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SABAN CENTER/BROOKINGS BRIEFING

PALESTINIAN POLITICS AND ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT

Panelists:

ZIAD ABU AMR, GHAITH AL-OMARI,
EIVAL GILADY AND AMNON LIPKIN-SHAHAK

Moderator:

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[TRANSCRIPT PRODUCED FROM A TAPE RECORDING]

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. We're very glad to host this policy press briefing this morning on the situation between Israel and the Palestinians.

As you will no doubt be aware, things have turned much more positive in recent times with the election of Abu Mazen as president of the Palestinian Authority—or Mahmoud Abbas, as he's also known; with the creation of a new Israeli coalition government that includes former Prime Minister Shimon Peres and the Labor Party and the smaller religious parties; with the negotiation with the terrorist and militant organizations on the Palestinian side of a hudna, or informal cease-fire; and with the resumption of coordination between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which is going to lead next week to a summit meeting between Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas; along with the visit next week of Condoleezza Rice as secretary of state as a manifestation of what President Bush has now referred to as his personal commitment to try to achieve his vision of a democratic Palestinian state living alongside a secure Jewish state of Israel within the next four years.

To talk about these developments, we've brought together four people who have direct involvement in these events and in developing the potential for them. They are all here as part of the Daniel Abraham Israeli-Palestinian workshop that the Saban Center hosts here three times a year—this is the sixth one—all made possible by the generous support of Daniel Abraham, who's greatly committed to seeing a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

I will introduce them together, and then what we're going to do is, instead of having them do set-piece presentations, I'm going to moderate discussion by asking them a few questions and then we'll go to Q&A.

First of all, Ziad Abu Amr. Dr. Abu Amr is chairman of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council. In other words, he himself is an elected member of the Legislative Council. He was elected in 1996, and he represents Gaza City. He's also president of the Palestinian Council on Foreign Relations and a professor of political science at Birzeit University. He has specialized in the study of Islamist groups, and because of that and his understanding of them, he's played a critical role in the negotiation of this hudna cease-fire.

Amnon Lipkin-Shahak was the 15th chief of the general staff of the Israeli Defense Forces. After he retired from a distinguished military career, he then entered Israeli politics. In the 15th Knesset, he was elected as a member of the Center Party and he became a minister in the Barak government both as minister of transportation and minister of tourism, and deputy prime minister, and in those positions played a critical role in negotiations with the Palestinians—as he had played a critical role as chief of staff in the implementation of the Oslo Accords. And now that Prime Minister Peres has joined Prime Minister Sharon in his government as vice prime minister, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, who is soon to join the Labor Party, is playing an important role as an advisor, especially on economic affairs.

Ghaith al-Omari is a lawyer who served as the legal advisor to the Palestinian negotiating delegations from Camp David through Taba. He also was the

lead drafter, on the Palestinian side, of the Geneva Initiative, and he serves as an advisor to President Mahmoud Abbas. He served in that capacity when Mahmoud Abbas was prime minister and now has that role today in the presidency.

And finally, Eival Gilady. General Gilady served as the head of the Strategic Planning Division of the Israel Defense Forces from 2001 to 2004. In that capacity, which followed also a distinguished military career, Eival was responsible for developing the planning of the Gaza disengagement proposal that Prime Minister Sharon is now in the process of implementing. And since his retirement, he is also advising the Sharon government on the disengagement process.

So we have a very distinguished and experienced panel to address you today. I'm going to start by asking Ziad to analyze for us the situation on the ground, particularly in Gaza, and to tell us what he can about the nature of this hudna cease-fire and its prospects. Ziad.

DR. ABU AMR: Thank you, Martin. Good morning, friends.

I think when we talk about the hudna or the period of calm, truce or cease-fire, whatever we call it, we have to see it in a broader context, in broader objective conditions that have recently evolved in the Palestinian areas and a broader context in the sense of a Palestinian national accord that is working right now. So the hudna, or the cease-fire, is not an isolated development. This is what is reassuring. If we were dealing with the hudna as an odd agreement, a temporary one, then this would have been worrying. But to see the hudna, or to make the hudna as part of a broader

national accord in new objective conditions and a new political and security context in the Palestinian areas, this would be the kind of cease-fire or hudna we are seeking.

Now, talking about the context, the broader objective context, a number of recent developments have taken place which opened this new phase or these new horizons for the Palestinians, the Israelis, and peace, of course, as a whole. One such development is the fact that the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza has become a fact. It is no longer in question, although certain tunings here and there need to be done, certain things have to be agreed upon. But the withdrawal is a reality now. And this, of course, is because the Israeli government and the prime minister in Israel have made up their minds, and I think the Palestinians, as time went, helped in creating the conditions to make that withdrawal possible.

The second development is that a Palestinian partner—and I don't want to go back to the period of the late President Arafat and debate anyone or argue whether we—whether the Palestinians had a credible partner or not at that time. Now this is history and I don't think we need to waste time debating or arguing whether there was a Palestinian partner or not. But I don't think anybody can now argue that there is no Palestinian partner. Everybody recognizes this. Now we have an elected president, somebody who's in very good standing with a lot of credibility and a serious approach to things. And I think this is important. It made the withdrawal easier, and possible, too, but it will have certain political implications. Because the whole idea of the withdrawal was based on the premise that there was no Palestinian partner. Now we have a Palestinian partner—what do we do with that unilateral disengagement plan?

The third development is the question of security. I think for the first time in four years you will see Palestinian security services deployed on the Palestinian borders and Gaza and in the Palestinian streets. And this has been deeply appreciated by the Israeli side and as a sign of serious conduct, not only goodwill. And I think we have seen something that we have not seen in the last four years. There has been a period of real calm, which, hopefully, will lead to a formal cease-fire between the Palestinians and the Israelis. And also, the second dimension of the security requirement, the security dimension, is the cease-fire we are talking about, the period of calm that rules. And I will be talking about this.

The fourth important development is the restructuring of the Palestinian political system which was begun by the triggering of all sorts of elections in Palestine—the municipal elections, the presidential elections, and the upcoming legislative elections. And I think this is a theme that needs a lot of discussion. I mean, it's more important than anybody imagined, because I think the political dynamics in the Palestinian society have changed altogether. Now, there is a criterion which no Palestinian can say no to, and that is elections. Elections are the basis for political participation, it is the basis for power-sharing. They are the only accepted criterion for the Palestinians. And as I said, it involves the introduction of a new dynamic to our political and national life. And I think what we have done, I don't need to talk about what happened in these elections in terms of their integrity, democraticness, and other aspects. I always say if these elections were not truly democratic, we wouldn't have seen observers coming from 66 countries. I mean, these teams don't go to countries where

there are no democratic elections, having seen these teams in many countries in the region during their elections.

The fifth variable here is the process of reform. I think we are beginning to see the serious process take place.

