are waiting. We are asking Hamas, we are pushing Hamas to come and sign it. After it, I think we can go directly to the elections, presidential elections, parliamentary elections, and their equal selection will take place, and the unity will return back to the Palestinian people.

MR. INDYK: One of the things I think is widely known that you actually referred to in an interview you did last night with Charlie Rose was that the external Hamas, under the influence of Iran, seems to be exercising a kind of veto of what the internal Hamas seems to want to do in terms of reconciliation.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes, I said.

MR. INDYK: Is that fair?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I said that, yes. I said that.

MR. INDYK: So you think this crisis will change anything in that --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I don't know if it will change or not, but I said what you mentioned now.

MR. INDYK: I reported you accurately?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes. Yes, it's accurate.

MR. INDYK: Let's talk a little bit about what you reported, which I thought was very interesting at that point, negotiations with Ehud Olmert.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Mm-hmm.

MR. INDYK: You know, in Israel that episode is seen as, generally speaking, as another example of Palestinians saying no to a very generous offer. I'm sure you're familiar with this narrative.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes, I am familiar.

MR. INDYK: What's your response to that argument?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I would attend back to what Olmert said. He said we negotiated everything. I offered them swap; they offered me swap. I sent to them map, and the same they did, but they didn't reject, they didn't accept, which means that we didn't reject any offer coming from them.

In the time we were discussing, he stepped down, and we are urging now the Senate and your House to start from that point to continue.

MR. INDYK: Right.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: So what's the mistake we committed?

We are ready now with for -- not --

MR. INDYK: Netanyahu.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Netanyahu.

MR. INDYK: Yes.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: To restart our talks from the point which we need on borders, on security, on everything. On everything.

MR. INDYK: There's one question in my own mind about this: You have for years led the effort to engage with Israel, Hamas, the Palestinians. You were the first advocate of that.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Mm-hmm.

MR. INDYK: In fact, one of your assistants told me how you had directed all your team to go out and meet with the Israelis.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes.

MR. INDYK: And have shabbat dinner with the Israelis.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I did. I did yesterday.

MR. INDYK: Exactly. It's what you did last night.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes.

MR. INDYK: So therefore, it's kind of puzzling because you so wanted to get into direct negotiations with the Israelis.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Mm-hmm.

MR. INDYK: It was always your dream.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

MR. INDYK: But now you don't -- now you really want indirect relations.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Oh, we do not reject that approach. In the beginning, if you know, if you remember, President Obama said the Israelis should cease all kind of settlement activities, including the --

MR. INDYK: Natural growth.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: -- natural growth. Okay. We waited until he convinced the Israelis. He spent maybe one year, more or less, and he didn't convince them. He returned back to us: Okay, now we will talk about something -- something else, proximity talk. It is the first time in my life I hear about proximity talk. I hear about direct or indirect, but proximity I didn't hear about.

MR. INDYK: You were too young. (Laughter) You lost all of that proximity choice.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: So I said what do you mean by "proximity talk?" They said I will go in between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and I will take with me the suggestion, the conversations, whatever. Okay.

Now we are waiting. If -- and he said and it is written also, that

when achieve any progress, any progress, we will go to direct.

MR. INDYK: Who said? Netanyahu or President Obama?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: President Obama.

MR. INDYK: President Obama.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes. But Netanyahu did now keep silent. He does nothing. He says nothing, only, "The Palestinians do not want to talk with me. I want the Palestinians' role to be that -- the Palestinian state to be demilitarized," and some slogans. "Come to the table and talk to us. We have something is in need to be bridged, and after that we'll talk about alternatives," but he comes from the end.

MR. INDYK: Mm-hmm.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: What do you think about that, this point or that point? I don't think this is doable at all.

MR. INDYK: So what is it you're looking for -- from -- for him from --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Pardon?

MR. INDYK: What are you looking from Netanyahu? Something -- some sign of seriousness? Is that what's holding you up?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Exactly. Exactly. We want from him to say these are two projects -- they are not projects, what do you say?

MR. INDYK: Suggestions.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Suggestions, okay, on the security on the border.

