



AHMED QURIE ('ABU ALA')

BEYOND OSLO

THE STRUGGLE FOR PALESTINE

INSIDE THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS
FROM RABIN'S DEATH TO CAMP DAVID

**BEYOND OSLO,
THE STRUGGLE
FOR PALESTINE**

Ahmed Qurie ('Abu Ala') has been a leading member of the Palestinian negotiating team since the Oslo talks. He was Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority from November 2003 to January 2006. He is the author of *From Oslo to Jerusalem: The Palestinian Story of the Secret Negotiations* (I.B.Tauris).

BEYOND OSLO, THE STRUGGLE FOR PALESTINE

Inside the Middle East Peace Process
from Rabin's Death to Camp David

Ahmed Qurie ('Abu Ala')

I.B. TAURIS

PUBLISHERS

Published in 2008 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

In the United States of America and Canada distributed by Palgrave Macmillan
a division of St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

Copyright © Ahmed Qurie, 2008

The right of Ahmed Qurie to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by
the author in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or any
part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or
transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording
or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978 1 8451 1 946 1

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Typeset in Monotype Joanna by Ellipsis Books Limited, Glasgow
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

CONTENTS

Dedication	vii
Chapter 1 Starting afresh	1
Chapter 2 Netanyahu as Prime Minister	18
Chapter 3 The advent of Barak	82
Chapter 4 The Swedish track	108
Chapter 5 On the threshold of Camp David	161
Chapter 6 Camp David diaries	176
Chapter 7 The aftermath of Camp David: the early days	250
Chapter 8 On the threshold of Taba	294
Appendix 1 The Wye River Memorandum	329
Appendix 2 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum	338
Appendix 3 Stockholm: the Final Agreement of Permanent Status	344
Appendix 4 Taba: the Moratinos non-paper	352
Index	365

I dedicate this book to the soul of my late Brother, President Yasser Arafat, whose presence I sorely missed as I was writing. I feel keenly the lack of the Martyr Brother and Leader, and I am acutely conscious of his absence at a delicate time in the history of Palestine.

Every day, I remember his wisdom and determination in times of calamity. My memory of him encourages me to strive to the best of my ability to follow in his footsteps. I shall never forget the way he patiently confronted injustice, foolish talk, and rivalry. I am never parted from my recollection of his simple way of speaking, his open heartedness, his broad vision, his humanity, modesty, and vigour, as well as his unrivalled ability to know people, his insight into political situations, and his gift for choosing the right path.

It is scarcely possible to say enough about the image of this great Palestinian who has been treated unfairly and disgracefully slandered by his enemies, in his lifetime and after his death. His departure from among us has left the entire Palestinian nation bereft. He was a true man of peace, who led his people from desperate exile to the threshold of independence. He has become a symbol of Palestine in the minds of millions of his people. Therefore, I have found none other than my Brother and Leader Abu Ammar to whom I would offer this book, dedicating it to his pure soul and immortal memory.

I accompanied my late Brother Yasser Arafat for some four decades of our lives and forty years of the Palestinian struggle. I trust that the book will serve as a fulfilment, however modest, of my duty to acknowledge all that I owe him. I also hope that its publication will help assuage the feeling, now he is no longer with us, of irreparable personal loss.

Ahmed Qurie
(Abu Ala)

CHAPTER ONE

STARTING AFRESH

The prospect of the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations was from the outset daunting for the Palestinian side. When the Oslo talks began, we were unprepared and inexperienced. Nevertheless, from our achievement there we learned the confidence and skills we needed for what was to come. Our success at Oslo came as a surprise both to the United States administration and to some of our Arab brethren. Those who had gleaned information about the Oslo channel while it was under way had seen it as a mere intellectual exercise. They believed it was no more than a talking shop, indulged in by representatives of the Israeli leadership and officials of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), who had been for years sequestered in Tunisia and were divorced from the realities of the situation on the ground in the Palestinian territories. However, not only was Oslo a success, it also proved to be only the initial stage of a lengthy and ongoing process. With the Oslo talks completed, together with the process of mutual recognition and the economic arrangements that went with it, we embarked at once on a new round of negotiations to conclude the Gaza–Jericho agreement. No sooner was this done than we initiated the negotiations that led to the signing of the Interim Agreement (Oslo 2), which took nearly another whole year to finalise. On 28 September 1995, these efforts culminated in a ceremony at the White House, like that held for the original Oslo Agreement nearly two years before.