And the last dynamic is the politics of inclusion which we are embarking on. And I think this also is part of the cease-fire. Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Hamas in particular, would not accept a cease-fire just, as I said, as an isolated element, but it has to be part of a broader package. And the broader package is what is called political participation or power sharing. And I know many people here and in Palestine and the region may be anxious about this undertaking, but I think it is the only way to create stability inside Palestine and around Palestine, that everybody has to be included in an accountable political system that is run by the rule of law.

Now, these are the variables. We come to the hudna—and briefly; I know there are time constraints. When we negotiated the hudna—I did this together with Abu Mazen—our demands were very clear. All we wanted is to have a period of calm or a truce or a cease-fire, and we had to do this gradually. Because Hamas wouldn't do it the same old way. You remember, in 2003 we negotiated a truce which lasted for 51 days, but it broke down. So I think this time we wanted to conclude a cease-fire or a truce that would last. So our primary request was a halt on violence, because we cannot do anything—we cannot deploy troops, we cannot continue with elections, we cannot resume talks with the Israelis—without that prerequisite. So that was our primary focus.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad, primarily, were willing to consider this request, but they had conditions that are placed on Mr. Abbas and another set of conditions that was placed on the Israelis. Of course, they were requesting the demands on Israelis from Abu Mazen, too, because they would not be talking to the Israelis. And basically, they wanted a halt on Israeli assassinations of their leaders and cadres, a halt on Israeli incursions and the demolition of homes, release of Palestinian prisoners, and withdrawal from Palestinian cities. And we had no problem because these are the demands of Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority. So here there was convergence of demands.

And I think—and based on his past contacts with the Israeli side, Amnon Shahak can enlighten us more on this particular issue—the Israelis have no serious objection to these demands except for the release of Palestinian prisoners. But we believe, Abu Mazen and I, that a process can be started where some phased release of prisoners can take place in order to consolidate the hudna and sustain it. Hamas, of course, would say we will give a period of calm, but for a formal cease-fire we need guarantees. And Abu Mazen could not give these guarantees to Hamas while we were negotiating at the table. He had to go and check with the Israelis, with third parties, to get the sort of guarantees that are needed.

Now, in return for the hudna, they had demands from Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority that the municipal elections had to be continued. And of course we have no objection to that, because it was our decision, the Palestinian Authority and the PLO, to undertake these elections. And they wanted certain amendments in the election law, technical stuff, which were acceptable to us, too.

So I think the time was really opportune. And my final remark in this regard is that I think the hudna this time was possible because everybody seemed to have a stake. There was clear convergence of interests. The Israelis wanted a hudna because they didn't want to withdraw from Gaza, starting from July, under fire. That is not acceptable to the Israelis. And the PA needed the cease-fire so it can proceed with its multifaceted program. And Hamas, I think, was under internal and regional pressure, and Hamas also knew that, you know, failing to be positive with regard to a hudna that is concluded or forged between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority may lead the two sides into some internal friction. And Hamas, like the PA, was working to avoid any sort of friction.

I think I'm going to stop here. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Ziad. Let me just ask you quickly—what is needed for the cease-fire to continue beyond 30 days?

DR. ABU AMR: Well, there was no agreement on 30 days. We have agreed on a certain mechanism to—you know, we did not agree on any specific date.

MR. INDYK: So it's open-ended?

DR. ABU AMR: Well, open and not open. I think it hinges on reciprocity. For instance, if Abu Mazen, after his meeting with Mr. Sharon, comes back to the Palestinians and to Hamas and says, look, I have guarantees that there is going to be a total halt on all kinds of attacks and hostilities, I think at that point a formal cease-fire will be declared by the Palestinian side. And I think we have agreed on a certain mechanism that nobody can break this truce unilaterally. I'm talking about the Palestinians. I'm not talking about the Israeli side. But if Hamas, for example, is

subjected to certain Israeli attacks, we agree that they should come to us and we sit together and we discuss it before they undertake any unilateral reaction.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

Amnon, I'll ask you to comment on that from an Israeli perspective in a moment, but first I wonder if you could just give us your sense of the ability, the political ability of Prime Minister Sharon to go ahead with the Gaza disengagement. We've seen over 100,000 settlers out in the streets demonstrating and a lot of talk about new elections. So I wonder if you could just give us your assessment of the political situation in Israel as Sharon goes into this critical period. And then perhaps comment on, from your own experience with cease-fires in the past that broke down, how you see the Israeli army dealing with this new situation.

MR. LIPKIN-SHAHAK: Well, I think that the dramatic change in Israeli politics happened when Sharon made a few declarations that were totally opposing what people expected him to say before the last elections in Israel.

His first declaration was that there must be a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the solution should be a two-state solution. It was unheard of before by a Likud party leader. And it was common knowledge between the Labor party, or what we would call the left wing in Israel, but from a party leader coming from the Likud or from the right wing, it was never heard before, and especially not from Sharon, who is known to be the godfather of the settlements.

More than that, later, when Sharon proposed the unilateral withdrawal for the settlers, it was a threat to their whole ideology that they went together step by step

with Sharon through the last 30 years. And it's true that the unilateral withdrawal idea was adopted by the government, and the coalition since then has changed dramatically. All the right wing parties except for Likud withdrew from the coalition. Even Shinui withdrew for different reasons. And within the Likud, one-third of the Knesset members of the Likud oppose the unilateral withdrawal decision and they, practically on a daily basis, act against it and are trying to change the decision.

That's what opened the way for Labor to join with the coalition, and now the Likud and Labor and some ultra-orthodox parties are the coalition. But it's not that, because now about half of the opposition support the withdrawal. If Shinui and Yahad, two parties that together are about half, and include odd members of the Knesset, maybe there are even more than half the opposition that will support a government decision to withdraw, unilaterally or in coordination, from Gaza.

So I do believe that from the political point of view, Sharon can enjoy a majority of the Knesset members that will support any decision that will favor and give him permission to implement the withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria. But there is a but. The settlers have the feeling that they have been betrayed by Sharon. And they claim, which is true, that before the elections, the unilateral withdrawal was the idea of the head of Labor, Amram Mitzna, at that time, which Sharon opposed. And they said, Well, you, Sharon, were elected by opposing the idea of a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. Now you have to go either to new elections or to a kind of referendum or a poll that will express the real will of the majority of the Israeli people.

I doubt so far no one—or the government does not accept this demand, and I believe that the timetable will not permit any of those two suggestions. Therefore, we witness almost every week demonstrations of settlers and many of those who support the settlers. And again, my belief is that the settlers are not worried so much about the withdrawal from Gaza and northern Samaria. This is not the real threat for the future. The real threat is that this will be the beginning for something that in the future will be much bigger. Not that they will accept the withdrawal from Gaza without protesting, but they will swallow it. The real threat is not there. The real threat is not in Gaza and not in northern Samaria, where we are talking about withdrawing from four settlements that are not very big by the population.