MR. INDYK: Issues. These are issues.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Two issues, security and borders. Look at it. Is it in principle accepted to you? Okay, let us talk. Let us speak. And when we say that '67 borders, everybody around the world talks about '67 borders, but with some -- I may admit some swaps here and there, we accept it, okay. Security, we will give you assurances for you, maybe 10 years, 20 years, whatever you want to make the peace that the Arabic people that they are secure inside their borders. What shall I do more?

And, at the same time, I don't have missiles and air (inaudible).

MR. INDYK: Well, that's what he worries about.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I'm not threatening anybody.

MR. INDYK: That's -- I mean, that's the fear I think the Israelis have is that because of what happened in Gaza, they withdrew unilaterally from Gaza, and then they were pursued by rockets.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Right.

MR. INDYK: That if they withdraw from the West Bank, rockets will come onto Ben Gurion Airport.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: They shouldn't withdraw unilaterally, as



they did in Gaza. We aired them, we begged them, please let us -- do it with us. They said no. With you, no. We will withdraw unilaterally. They withdrew unilaterally and after six months or one year, the Hamas took over the authority, and that's it.

Now we are talking about an agreement, an international agreement, and we will give them all the assurances. We are interested -- now we are interested that the Israelis should be secure. Our police is cooperating every moment with the Israelis; it's not secret. Some people accuse me that I am working with the Israelis. No. We are cooperating with the Israelis to prevent any kind of terror acts or incidents here, and we succeed. We succeeded. We give the proof to them. We proved to them, and the -- you can ask the American administration, you ask the General Jones and his team about our -- if you ask the Israelis, the Israeli side, what is going on in the West Bank? Some of them exaggerating, but they say security in the West Bank better than Israel.

MR. INDYK: Well, indeed, one high Israeli general said to me that, in fact, over the last three years the Palestinian security forces have saved hundreds of Israeli lives.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: That's good. So this is the proof. This is the proof. This is the answer to your question to the Israeli side that we can cooperate. We can do everything, and we are interested, we are eager

to do something because we want this. The region is ought to be quiet, to be calm. We want to live. We suffered more than 62 years. I want my grandsons -- one of them is here -- to live in peace, to feel that he belongs to something. Till now we don't believe that we are belonging to anything. We want this state 22 percent out of whole Palestine. We accept it. No more demands, no more --

MR. INDYK: End of claims.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: End of claims.

MR. INDYK: No more claims.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: End of the claims, yes.

MR. INDYK: No more conflict.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: So -- what? End of the conflict, yes.

MR. INDYK: When you look back, you look at your grandson and you look back over the, what is it, four decades that you've been struggling to try to achieve peace.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I don't want the days I passed my grandson to pass. I want him to live normal life. I didn't live normal life, believe me. I didn't. Also, I didn't have any passport, any nationality. I don't know to whom I belonged. Now we are in Palestine. We want this independent state, not for me because after, I don't know, when I pass over -- pass away I want for my generation, my grandsons and for the Israel

grandsons, for both, not only for us.

MR. INDYK: And daughters, too.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: And?

MR. INDYK: And daughters, too.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: And daughters, of course. (Laughter)

The beloved daughters of.

MR. INDYK: Do you think, though, that you're close to achieving that now?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I don't know, but I keep the hope. I keep the hope. Somebody will ask me are you optimistic or not? I want -- I used to say I will keep the hope, but I don't know till when. Till when? Sometimes I feel that I am (inaudible). I am fed up. But I want to keep the moment, to keep the hope for our people because, as I said here, some of our people now are saying, okay, we don't want two-state solution, we want one-state solution, to live in Israel. But this is unacceptable to the majority of the Palestinian people.

MR. INDYK: Does President Obama give you some hope?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes.

MR. INDYK: Why is that?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: What is the hope? The hope is that President Obama started his tenure from the beginning talking and working

for peace, which means that it's a good sign. It's a positive sign to us that this man is serious. And yesterday he said that by the end of this year we should achieve something. We should do something. He is determined. I hope that everybody helps him. Everybody. And you know whom I mean.

