



DIALOGUE SESSION THREE

Strengthening Palestinian Security and Governance Capabilities

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Yuval Diskin, Director, Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet)

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Chairwoman, House Homeland Security Subcommittee on
Intelligence Affairs

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In the third dialogue session, participants discussed the security and political capabilities of the Palestinian Authority. There was broad agreement that the Palestinian Authority has made substantial progress in its security abilities, but many participants argued that Palestinians and Israelis need to do more. Both Americans and Israelis warned that the situation in the Palestinian territories is drifting to the point where a two-state solution may no longer be viable.

An Israeli participant began by arguing that while coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security services has greatly improved, interested parties should be realistic in assessing the current situation and acknowledge that more must be done and challenges remain. The participant said that in 2007, the Palestinian Authority instituted security reforms—in terms of infrastructure and organization—mostly out of a fear of Hamas, not out of a desire to work with Israel. Despite this, Israel and the PA have deepened their cooperation. For example, in July 2007, there were several hundred Fatah fugitives in the West Bank and Israel offered a deal by which the fugitives would sign an agreement saying they would cease terrorist activity, turn over their weapons, and not travel outside the West Bank. This offer was accepted and Israel subsequently monitored the individuals for several months and, when they showed that they were complying with the terms, eased additional restrictions. While the Israeli participant pointed to this as an example of cooperation and creative problem solving, the participant said that challenges remain, particularly relating to general intelligence sharing, and the Palestinian security forces still need to improve their culture and organizational structure.

An American participant said that the United States government should be heartened to see real improvement in Palestinian security forces in the West Bank. For instance, during Operation Cast Lead in late 2008 and early 2009, Palestinian security services were ready to impose order in the West Bank. Most notably, there have been signs of growing public support of Palestinian security



services, and the public has sided with them over Hamas militants. The American participant praised Salam Fayyad for taking action to make security reforms and argued that Israel should assist him by refraining from conducting raids in the West Bank. The American said that the United States hopes that by April 2011 there will be full implementation of Palestinian security training, which will enable deeper Palestinian-Israeli security partnerships. However, another American warned that because Fayyad is a “one man show” without a political base of support, he can institute difficult security measures for only so long. This point brought strong agreement among many American participants, with one saying that there is a political liability for the Palestinian security services in cooperating with Israel. The only way to neutralize this is to make progress on the negotiation track.

There was considerable discussion of the need to strengthen the PA, and an American said that a primary objective of the United States was to ensure Abu Mazen does not step down. An Israeli viewed Abu Mazen’s threats to resign as manipulative but did stress that Israel was focused on strengthening the PA. The Israeli offered that Israel was focused on not strengthening Hamas, and therefore it had to view a possible deal for the captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit as part of a broader, strategic issue. Releasing Palestinian prisoners for Shalit would be a boon for Hamas at the expense of the PA.

Regarding the Gaza Strip, an American said that Israel should ease crossing restrictions so that goods could flow easier and give credit for these improvements to the PA so that the public will start to lower their support for Hamas. An Israeli disagreed and said that any improvements in Gaza would be a victory for Hamas, and lessen the chances of a deal for Gilad Shalit. The Israeli also said that Operation Cast Lead, which cost Israel monetarily and in terms of its political standing in the international arena, had stopped rockets from being fired into Israel, so the Israeli government should not be cavalier about trading away these gains. The operation was so successful, the Israeli said, that Hamas was on the brink of collapse, but Israel made the political decision not to finish them off.

An Israeli participant criticized Egypt’s role in assisting Israel with security in the Gaza Strip. The participant said that Israeli intelligence agencies estimate there to be 350 to 500 illegal tunnels between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. While Israel has given Egypt intelligence showing the location of these tunnels, Egyptian authorities have not acted on the intelligence. An American agreed



and criticized Egypt's performance as uneven. However, despite the declining security situation in the Gaza Strip, an Israeli participant said that there are no signs that al-Qa'eda is emerging, but this is mostly due to Hamas's strong crackdown on any individual who shows sympathy for the group.

In assessing the overall political situation in the Palestinian territories, an Israeli warned that Palestinians are drifting away from the idea of a two-state solution toward a two-government solution, meaning that many are now focused on the fact that the West Bank and Gaza Strip are becoming separate political and cultural entities. Already, an Israeli said, Palestinians do not have a yearning for a two-state solution, and while they may accept it, they are not driven by a vision of it. An American agreed, but said that this situation was not based on a lack of Palestinian will, but on the fact that the Palestinian public does not believe a political settlement with Israel is really possible. Another Israeli went further to say that a two-state solution is impossible, saying that because Palestinians would never reconcile among themselves, a three-state solution should be considered.