So this is the present situation in Israel. Things still the government has to go—months from now the government should go again and vote for exactly what has to be done in Gaza and northern Samaria and decide on the timetable, which I believe will start no later than June or July—the coming June or July, meaning that we have no time.

I do believe that the new circumstances on the Palestinian side not only permit but—the Israel government started certain coordination with the Palestinian Authority. And once the new Palestinian government will be announced and the key figures or people who will be responsible for each of the activities will be known, I believe that this cooperation has a very good chance to go much deeper than what we witness now. And I think it's a common interest.

That brings me to the second question of cease-fire. We're not looking for a cease-fire because cease-fire by its nature is a temporary situation. I think that Abu Mazen, in his declaration before the elections, said that from the Palestinian point of view, the intifada, or using violence, using terror attacks against Israel, was a mistake. And I fully agree. So I do believe that if the Palestinians will be able to implement law and order in their territories, meaning that no militias will be able to carry and use weapons—and by the way, we have a previous agreement with the Palestinian Authority that they should not permit this kind of activity in their territories, which was not fulfilled—especially not in the last four years, but even before the last four years. So if, at least for the beginning, the Palestinian Authority will be able to implement law and order and keep the situation calm, I think that we are in a very promising new beginning.

MR. INDYK: Thanks, Amnon. Let's hope so.

Ghaith, I wonder if you could give us your sense of Abu Mazen's program. We heard from Amnon basically that the disengagement will go ahead and start in June and conclude, probably, in October. That's a kind of nine-month period. Can you give us a sense of where you feel he wants to go in the next nine months and then what happens after that, from the Palestinian point of view on it?

MR. AL-OMARI: Thanks, Martin.

I would say we have a two-tier approach for the coming year, one regarding domestic politics. Ziad talked a lot about it. I would just want to stress two points. The first is the point of democratization. I mean, we're serious about this. This year is definitely going to be the year of Palestinian actions. We've already had the

presidential elections, we're in the process of doing the staggered municipal elections, we're having parliamentary, we're having the Fatah elections. And not only that. Also we're going to be pushing for more elections, we're going to have elections in the various political parties and several institutions.

Basically, you want to rejuvenate the political system. You want to create a situation where everyone feels that they have some kind of stake in the process. And frankly, also, we feel that this will have very much of a foreign policy impact. We're talking about the Greater Middle East Initiative. We think that we can be a strategic partner in this initiative.

But also, the elections have another function, a function that relates to what Amnon talked about, which is in terms of bringing sustainable calm. We are committed, obviously, to ending the violence and to ending all of the underpinnings of violence, whether it's armed militias or what have you. It's not something that you can do overnight after four years of what happened. You have to do it through a process, a process that on the one hand clearly sets the parameters of what's allowed and what's not allowed, but also creates a political alternative. This political alternative and this political space is being created, on the one hand, by the hudna—a political process whereby the militants can be integrated into the political life—but also through the elections, whereby legitimacy is gained by election, not by violence.

This is the political process when it comes to domestic work. Obviously, on the other hand domestically, the whole project of reform is continuing, whether it's in terms of the financial and administrative reforms, but more importantly in terms of

implementation of the rule of law, not only as a euphemism for ethnic violence but also actually as a way of how do you manage your country, how do you manage disputes, how do you manage your political system and also your economic and your social interactions. This is on the domestic field, and it's very clear in Abu Mazen's various speeches and his various statements this is where we're going to be heading.

Then you have the issue of the peace process/foreign policy—where do you move on that one. Obviously, the most significant event in the peace process this year is going to be the Gaza disengagement, the withdrawal from Gaza. Now, as an event, it's hard, really, to assess if it is positive or negative. I mean, as an event it's a good thing. Israel's going to withdraw from Palestinian territory. That's great. The question is what happens with this withdrawal. It can either be a catalyst for something positive or it can be an impediment towards progress. If one reads what [inaudible] said in his [inaudible] interview, definitely it's not being thought of, at least in some circles in the Israeli system, as a catalyst for progress. But we still believe that it can be turned into something positive. It can be turned into something that will spur things forward. And I think this will be the focus of our foreign policy in the coming years: How do you turn Gaza into something that will spur something more advanced afterwards?

And for that to happen, we see a number of things that are new. First of all, Gaza cannot be done in separation of the West Bank, or at the expense of the West Bank. Gaza cannot be an excuse for strengthening, consolidating [inaudible] in the West Bank, whether through intensifying settlement activity, whether through the settlement outposts, whether through the war, or what have you. There has to be a link between

these two things. But also, realize that you cannot make Gaza a success without linking it to the West Bank. You cannot basically bring calm and security to Gaza if the West Bank is not calm or secure. Today [inaudible], I think, said that they would only hand over cities in the West Bank if calm happens in Gaza. There's obviously going to be a link between the two. I cannot imagine a situation where, if we bring calm to Gaza but violence continues in the West Bank, that Gaza will be a success. So our security work will have to proceed on both sides.

Also, in terms of reform. We cannot build institutions for a state in Gaza and not in the West Bank. If I want to reform my ministry of health, it's ridiculous to reform the Gaza branch and not the West Bank branch. And more politically and politically speaking, the reform process is going to be a politically costly one. We're going to have to expend quite a lot of political capital. So we might as well—if we want to do it, let's just do it on both sides, West Bank and Gaza. So in that sense, there is no sense in focusing on Gaza in isolation of the West Bank.

Now, what does that mean if we do all of this work, security and reform, West Bank and Gaza? It means that we've done what we need to do, what is expected from us in phase one of the Roadmap. And this would create the natural link between disengagement and the Roadmap process. We think that if all parties—the Israelis, Palestinians obviously, and the international community, meaning the Americans—act in good faith, it is possible by the end of the year, by the end of the disengagement, to actually have achieved the end of phase one of the Roadmap and to move towards something more.

Now, as I said earlier, our biggest concern with the Gaza disengagement this year is that basically a long-term, interim, partial solution, Gaza-first, Gaza-last— basically, as [inaudible] said a few days ago, we don't want to be subcontractors for a unilateral process. For us to have assurances that the Gaza disengagement is not going to be Gaza-first, Gaza-last, again, two things are needed. The first thing is we really feel that there is a need to start very soon the process of permanent status negotiations, a parallel process of permanent status negotiations—not as a way of side-stepping the Roadmap. Again, I mean, we've repeatedly said that we're committed to implementing our bits of the Roadmap unilaterally. Whether or not—whatever Israel does, we want to do it for our own interest.

But we believe that you have to have parallel permanent status negotiations for two reasons. One is practical. Martin was—you were in Camp David and so were you, Amnon, and you both know that in Camp David, when we got there, we were not ready. Even had we had the political will—and I'm not going to get into that—we would not have reached an agreement simply because there wasn't the preparation. So that's a trap that we should not fall into again, and so a process of negotiation, a preparatory negotiation is important. But also, politically speaking, if you have permanent status negotiations in parallel with Gaza, it will give us on the Palestinian side more of a margin to engage more positively with Gaza, simply because that would be one way that we can actually silence anyone who is going to try to accuse us of engaging in Gaza as a way of selling out on the [inaudible]. This is what we're facing right now. If you want to engage positively with Gaza, people are going to say,

yes, but you're selling out in the West Bank and on Jerusalem and the refugees and what have you.