MR. INDYK: Let's go to the audience now. Just a couple of rules. The first is that you ask a question and not make a statement, which means there has to be a question mark at the end of your sentence.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes, if you would make a lecture, we can't continue.

MR. INDYK: And the second is that you need to identify yourself, particularly for President Abbas.

Yes, sir.

SPEAKER: Mr. President, welcome to Washington.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I will listen to the translation now.  
Okay.

MR. ABURDENE: After meeting with President Obama --

MR. INDYK: You have to identify yourself.

MR. ABURDENE: Okay. Odeh Aburdene.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Hold on one moment.

MR. ABURDENE: After meeting with President Obama, do you think he's going to get engaged personally? Because in the past any

Arab-Israeli progress was made when the American President was in power. We have seen that with Carter. We have seen that with Clinton. Do you think he's going to get his hands dirty and call you or Netanyahu?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Some people say that President Bush didn't commit himself to peace, but I -- this I believe. I believe that -- I'm talking about President Bush now. President Bush was committed, was serious from Annapolis, the last day in his office, that he is working very hard to see the peace prevails everywhere. I believe the same I can say about President Obama.

MR. INDYK: Yes, please. Yeah.

SPEAKER: (inaudible), Carnegie. Mr. President, you have enlisted a lot on the peace process, and to the limit that it's becoming wishful thinking, and it's harming you on the ground and you are aware of that, because people, as you said, lost the hope when it comes to a recreation of a Palestinian state. What I want to ask you is, like, why don't you invest heavily on organizing the Palestinian House on pushing so hard where it's reconciliation talks? As you said, you care a lot about the next generation, but the Palestinian generation living in the Gaza Strip, you know, is paying heavily. Can you do something to stop that entity that this current policy is creating on the ground in Gaza?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: We can say that simultaneously we

invest in peace talks and in the same time we invest in reconciliation. I know how much it's important for our future, for our people, for our community. So, the same efforts here and there. I am exerting all my efforts here and there. Yesterday I was in telephone calls with some of Hamas leaders -- the day before yesterday, talking about how can we start reconciliation. I wanted -- I sent envoys everywhere. Now you heard about the mission of Manibur Maseré. I instructed him to go with several Palestinian leaders to go to Gaza. I sent before him many, many people from other factions to go to Hamas to convince them that our future is very conciliation. We have to do it. And without it we cannot achieve peace. So -- but in both. I'm afraid that when you ask me about investment in peace, why shouldn't I make investment in war. I will not do it.

MR. INDYK: Do you feel that Hamas is changing at all as a result of --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Some of them change I believe. Why? Because many of them now are under very severe conditions in Gaza, and they want to go out from this impasse, from this miserable life. The others -- I am talking openly. You're on the record here, so on the record --

MR. INDYK: Be careful.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Okay. No, no, no. On the record doesn't matter. Some of them are outside. We call them outsiders. Maybe

do not believe -- do not feel --

MR. INDYK: The same pressure.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: -- the same life, the same impression people in Gaza do. So, there is difference -- there are differences between both sides. But we cannot say this because some people are trying to say okay, you are trying to make differences between Hamas and I do not do anything. I want Hamas to come with us, to live with us. We cannot ignore them. They won the elections. Last election. They won it. I admit. And from the very beginning, from the first moment I protected them and told them now you won the elections, hope you nominate to be prime minister. They said, Haniya, I instruct you to form the government. I cannot ignore that Hamas is existing. But they should come to the elections. The elections is not -- one should -- the matches, you know. The election is a process. You win today, tomorrow you lose as you have here, Democrats and Republicans, but it's not for wins forever. They believe that it wins for ever. We won, that's it. We won, that's it.

MR. INDYK: Are elections part of this reconciliation process?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Pardon?

MR. INDYK: The elections. I mean, they've been long postponed now. Do you see that elections will be part of the reconciliation process?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Of course, but it will be the first item in the reconciliation.

MR. INDYK: Once you have an agreement --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Immediately. When we assign it, we will fix the date.

