

What Should President Abbas Say When He Meets Mr. Trump?

Part One

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Sometime in the near future President Abbas will meet with President Trump. He will have an hour of Mr. Trump's time. Here's what he might consider saying:

"President Trump, thank you for inviting me to the White House. I know your time is precious, and I know you are a practical man, so if I may, let me jump right to the central question. As I understand it, you are trying to determine whether a deal is possible, specifically, whether the PLO under my leadership and the Government of Israel under Prime Minister Netanyahu can reach a comprehensive agreement that ends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In truth, I must tell you that I do not know, but I doubt that it is possible. But what I want to make clear is that it is not the Palestinian side that is unwilling or unable to make the hard compromises that are necessary. Some will tell you that politically I am too weak to conclude an agreement. Some will tell you that the Palestinians cannot say "Yes" or even as Abba Eban once said, that "The Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity." So let me tell you that we are ready to say "Yes." And let me spell out the key terms of the agreement we will need for that "Yes."

What I will describe to you is a package. There are parts of it that are very hard for us, but respond to Israeli needs, and these are balanced by other parts that we must have. So this package cannot be pulled apart. I can say "Yes" to the package, but not to all of the pieces, if taken separately. Secondly, what I will outline for you is not some opening position in our negotiations with the Israelis. I present this package to you, so you can better understand our position. If you can get the Israelis to say, "Yes" to the package, then we will have a deal that is "end of conflict, end of claims."

1. First, we must have an independent Palestinian state with genuine sovereignty, like any other state in the world. This means that after an agreed time period, all Israeli troops leave our land, and it remains under our sovereignty. A real state.
2. Second, the borders must be based on the June 4, 1967 lines, modified by land swaps that are equal in quantity and quality, with Jerusalem a separate issue for negotiations.
3. Third, within our sovereign land, we will locate our capital wherever we choose. This is a right of any state and is not open for negotiations.

4. With respect to Jerusalem, we are prepared to accept President Clinton's formula which was based on which population groups live in which area: "What is Arab will be Palestinian, what is Jewish will be Israeli." At the same time, it must be recognized, that 90% of what Israel refers to as "East Jerusalem" was never part of Jerusalem, either before or during the period in which the city was divided. Rather 90% of so-called "East Jerusalem" is really West Bank village land that Israel annexed and redefined as Jerusalem following the 1967 War.

5. With respect to Al-Haram al-Sharif, (the Temple Mount, in English), the State of Palestine will not relinquish its claim to sovereignty. However, we are prepared to accept an agreement within which Israel too, maintains its claim to sovereignty. Neither side will be required to accept the claims of the other. Instead, we work out a permanent agreement on the Administration of the Haram. One idea of value here was offered by the late King Hussein of Jordan who suggested that both side agree that ultimate sovereignty belongs to God. Agreeing that God has ultimate sovereignty will make it easier for us to put aside the issue of political sovereignty. We can accept this approach. The God of Jews, Christians and Muslims is the same God.

6. With respect to the land swaps, this is not something we seek. We view all the settlements beyond the June 4, 1967 line as illegal. However, we understand that through the settler movement Israel has created a monster that it cannot fully control, and that only through land swaps that draw a border that will include 70% or 80% of the settlers, can it deal with this monster. We will provide you with maps of how this might be done in a way that involves no more that 2%-3% of the land, land that will be close to the green line.

7. Further, with respect to settlers beyond the swapped areas, if as individuals they are prepared to respect Palestinian sovereignty, we are open to the idea that there can be a Jewish population within Palestine, whether as Palestinian citizens, or as foreign residents, or even with joint citizenship. But if they reside within Palestine, they will be under Palestinian law.

8. With respect to Israel's security concerns, we are open to a wide range of approaches, including agreeing to limitations on Palestinian armed forces, limitations on the presence of forces from countries hostile to Israel, joint security arrangements, the presence of international forces and so forth. We know that the United States has developed many ideas in this area, and we are ready to work with you on this.

9. With respect to the refugee issue, while we do not expect Israel to recognize the right of return of seven million refugees, we will not renounce the rights of the refugees. However, we are prepared to reach a permanent peace agreement, one that the PLO and the State of Palestine will view as end of claims, based on substantial compensation to the refugees, and very limited actual return of refugees to areas that are part of Israeli sovereignty. We are not seeking any major change in

Israeli demographics. On compensation, I am talking about levels of compensation that materially change the lives of the refugees.

10. Finally, with respect to the Jewish State issue, let me say this. Israel was proclaimed as a Jewish State in its 1948 Declaration of Independence. We are under no illusions here. Israel is a Jewish state. We recognize that fact, and we recognize Israel. Further, in our 1988 Declaration of Independence, we specifically noted that the 1947 United Nations Partition Resolution, although it was unjust to the Palestinians, was and remains part of international legitimacy, and in our Declaration, we specifically noted that the Partition Resolution called for two states, "One Arab and one Jewish." Thus, we accepted that Israel came into existence as a Jewish state in accord with international legitimacy. However, the Partition resolution also required full equality for the Palestinian citizens of the Jewish state. We are prepared to again affirm that with full equality for its Palestinian citizens, Israel's status as a Jewish state is supported by international legitimacy.

As I said Mr. President, to a package deal of this sort, we are prepared to say 'Yes.'"

[Tomorrow Part Two of this essay will discuss a new kind of peace process]

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