So having this bigger political process will give us the political space domestically to engage in Gaza. That's the first thing. The second thing that we really need is a day-after scenario. From here to the end of the disengagement, we have plenty of space to agree on a process to see what happens after Gaza. Right now, we don't know. Right now, what we hear is a multitude of things, everything from, you know, we're going to freeze the process after the Gaza disengagement to we're going to have further unilateral withdrawals from the West Bank. These are all options out there. We don't know what the real plan is. So we have to have an agreement on a process whereby it's clear what happens after Gaza. And basically, what happens after Gaza is going back full force into the Roadmap and into phase three of the Roadmap.

This is at least a conception of what we're going to be doing this coming year.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Ghaith.

Eival. First of all, I wonder if you would explain to us the logic of the Gaza disengagement as you understand it, and address these two points that Ziad and Ghaith have raised, which is, number one, circumstances have changed, so what was logical as a unilateral move now is a question mark—what do you do if there is a Palestinian partner? And the second is how do you address the question about whether Gaza-first is in fact Gaza-last? What is the likely follow-on, from an Israeli perspective, to the Gaza disengagement?

MR. GILADY: Okay, let me start by saying something about the very immediate term and then I'll go to the logic that is still valid of the disengagement even though some changes have happened recently.

What we're trying to do now in fact is to implement a five-stage strategy at once. This is kind of a lot more risky process than we may have thought of, but we're going to do it. But we must look at both sides of the equation. What are the stages? And I'll go very quickly over these.

The first one is what we all call, you know, removing checkpoints and increasing the freedom of goods, of people, and these kind of things. It is very important. We're going to do it. It is important because we believe that it's in our interest that the Palestinian day-to-day life will be better, the economy will be better, the labor market will work better, and so forth. It takes some risk, because you probably understand that the more we're open, the higher the risk is that some terror attack will leak into Israel. But we're going to do it. There is some work expected to be done by our Palestinian colleagues, but this is, I would say, the first stage.

Then we'll go to the second stage, which is redeployment of our troops. You probably understand that just the presence of the troops in the area prevents [inaudible] and makes many things that, once we change that, might have to be done by others. Now, you probably understand that we wish to make the presence of the Israeli Defense Forces as invisible as possible. I believe it is important and possible that a Palestinian guy that wants to drive his car from Jenin in the north down to Hebron in the

south will be able to do that without seeing any Israeli checkpoint, without seeing any Israeli military group. I think this also can be done.

But we're going now not only for the immediate risk of terror, but something beyond that, and this is the desire, I would say, that we know of, the Palestinians—some groups—supported and encouraged from outside, mainly by the Hizbullah, to transfer some knowledge and materials from Gaza to the West Bank. Now, you probably understand what it takes to have Kassam missiles launched from Gaza towards Kalkilya. Just imagine that we have Kassam missiles in Kalkilya. No one even wanted to think about that kind of scenario. But if nothing is being done on the Palestinian side, we just open all those checkpoints. And really, for our troops, the risk gets higher.

Then we go to the third stage—and as I say, we're going to implement them all at once. The third stage is preventing military operations—no arrests, no incursions, no all of what we did, any problem [inaudible] from the arrests, a lot of information and intelligence was gathered to prevent terror attacks that were on the process and to get some information about who tries to do what. And if I'm trying to get back to the very strong fingerprint that we find of the Hizbullah in the Palestinian terror group in this time, it is something that, once we pull out, it is very important that somebody else takes responsibility for that. So this is the third stage.

The fourth one is what I would call security and intelligence cooperation, that if we got any kind of information, we'll provide it to the Palestinian security apparatuses, expecting them to take action.

And a fifth one would be in fact getting back to where we were three years ago, where the Palestinian security apparatuses were responsible for the security and of the Israelis. This was changed after the Defensive Shield Operation almost three years ago.

Now, what we're trying to do now is get all these processes at once to help Abu Mazen create the necessary environment and atmosphere for him to start operating. And we will do whatever we can, taking that kind of calculated risk. But this cannot be done if Israelis are getting killed on a day-to-day basis. This cannot be done—we cannot allow, if we don't take action, somebody else must do that. And we can't live with the kind of equation proposed to us: You don't do, we can't do, and let's hope that something gets better in the future.

My point to my colleagues is, guys, we're about to move out. I'm talking about before disengagement. I'm talking about very immediate-term. If we move out, you must take action. You must act, you must act effectively, and you must act now.

So this is one point, very important, for me to explain. This is what we're trying to do right now. So if somebody says, well, you know, you cannot expect to be calm in Gaza and not talk about other places, we will never legitimize low levels of terrorism. Let me tell you something. The terror groups now do not test Sharon. They test Abu Mazen. They're trying to test what is accepted and what is not and they wish to see that kind of test, that I haven't seen so far, of where the lines go. If there were Kassam missiles and mortar shells launched yesterday, who took the decision? What's the process following it? If they would legitimize something like, well, you know, terror

with no Israeli kills—if there is no Israeli killed, would that be legitimate terror, just low level of terror. So we can terrorize the population. They may not be able to use the roads, may not be able to send kids to school, no Israeli killed. If it would be only in the territories and not in Israel, would that be accepted? I think the message that needs to be sent out from the Palestinian leadership now is very clear and needs to be sent right away.

Now, let me go to your question about disengagement. All the logic behind the disengagement is still valid, and the logic was very simple. Understanding that we can't go now directly to final status negotiations, should we stay where we are with that level of friction and day-to-day friction, killing and dying and bleeding with a lousy economy, lousy security, or can we get to a better position where we can minimize the day-to-day friction, take all those checkpoints, redeploy troops, be more dependent on the security fence, or antiterrorism fence, as I wish to call it, and get out of the Palestinian day-to-day life, let them run their day-to-day life, let them, as I said earlier, take a car and drive all over with no Israeli checkpoint? If we can do that, we might support those conditions so important to the Palestinian society to create the incentive to reform and move forward.

Can we do that? Yes. Should we do it? Yes. Are we going to do it? My answer is yes, regardless of what happens now on the Palestinian side. This is the thrust of a unilateral plan. For whatever we've committed ourselves to the U.S. administration on April 14, when our plan [inaudible] here at Washington is going to be implemented by the end of 2005. We're going to evacuate Gaza not only for the Israeli troops, but the

settlers. They're going to evacuate the northern part of Samaria, and we're going to create what I've just said, this kind of much better day-to-day life on the Palestinian side.