MR. INDYK: Uh-huh.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: I already fixed dates, but I couldn't fulfill it. Now, when we assign, immediately we will go to elections -- parliament and presidential -- and I will be out.

MR. INDYK: You will be out?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes.

MR. INDYK: No, no, that's a bad deal. David Makovsky?

MR. MAKOVSKY: Mr. President, good to see you again.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Twice.

MR. MAKOVSKY: Yes, twice. Two questions, one is --

MR. INDYK: Identify yourself, please.

MR. MAKOVSKY: David Makovsky, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Mr. President, do you --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: We were yesterday together.

MR. MAKOVSKY: Yeah. Do you see, if you could reach an agreement on borders and security, but some people believe Jerusalem and



refugees is going to be harder -- can you imagine a first phase agreement on borders and security and then having a timetable to deal with the second phase on Jerusalem and refugees?

And the second question, we are hearing in Washington all sorts of reports of tensions between the Fatah members and the Fayad government, and some believe in Fatah that America is so focused on the peace talks, they don't care about reform anymore among the Palestinians. Can you clarify where you stand in this tension between Fatah members and the Fayad government?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: The second question, Fayad is my Prime Minister. There are some people who are against him, not in Fatah and in Fatah. Now, if you mention his name with Hamas, they will become mad, furious. I believe Salam Fayad is a capable man, is a good man for his post, and I trust him. And he is my prime minister, whether some of Fatah likes or dislike, doesn't matter.

About the first question, of course when we talk about borders and security it is the first stage, because if we come to an agreement on these two issues, it doesn't mean that there is an agreement because nothing agreed until everything is agreed. This is our slogan since 20 years.

MR. INDYK: Maybe that's why we never got an agreement.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Unfortunately. Now, concerning

Jerusalem, Jerusalem is a part of the occupied territories. Not only the Palestinians are saying, even here the American administration, Condoleezza Rice, who was the Secretary, told us our position is the occupied territories are from following: West Bank, Gaza -- I mention this now in Arabic; I don't whether you follow it or not -- and East Jerusalem. So East Jerusalem is an occupied. I'm not asking to re-divide. We keep this is the east part and this is the western part, and this is the capital of Israel and this is the capital of Palestine, and there will be coordination between both parts.

MR. INDYK: So, it's a united city, but shared or divided sovereignty.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: To this day, who will divide it now? Everybody knows his borders, the Palestinians and the Israelis. This is ours, this is yours, and it is good for the coexistence, also. Right?

Concerning refugee, in the other peace initiative, I hope that you will read it, there is a paragraph reading as following: We want just and agreed upon solution according to 194, which means that this issue will be put on the table, agreed upon. I cannot impose anything on Israel to accept or to reject, but we have to discuss, it is one of the items we stipulated where, in Oslo, it is one of the major issues. How can we find a solution for it? Nobody can ignore that there are five million refugees deported from

their houses. We should find a solution for them. What is the solution -- agreed upon solution?

MR. INDYK: It has to be agreed with Israel, you mean? It has to be agreed with Israel, when you say, agreed upon?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: With whom? You think with Tanzania?  
(Laughter)

MR. INDYK: I have a question for you, President Abbas, from Doha, from the Brookings Doha Center, if you'll allow me to read it.

"Mr. President, do you believe that in order for the United States to have legitimacy to push Iran to give up its nuclear program, it must make progress on the Palestinian issue first?"

PRESIDENT ABBAS: (Speaking Arabic) Concerning the nuclear weapons, our position, we hope that all the Middle East, maybe all the world, will be free of nuclear weapons. This is our --

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

PRESIDENT ABBAS: If they want -- if they would keep it, we will ask for it. (Laughter) We will not ask for tanks. Okay.

So, another issue -- this is our position, but the Americans are working on behalf of the quartet. What is the quartet? The quartet is the United Nations, is Europe, is Russia, is America, which means the whole world. So, when they work, when they talk, when they exert any effort, they

are doing it on behalf of the world. If they have few of the men who ask questions, have another mediator, let me know.

MR. INDYK: Yes, please?