Then we immediately launched ourselves into further talks to work out the details of the Interim Agreement, already 460 pages long even before we began the painstaking process of adding the appendices, tables, illustrations and schedules, all of which we discussed line by line. This was undertaken under the umbrella of the American Letter of Guarantee, signed by the then American Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, and sent to both parties on behalf of the US administration. The letter expressed

the commitment of the United States to be the guarantor of all provisions and commitments that might be mutually agreed between the two parties. Because of the intricacy of the agreement's details, Warren Christopher described it at the time as the most complicated document in the history of international diplomacy. For example, it covered security issues not only at the national level but also down to the level of arrangements for individual towns, villages, and settlements. It also defined the differing powers of the Palestinian administration over the three differently administered zones of the Palestinian territories, or Zones A, B and C as they had been called. In the eyes of those outside the process, its complexities seemed to be such that they placed the final goal virtually out of reach. On the other hand, those of us directly involved in the negotiation never ceased to believe we would in the end arrive at our goal.

A death unheralded

Soon, however, events were to take an unexpected turn. The ironies of history are unfathomable. On 9 November 1995, I found myself flying to Tel Aviv in an Israeli military helicopter in the company of my brethren Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen (Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas), on a secret mission that was revealed to the public only after it was completed. Our purpose was to offer our condolences to the family of the deceased Israeli former Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. On Saturday, 4 November, a youthful Jewish extremist had murdered Rabin with three shots fired at close quarters after a peace rally at Tel Aviv's Kings of Israel Square. The late Prime Minister had been our negotiating partner when the Oslo Agreement was concluded, and had played a key role. His killer, Yigal Amir, was not some social misfit but a member of the elite Golani Unit of the Israeli army. The repercussions of his three murderous bullets filled the Middle East with noise and blood, and within Israel both the public and the political classes were obsessed by the causes and consequences of his fateful act.

Not the least strange aspect of the circumstances in which we found ourselves on that day was that the aircraft was one just such as had in the past been frequently used to hunt down fugitive fighters of the PLO. In contrast, as we boarded the helicopter, the Israeli crew installed us

carefully, solicitous for our safety. When the helicopter landed, under cover of darkness at a small military airfield near Tel Aviv, we were driven through the night to Rabin's home in vehicles provided by the security services. The strictest security surrounded our clandestine journey, from the moment the helicopter took off in the northern Gaza Strip until we reached the home of the stricken family.

As we flew through the night, I was unable to stop myself thinking of how the sudden and unanticipated violence of Rabin's death had plunged into turmoil all that Rabin stood for and hoped for. The simple act of pulling the trigger of the murder weapon had changed history. Rabin's death seemed to me like the demise of a hero in a classical Greek epic. Rabin had been singled out by destiny, not to fight against foes and champions, but to become involved in the Palestinian people's struggle. He had first fought against the Palestinians, when he saw them as a threat to the nation of Israel. His fatal hubris had been to change direction, ceasing to be a man of the sword and embarking on the struggle for peace. Rabin was an Israeli patriot through and through. He was born in Jerusalem in 1922. His mother was a Russian Jew who had migrated to Palestine in 1919, and his father, originally from Ukraine, had come to Palestine from the United States two years earlier. Rabin grew up in what had been the Palestinian countryside between Tel Aviv and the Jaffa border, where he played with Arab boys, made friends with them, and lived peacefully in a hospitable environment. In due course, he enrolled in the renowned Kadoorie Agricultural High School, from which he graduated in 1940.

Of course, the image of Rabin uppermost in my mind was that of the mature statesman whom I had first known at the time of Oslo. I vividly recalled his frowning face, his rasping voice, and his stern manner. I remembered his part in the agreement we had made together, but I also recalled cruel episodes from his earlier career, when he had oppressed the Palestinians in order, as he then believed, to defend Israel. He had not spared even our children. During the first Intifada he had infamously appeared to authorise Israel's soldiers, no more than boys themselves, to break the arms and legs of our brave young stone throwers, who did not hesitate to play David against Israel's Goliath. I also recalled his image, in a famous photograph taken on 7 June 1967, the day Jerusalem was lost to us, standing in his officer's uniform and battledress helmet behind Moshe Dayan at the Western Wall of the Temple. The pictures were intended

to immortalise the moment Israel took the Old City, and to commemorate that historical event, which is to this day linked in the minds of the Palestinian people with the onset of all our pain, toil, and bitterness. Finally, I thought of Rabin's body lying in state, surrounded by candles, medals, and mourners, at the impressive funeral ceremony a few days before. I had attended the ceremony on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and had stood shoulder to shoulder with President Clinton of the United States, King Hussein of Jordan, President Mubarak of Egypt, and many other world leaders.