The logic is still there and we're going to do it for whatever happens. But we can't just walk out and wash our hands. It is in our interest that a positive dynamic will be developed. It is a unilateral plan, but I wish to see a Palestinian unilateral plan, taking responsibility from the other side. So we the Israelis have our unilateral plan. This is something we are going to do whether the Palestinians do or do not do what is expected from their side. I wish to see a Palestinian unilateral plan.

The failure of the past was what we used to call this kind of zipper strategy plans, and you all know about them. And I was personally involved in all of those. Now, what we did in those plans that we said if you do this, we do that. If you do this, we do— It was like a step-by-step strategy. Both sides were looking at the other side's responsibility and nothing happened because each side, including us—let's be honest—could find a good excuse not to move forward. When we worked from the Roadmap, we tried to change the strategy and to go to a different approach, when we had a long list of what needs to be done by Side A, a long list of what needs to be done by Side B, now each side go and get your things done and let's meet at the end of the phase and see if everything was done, and move forward. And even this didn't work.

So the only way to move forward now, to my mind, is take unilateral plans, each side—it may not be negotiated, but it would be very well coordinated. And the more responsive and responsible partner we see on the other side, the more it will be

coordinated. As you see right now. Dahlan and Mofaz meet every other day, and the level of coordination will increase as we go by.

But now let's look at the Israeli leadership. What I believe, help creating these conditions was not only the thing that Arafat passed away, President Bush was reelected as a strong signal for the two-state solution, his well-known 24th of June speech, the Roadmap—but look at the Israeli politics. Sharon has legitimized the evacuation of Gaza. For whatever it's going to be in the future, this will be done. Sharon risked his political career and he has created a coalition now that all this coalition is only for one thing, for disengagement. The message that is being sent out is very strong, very clear, continuously, permanently, for whatever it takes. We are going to implement it.

Now, let me make it very clear to you. It is not something that is going to be very easy, not only because the settlers are very well-organized. It is really something very hard, and I don't know if any of you thought of what kind of discussions are you getting in those settlements. When a group of people ask themselves should we call our boys to leave those units and come back, or should they stay there to help us when the time comes? What does it mean to help us when the time comes? This is something very risky not only for the Israeli Defense Force but for the Israeli society as a whole. And let me be honest with you. Had my son served in the military and I was living in one of those settlements, would he give me a call and say, hey, dad, it's going to be tonight—or not? Any of your kids would have done so.

It is a very complicated process, and we're going to implement it. We have prepared ourselves step by step. And this message is being sent out every day. Now I'm looking to my colleagues. I wish to see a very strong message sent out. Terror is not accepted anymore. We are done with this. If there was an attack in [inaudible] and six people got killed, I wish to see a true investigation and the rest, and this interrogation will lead to somebody else. And you send a message: Guys, this is over and we're taking a totally different approach.

But if this is not over, some of those groups are trying to see what is accepted and what is not, and this is the testing time of Abu Mazen. As I said earlier, we believe it's a great opportunity. We will do whatever we can to create the conditions for him to work. There are many things needed to be done by him, and now.

MR. INDYK: Ziad, do you want to comment on that?

DR. ABU AMR: Well, no, I don't have, you know, much quarrel with this. I'm excited about what is happening. I don't want to go back to any form of antagonistic discussions because, from an Israeli point of view, I can, you know, understand the mindset and—although I feel a little bit uneasy about, you know, the question of the settlers, the security, and—you know, as if we, it was the Palestinians who created this problem for— This is Palestinian land which was taken illegally. And I don't think we need to really sympathize and agonize for people who should be evacuated because their presence there is very—from our point of view—is a hostile act.

And I understand the concerns of my friend there, that the—you know, they want to handle this carefully because this is important for the prime minister, it's

important for Israeli society. I understand. But the way he puts it, you know, it sounds as if we were doing something wrong, the Palestinians, because we want the settlers to go. I mean, this is exactly what we want.

And I want to stress what Amnon Shahak is saying. The Gaza withdrawal is important to me because it sets the precedent. The Israeli presence in the settlements in the West Bank, from my point of view as a Palestinian, is illegal and illegitimate and these settlements should be evacuated. And maybe this is the [inaudible] political significance. This is maybe why we did not make a lot of fuss about the unilateral disengagement. And "unilateral" is not a very good word, by the way. My friend mentioned the meetings between Dahlan and Mofaz. These are not unilateral meetings. These are bilateral. So in order for you to reach something, you have to sit together, you have to coordinate. Because if I go, relying on goodwill, relying on what I as a Palestinian think is good for the Palestinians and the Israelis and the peace process, and you on the Israeli side go and do the same, there are no guarantees that we would be doing what is acceptable for both of us. It's very important for us to sit and coordinate. And this is the philosophy and essence of the peace accord. Bilateralism is the contract, you know.

So I understand your motives and your concern and your understanding of the objective conditions, but I think it's very important, if you sit together, and you have an experience, you did a lot of mediation and— you know, it takes two to tango.

So I think the idea of coordination and— the sooner we take this unilateral plan to the bilateral concept, the better. Because if each side does what they

believe is right, without any synchronization, without any coordination, the risks are very high. I think when the two sides sit, they become bound by what they discuss and they agree upon. There are mechanisms, built-in mechanisms in the concept of bilateralism to safeguard the process. But if you leave it to each side to decide what is good for the Palestinians and the Israelis at the same time, I'm—I can't speak on behalf of the Israelis and you cannot speak on behalf of the Palestinians.

So in order to do something good for both sides, we should sit together and forge a common concept and common strategy and common plan. So I can't be convinced that unilateralism serves the purpose of achieving a peaceful arrangement at any level. And why insist on security cooperation? Why don't you say do it on your own, for instance, if unilateralism is good? So just leave it to the goodwill of the Palestinians and leave them do it in their own way.

If you don't want to do any consultation and coordination with us, of course, we'll do what's good for our people and what's good for our security and what's good for the peace process. But we cannot give you any formal security or political concessions. We cannot be obliged. And I think this is the thing you should not miss and the international community should not miss. I think it's very important to commit the Palestinians. So we have no security and political obligations to you in any formal sense if you insist in excluding us from the withdrawal. And how can you do it alone?

So I think we have talked a lot about the reasoning and the logic of unilateralism. But I'm sorry to say that this is not the way to do it. I think this is the time for real bilateral engagement, accountability, coordination, the role of the third

parties there—the Americans, our friends, are there. We need to carefully do this together. And I still believe that all the reasons that were provided for the unilateral disengagement plan are disappearing right now and we are doing it by our own initiative just to prove that we are serious, we are committed, and we want to work together.

MR. GILADY: First of all, let me ease the tension. I didn't mean to increase it.

Secondly, as I said earlier, we do see it as a great opportunity and we'll do whatever we can to support.