SPEAKER: Thank you. Nadia (inaudible) with NBC Television. Mr. President, I'm just going to follow up on Iran. Some people see the conflict as a bigger one between the United States and Iran. You just said that Khaled Mashaal is under the influence of Iran and, at the same time, you want to send a hand to Hamas inside Palestine. How do you reconcile both? Do you think it's possible to reach an agreement without actually dealing directly with Khaled Mashaal in Damascus?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Mashaal is the head of the political bureau of Hamas. He is the man, as I am, with some differences: I am the man at the head of the Palestinian authority, he is the head of Hamas, and we have to talk with him. We know his relations with Iran, but in spite of that, we have to talk to him, to convince him that he can go to the reconciliation, he can go to sign the document, and please don't ask me any questions about the nuclear weapons because I do not understand the nuclear.

MR. INDYK: Let's take one down the back a little, please.

SPEAKER: (Speaking Arabic)

PRESIDENT ABBAS: (Speaking Arabic)

MR. INDYK: Over here, please?

SPEAKER: Good morning, Mr. President. Allow me to ask my question in Arabic, too. (Speaking Arabic)

PRESIDENT ABBAS: (Speaking Arabic)

MR. INDYK: We're going to have to close it up now. You've been very generous with your time, but I just want to follow up on that for a moment because the Arab Peace Initiative, as you've described it, is a very important development. No doubt. That all of the Arab states and leading Muslim countries are on record as saying they will end the conflict, make peace, normalize relations with Israel, but what's missing -- what seems to me to be missing from that -- oh, you have your --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: This is the Arab Peace Initiative.

MR. INDYK: The flags of the countries that were --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Two countries, and all the countries who accepted. (Speaking Arabic), I'm sorry. (Laughing) (Speaking Arabic)

MR. INDYK: Yes.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: (Speaking Arabic)

MR. INDYK: But here's the thing, Mr. President, there is no mechanism for implementing this initiative. It's a declaration of intent, an important one, and I think that's what the questioner was asking is, should there be Arab engagement in a more active way from the Arab states? You've brought the Arab League into it by getting their mandate to negotiate

--

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Yes.

MR. INDYK: -- which I think is actually a positive development because, as you and I know, the Arab states were always pushing you out in front and saying you make the deal, but they were never prepared to support it.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: No, no, it is not in this way, no.

MR. INDYK: But now they give you the mandate, but --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: They gave me a mandate to go to negotiate, first of all, four months, and after that they reiterated their position. And when I finish anything I will return back to them, which means that they are also committed in peace.

And by the way, when you talk about the Arabs, two of the Arab countries decided according to a decision came from the Arab League, maybe I remember, the foreign minister of Egypt and the foreign minister of Jordan, one, to Israel, two, to promote the Arab Peace Initiative, no response. No response from the Israelis. So, they didn't encourage the others to come and follow up this.

MR. INDYK: So, you're -- what you're saying is, you're building a mechanism through this Arab League mandate? Is that accurate?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Exactly.

MR. INDYK: But other people criticize you.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Why?

MR. INDYK: And so they say --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Many people criticize me.

MR. INDYK: They say that Abu Mazen was the one who always promoted the independence of Palestinian decision making and now you are giving the decision to the Arab states. What's your response to that?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: There is no contradiction between the mandate for the Arab league and the Palestinian independent decision. Why? Because I go to the Arabs to ask them, to talk to them, and take their blessings, not only blessings, but mandate, and then I go to the --

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

MR. INDYK: Support and umbrella?

PRESIDENT ABBAS: No, no, to go to the PLO, (speaking Arabic), and to the central committee of al Fatah, to decide whether I am wrong or right, and to approve what I did with the Arab League. So, both sides are participating in the same, which is good, which is good for us because all the Arabs now are committed.

MR. INDYK: President Abbas, as I said, we first met when you signed the Oslo Agreement --

PRESIDENT ABBAS: 1993, yes.

MR. INDYK: -- in September 13, 1993, and I wish that we will see you again on the White House lawn signing the peace agreement between Israel and the State of Palestine, maybe in our lifetime. Thank you so much for joining us.

PRESIDENT ABBAS: Thank you very much. (Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

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