Thirdly, the plan will not be negotiated. It's going to be implemented unilaterally, but it's going to be well-coordinated. And the more responsive and responsible partner we see on the other side, we'll coordinate more. No one thought of coordination at the security level as it goes now, but as we see a real partnership from the other side, we'll do it better and I think we'll do more and more. And this is what I believe needs to be done. I think in some way, had I been from the Palestinian side, it is a guarantee to the Palestinians, so whatever happens, the Israelis are going to be out. And you said that, you want to learn that we're going to be out. Whether you do more or less with coordination or not, we're going to implement it.

Now, I hope that you will take the right steps to create what I call positive dynamics so it will be positively developed. It serves both sides' interest. That's the best—the win-win scenario.

QUESTION: Robin Wright, *The Washington Post*. I have a question for Ziad.

One of the most striking things about the last four and a half years is the emergence of Hamas from the margins to the mainstream. What gives you any sense of confidence that Hamas and Islamic Jihad are prepared to engage in any agreement that recognizes Israel's right to exist?

DR. ABU AMR: Well, they will be required to do that if they assume power as a party. Like certain parties in Israel which are part of the government, they have their party program, but they are bound by the parameters and the laws of the land, the state. So Hamas may not—we may not be able to convince Hamas to recognize Israel as a partner, but Hamas may become, and I think it is going to become part of an authority, a state, political entity that recognizes Israel. So if they want to oppose as a party that principle, this is their privilege. The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, they are in the parliament. At one point they were in the government and they do not recognize Israel. But if they want to become part of the state, they have to be bound by the imperatives and by the parameters and the laws of the state.

And I think this is what is happening right now. Hamas has conceded, you know, the Palestine state. They accept now—and this is what we were told in our negotiations, that they will not object, or they accept the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem. But they may have further claims. These further claims are not going to be inscribed in any agreement to power sharing. This is their privilege as a party. I know of political parties in Israel, again, who talk about [inaudible] Israel; let Hamas talk about [inaudible] Palestine. That's fine with me. But that's not going to be the policy and the program and the ideology of the state.

So this is the way and this is—this is something we discussed. It is not a secret. I mean, I'm not—let me talk about Sharon, not anybody else. Sharon the other day was saying that it's very hard to evacuate parts of the homeland. And he was talking about Gaza. He wasn't talking about anything else. So if the prime minister of the State of Israel can say this type of thing, let Hamas say it. But for me, they will be part of the state if they are bound by this state which has a clear political program that recognizes Israel, that will abide by the rule of law, which—you know, which is the law of the Palestinian Authority. That's fine. They can have their own ideology as a party.

QUESTION: Glen Kessler with *The Washington Post*. I was interested in a response from someone from the Israeli side, someone from the Palestine side.

What role should the American administration have in this process over the coming year? Is it enough for Dr. Rice to drop in once a month and shake everyone's hand and talk to the parties, or does the administration have to be much more proactive, perhaps someone assigned to a role in terms of being specifically focused on the Gaza disengagement? How do you see it playing out in the coming year, and what would be the most effective role for the Americans to play?

MR. INDYK: Amnon, do you want to start?

MR. LIPKIN-SHAHAK: I do believe that in the very near future it's the two sides' duty to heal some of the wounds of the last four years. Without a beginning of the healing process between Israelis and Palestinians, it will be very difficult, even if a third party or the United States will try to help and moderate the two sides.

The whole idea of a unilateral act on the Israeli side started when the general belief among the Israeli population was that we have no Palestinian partner. And I don't argue if it's right or wrong that we did not have a Palestinian partner, but the fact is that the vast majority of the Israeli population, when we believed that Arafat was responsible as the head of the Palestinian state for the agony and the very disturbing last four years, we got the feeling that we have nobody whom we trust and with whom we can start negotiating. This is the fact.

Now there is a change. But this change, we are in the beginning of the change. It's an opportunity. And I believe, again, that the new Palestinian leader enjoyed the trust of many, many Israelis. We believe that he really means what he says, and we want him to succeed. Therefore, we need sometime, even on a unilateral basis—I don't care if unilaterally the Palestinians will not consult with us and implement law and order among their people. Don't consult with us. Do what you have to do as a responsible regime.

But once we will start moving forward, we need the international community, and especially the United States, not only for economic aid. Look, the last four years almost totally destroyed the Palestinian economy. The Israeli economy also paid an enormous price for these last four years. We'll need the Americans to help in the economy; we'll need the Americans to be in the process in order for the two sides to feel that we are backed by the international community. And I think that both Palestinians and Israelis trust that the United States now is the main power that can push things forward.

And we need the feeling that we are not alone in this process. And sometimes, when there might be—and there will be, I am sure—arguments between the two sides, we'll need the Americans, or not only the Americans—the Quartet, or I don't know who—to in a way monitor the situation or ease the situation between the two sides.

MR. INDYK: It's interesting, to just follow up here. You're not suggesting that the United States come in now and engage in the security coordination in the kind of way that we used to do.

MR. LIPKIN-SHAHAK: No, I think that the United States should watch what's going on, the U.S. should learn it's a new situation, should be in a way involved, but I don't think that—I believe that the Palestinians have to establish their own new system. And I don't think that the Palestinian people have to get the feeling that the United States is pushing the new Palestinian administration to take decisions.

MR. AL-OMARI: I cannot disagree more, in that this is the time—when it comes to all of the third-party monitoring, this is the time. As you said, there is absolutely almost no trust between the two sides. And even, you know, as we're talking here today—as General Gilady was speaking, what he was saying was exactly what I would have said. But as he was speaking, I was running through my mind the worst possible interpretation of what he could mean.

Right now we don't trust one another. Right now, any action that the Israelis do we will interpret negatively. Anything we will do, they will interpret

negatively. They will not believe us, we will not believe them. We need someone to come and help us at this stage, at least monitor and verify what we're doing.

I agree with Amnon. If we don't have the political will, nothing is going to move. Even if we get the strongest, biggest international presence, things are not going to move. We need to [inaudible]. But we need a third party, an objective third party that can actually help us move forward, that can come when we have inevitable disagreements, inevitable frictions—that will happen, especially at the beginning—will come and ease these. And the third party doesn't need to come for [inaudible]. Again, I agree with Amnon that, at least at the beginning, we know what we have to do and we have to do it, and the Israelis know what they have to do and they have to do it.

But again, if the internationals are not present—I mean, when would you want them? At the end, when everything is done? If they're not here right now, the process can collapse. It has collapsed in the past, specifically—or in many ways because there was lack of belief on both sides in the other side's intention. So the sooner we get it going, the better, on this one.

The rest, I would agree with Amnon again. I mean, what we want from the international community—we want, definitely, economic aid on both sides. This is essential. But as importantly, in addition to the immediate monitoring, in addition to the economic aid, we need international buy-in into a political process. As I said earlier, for us it's very important to put the Gaza disengagement within a bigger political context. And for that we need the international community to reassert its commitment to the

Roadmap, but also put a practical, realistic, pragmatic way of implementing this Roadmap, getting us in the end to permanent status.

But again, as I said, in my mind, without an immediate monitoring goal and a medium-term buy-in into a political process, I think our work will be much, much harder.

QUESTION: Moshe Ma'oz, U.S. Institute of Peace.

Back to the two parties. Amnon, why do you think that Sharon—if you can read his mind—tried to disengage the disengagement from the Roadmap? Why not link it and encourage the Palestinians and show them [inaudible] by going to the Roadmap, at least phase two? Because we learned in Oslo, the more you drag it, the more the militants on both sides can destroy the process. And also, to give Palestinians hope. We are going to discuss Jerusalem. We'll discuss issues that are very important to you.

I'm not speaking about the authority of the PA over Hamas. Is there one Hamas? I mean, is there an authority in Hamas that can take decisions that will bind all members of it?

MR. LIPKIN-SHAHAK: Well, I doubt if I can tell you why Sharon decided to do. I will give you my answer. First of all, if you know, the Roadmap was accepted by the Israeli government with a number of reservations.

And reading all the reservations created a little different Roadmap than the one that was proposed. But the Roadmap is talking about a bilateral process, that the

two sides are going to move and the monitoring authority will monitor what they are doing. When Sharon proposed, again, the unilateral withdrawal, he said loud and clear, We have no partner, that's why we cannot really execute the Roadmap as it is. I'm going to start with unilaterally. It's according to the Roadmap. And once we have a partner, then we can keep on moving together.

I think that this was the logic as it was presented to the Israeli people when the decision was taken. And again, bear in mind that it was almost a year ago when the overall situation looked totally different than it looks now.

MR. GILADY: Let me just say—and very short—being the one who wrote the Israeli version of the Roadmap and coming here to Washington to present it to Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell, I am not sure that it is an open number, these floating reservations. But it is accepted by the Israeli government to be implemented. Had we had a partner, we would have gone with the Roadmap. When Abu Ala became the Palestinian prime minister—let me remind you, about a year ago—he didn't even want to meet Sharon and he had preconditions which were, I would say, irrational, as of getting off this security fence, this—not only what was already built and so forth. And we tried to arrange this kind of meeting, and we couldn't, time and time again. So having no partner, our idea was we'll try to implement what we can do unilaterally on the Roadmap. Once we have a partner, we'll go all the way through.

And second, a very important point. There is a different structure within the Roadmap that derives from the understanding that you cannot defeat terror by a peace process. This was something that we wrongly thought about for about a decade.

This was the logic in Oslo. We thought that once we achieve peace, there will be no motivation to attack us, there will be no more terror because we have peace. So the idea was let's push forward and achieve peace—this will be the best way to defeat terror. We found out that the peace process is not enough; someone must fight terrorism. So with the Roadmap, the first phase deals with security. Because we understand today that it is not peace that will bring security, but the other way around. It is security that will bring peace.

Now, if you want us to go to final status negotiations and jump above this first phase, what does it mean? It is not the Roadmap. It is a totally different plan, giving up the security, giving up the reforms—not only the security, but for many other aspects—and going to final status negotiations. This is not the Roadmap. This is something totally different.

We stick to the Roadmap, we are committed to the Roadmap. This was recently said to the U.S. administration again. And once conditions mature, we will be more than happy to implement it.

MR. : I think we need to decide whether we are interested in the essence of any agreement, of any initiative, of any plan, or to be handicapped and impeded by the letter. Because we are doing things right now which are part of the Roadmap, but we are not doing it in any formal way. When Sharon presented his disengagement plan in his letter to President Bush, he said this disengagement is not part of the Roadmap, but it is consistent with it. And I think that was enough, perhaps, for the president here to reward him by two major [inaudible] in his letter, on the refugees

and the settlements. I think you can be a primary sponsor, but you cannot not be an honest broker. If you are a primary sponsor and not an honest broker, you complicate and you jeopardize the process. And this is exactly what happened in the last few years for America. And there is no alternative for America, as you all know, for the role of that administration.

So I think the administration in the last few years refrained from exercising its role as an honest broker, and this is our major complaint. Nobody objects to an active involvement, strong involvement of the administration, but they have really to be an honest broker, or else you jeopardize the process.

MR. INDYK: Let's go to the question of Hamas.

MR. : Hamas is united, that's all. Moshe, Hamas is a very disciplined, united movement, and when they say something, they commit and they deliver.

MR. INDYK: What about the other groups? There's a lot of reporting about Hizbullah supporting the [inaudible] brigade and pushing through more territory—

MR. : Well, there may be attempts, but I think—how do these people come? Through the borders? Who controls the borders? We like to do our share, but I don't think Israel with its, you know, massive security and intelligence capabilities, logistical capabilities, should throw their burden on the Palestinians. I'm not fully aware of the size and magnitude of this so-called Hizbullah involvement. I really don't know. I mean, it may be there, but I don't have enough information. There

must be some—you know, you have intelligence, some contacts, some penetration. But, you know, we do our share. You do your share. You can't just throw it on our shoulders. Again, when you control the borders, when you have all—you have satellites, you have intelligence, you have massive capabilities, we have—our hands are full already with what we have in our own courtyard. So I don't think the business of Hizbullah should be delegated to us, too. That's not—you know, that's beyond our capabilities.

QUESTION: Sam Lewis, retired.

Ziad, in your opening statement, you were talking about how you were negotiating with Hamas. And you were confident that Hamas, there would be an agreement, or is already an agreement with Hamas. You didn't really mention Jihad. And that's my question. Do you believe that you have a deal, or will have a deal that's enforceable with Jihad?

MR. INDYK: Do you just want to explain what jihad it is?

DR. ABU AMR: There is this other Islamic group, Islamic Jihad, which has been game. We negotiated this—you will get whatever you want, we will not violate any Palestinian consensus. And, you know, we accept that, because I had leaders inside, outside, Abu Mazen did, and they are not going to be spoilers. So the main partner here is Hamas. And if the PA and the PLO, Abu Mazen strike a deal with Hamas, I think everybody else would follow suit.

Now, let's remember that you cannot have a cease-fire, and [inaudible] is only the first step. This is how you started with Egypt and with Syria, you all settled for

much less than a real cease-fire —disengagement, the procedures, and it's been holding for more than 30 years. I mean, I wish—you know, so our cease-fire is only an introduction to something that is more serious for us as Palestinians. Because we really want to— hopefully, we can improve on that. The Americans, the world can help us convince our people that there is a better alternative to [inaudible]. I mean, people resort to violence and to death when they become disparate. But if we have a promising process, I think it's going to be a natural—you know, a natural abandoning of [inaudible]. Hamas has been telling us this is only a tactic, it's [inaudible], but we can put it aside if we are assured that we can fulfill Palestinian rights without violence.

So this is—I take this as a positive. Let's prove to our people that [inaudible] can be done, you know, with—they can put them aside. This is our approach. This is the philosophy of our approach.

So back to the Islamic Jihad, there isn't a problem with Islamic Jihad.

QUESTION: Troy Davis from the World Citizen Foundation.

There have been some proposals that one of the best ways to at the same time promote democracy and the peace process and to create a buy-in from the Israeli and the Palestinian populations would be to have democratic peace negotiation itself; in other words, a peace conference which will be a democratic peace conference and which would consist of a couple hundred people on both sides, both the parliamentarians, mayors of cities and civil society, and they would meet for, you know, a month or two and they would negotiate all the outstanding issues and try to get some commitment and buy-in.

What do you think of this idea—which might sound a bit—which is unorthodox for diplomats. But given the climate in the region, what do you think of this idea?

MR. INDYK: Ghaith, do you want to—since you were involved in such a citizens effort. Is it relevant anymore?

MR. AL-OMARI: You definitely need buy-in from the public, that's for sure. I mean, I'm not sure that if you can get 200 people in the same room and get them to negotiate, they will get anywhere. But you definitely need a process whereby the public will buy into this process. And this needs at least two levels of action, if not more. One would be the question of preparing your public for the agreement. The posturing we see right now, with each side taking these extreme positions, this has to end. We both have to prepare our publics to what the end game is going to look like.

That's the first thing. But the second thing is also to create the kind of public support systems and mechanisms for any future agreement. And this is where the idea of getting civil societies together, getting businesses together is still very relevant. It's not going to happen overnight. Again, the degree—the last four years. I mean, you have to remember, the last four years basically Palestinians [inaudible] Israelis, and vice versa—for us, an Israeli as a soldier at a checkpoint; for the Israelis, the Palestinian as a suicide bomber. To take some time to build this again. But we don't do this without actually having the kind of structures that will support a future peace deal. I don't think a peace deal can stick, especially when you look at the forces against a peace deal, which

are very well organized, very active, can mobilize quickly. We need the counterpart for that.

So yes, it's still very relevant, but it wouldn't be a replacement for a serious diplomatic, official, formal process.

QUESTION: Said Arikat from *al-Quds* newspaper. My question is for Generals Shahak and Gilady.

What would guarantee that Gaza-first does not become Gaza-last in view of this tremendous leverage that the settlers continue to wield? And in fact, you referred to the West Bank and northern Samaria, the security continues to be approached as a one-sided coin.

MR. LIPKIN-SHAHAK: There are no guarantees for nothing. It depends on us, on both of us. And in a way, it's in our hands. If both sides—first of all, I believe that the compromise is accepted by the majority of people on both sides. We need it for our future and the Palestinians need it for their future. And the fact that I mentioned before, that Sharon as the prime minister makes the declaration that the two-state solution is the solution, it has a very powerful meaning on any future negotiations or settlement of the conflict. The only guarantee is what we will be able to do together on the ground. If we'll be strong enough to heal what—or to rebuild trust and if there will be no violence, then I believe nothing can stop the process from moving forward. If difficulties will arise again and if terror activities will continue to happen on almost a daily basis, then all the goodwill will vanish and disappear.

Therefore, I believe, again, it is an opportunity. If we are going to miss this one, I doubt—I believe that a new opportunity will take much longer than the present one. And if we are going to miss it, it's going to be a very painful process in the future. Therefore, it is extremely important to do whatever is possible to pave the ground for this situation to move in a smooth way into wherever we'll go and wherever we are heading together as the Roadmap that was accepted, that there is an international support to the Roadmap, and in the end it's a two-state solution.

MR. INDYK: Eival, do you want to—

MR. GILADY: I don't want to repeat what Amnon said. I absolutely agree there is no guarantee. But I would look at the intention, at the strategy, at the policy. And I think this is very clear what we're heading to. Now, this strategy and policy is well-supported by wisdom, logic, human rights, understanding reality, demographics, and many others.

But I would argue with one point that Amnon said, that it is in our hands because if there is terror and violence, this process may not go. I would even say if there is terror and violence, this process will continue. The difference to my mind is are we going to do it with a partner and discuss the future of the two people, or should we have to go only unilaterally? Because when there is a use of terror, for me it is not a real partner.

Now again, I don't want to leave you with the impression that we do not fully appreciate the efforts that are being done now. I think it is clear. Yes, we are, and we do. And I think it is very hard and greatly done by the Palestinian leadership. This is

why, as I started, we're trying to implement all five stages at once. But terror will not stop the process. Terror will influence how we do it. Are we going to do it bilaterally or unilaterally?

MR. INDYK: Ghaith?

MR. AL-OMARI: Again, I want to echo what Amnon said. I mean, there can be no guarantees for sure, but just two main points. The first one is we are completely and utterly and unequivocally committed to ending terrorism not only in terms of relations with Israel, but we—I agree with Amnon here—we cannot have a process with terrorism. And even if there's an intention to continue a unilateral one, it will be a painful one for both sides and it's best we do it bilaterally, best we do it without one. So we're completely—I cannot overemphasize this. It's there in every statement Abu Mazen makes and the government makes. We are completely against terrorism. That's the first one. Whether or not we succeed, it depends on many factors, but we would assert every effort that we have. We're committed to that.

The second thing is I know there's an issue of credibility. I know that we've developed a habit in the last four years of not trusting one another. But again, I would like to emphasize that all of our proposals, whether it's in terms of going for parallel permanent status negotiations, whether it's going through a hudna, all of these things are not intended as an excuse to not implement the Roadmap.

And again, we've been very, very clear on our intentions. Abu Mazen asserted in his inaugural speech and many other speeches, we will implement everything that we have to do on the Roadmap. But we also realize that there is a limit to what we

can do on our own. Without Israeli help, without international help, we'll get to a point and then we'll get deadlocked. And the biggest problem—and I also agree with Amnon, that if we fail on this particular time, we will not have a chance for a long, long period. I think the Palestinian national movement will disintegrate and we'll have a long time to rebuild, but it's a different story.

The point here is that if we do not get Israeli support, if we get to a point of a deadlock, then definitely our agenda, our program will be completely discredited domestically and that will create the kind of atmosphere that will make Hamas even stronger than it is right now. It's a domestic issue for us, but it's also an issue for the peace process and for [inaudible].

MR. INDYK: Ziad, you have the last word.

DR. ABU AMR: I think there is a window of opportunity, as everybody says, and I think there is a momentum. I think partnership is important. We should maintain the momentum. We should not waste this mutual opportunity, because the alternative is renewal and continuation of conflict. And I don't think we should look at one another as if we are doing favors for one another. No. This is of interest for the two sides, for the two peoples. And I must say I'm optimistic and I hope my optimism will be justified.

MR. INDYK: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes our session.

I want to just say a word here. I don't know how many of you appreciate the extraordinary nature of this discussion, the fact that Israelis and Palestinians, after

four years of such horrendous violence and terrorism, can be sitting up here and talking in such positive tones is, I think, reflective of the kind of opportunity that now exists.

We're very grateful to all four of you for taking the trouble of sharing your views and wisdom with us today. Thank you very much.