Other things float back to me from my memories of that nocturnal journey. This was the first time that Abu Ammar had been able to fly up that stretch of coastline, the shore of historic Palestine, now under Israeli rule. This was a land redolent of our history, and its landmarks were inseparable from the pain that was an intimate part of the experience of all Palestinians. I looked at the night sky and gazed down at the ground, recognising only intermittently and with difficulty the towns illuminated by the patterns of the street lights. So much was new and changed. But as we passed over Jaffa, I saw the famous minaret of the Hassan Bek Mosque and realised we were over the beautiful city that meant so much to me when I was young. I urged Abu Ammar to look, but he refused, bowing his head and looking neither right nor left. This was what he insisted on doing throughout that strange journey, though it was a once-in-a-lifetime chance for us to see our beloved country. I have never asked him why it was that he did not want to see the panorama of historic Palestine that lay beneath us. Perhaps he remembered how it was and did not wish to see what it had become.

This was also the first time our brother Abu Ammar had been to the Israeli city of Tel Aviv, and the emotion this aroused in him was clearly intense. When we at last entered the Rabin family's duplex apartment on the fifth floor of a building in the modern city the Israelis had built, Leah Rabin, the late Prime Minister's grief-stricken widow, was there to greet us. Dressed in black mourning, she welcomed us with words full of courtesy and was kind enough to express her appreciation for the role we had played in the peace agreement of which her husband had been so proud. I was struck by her tone of voice, which gave evidence of her fortitude and composure. With her were her children and granddaughter, together with Israel's Chief of Staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, as well as the security official Yossi Ginossar, one of Rabin's particular confidants, who

had greatly assisted him during the Oslo process, and other high-ranking military officers. Leah Rabin comported herself in those difficult days with unbending dignity, and her strength was such as to serve as an example and an encouragement to any widow laid low by the pain and despair of losing the partner with whom she had shared her life. None of the Israelis present could take their eyes from us as we were invited to take our seats in her modest drawing room. This was especially so after Abu Ammar suddenly took off the hat that had served him as a disguise throughout the secret trip, unexpectedly exposing his bald head, which, without his customary *kefiyyeh*, seemed wider and shinier than anyone had expected!

The conversation soon moved from expressions of condolence to a discussion of the widow's thoughts on the assassination. She seemed to be reading from the political testament of her late husband and evidently shared his objectives. Rabin had been a deeply serious man, who had scarcely ever made an open display of good humour. On the night of his death, however, he had surprisingly joined with his audience of peace activists in singing pacifist songs. This symbolised an aspect of Rabin's behaviour since he had become involved in the peace process that was a step too far for Israel's bellicose right wing, which was determined to halt the Oslo process at all costs. Rabin's participation in such events was seen by Israel's security-obsessed right-wingers as a deadly sin, and was detested by the fanatical, racist, and hateful settlers. Leah Rabin had quickly recovered from her personal ordeal, and no sooner was the funeral over than she took it upon herself to speak to the Israeli people, passing on Rabin's final message with dignity and determination. She addressed herself both to the converted and to those who were yet to be swayed to the position Rabin had adopted in his final years. She spoke both to the old guard and to the younger generation, to her Labour Party colleagues and to the officials of Israel's security services. She shook the collective conscience of Fortress Israel. For the Jewish people, the crime of Rabin's death was especially unsettling. The shedding of Jewish blood by the hands of Jews was regarded as a dreadful sin. Leah Rabin sought a way to use the tragedy of her husband's death to serve his own political objectives. Her goal was to create a narrative of that bloody incident that would touch the emotions of the Israeli people, perhaps reopening the way to the continuation of the peace process.

After her husband's death, Leah Rabin took the initiative against those

fanatics who had hitherto orchestrated demonstrations each Friday night outside the entry to their apartment, sully the Jewish Sabbath and its traditions by taunting Yitzhak Rabin as he tried to return peacefully to his home. Their insults and accusations of treason had often continued all night. She told the media that in his lifetime this had only stiffened Rabin's resolve. She savagely criticised those spokesmen of Israel's extreme right who had declared the former Prime Minister to be a traitor, proclaiming that his blood could be shed with impunity. They believed this would help to halt what they saw as a process begun by Rabin of handing over the land of Israel to the Palestinian enemy. They wanted the settlers once more to be free to expand and consolidate. Rabin had ordered the construction of fences sited 50 metres outside the boundaries of each settlement to halt their further expansion until the completion of negotiations on the final status. Only then would the future of settlements be decided, in accordance with the pledge he had made to the Palestinians. Leah Rabin told her husband's critics that she had begun to find more in common with the Palestinians than with the Jewish extremists. For many years, such language had been absent from Israel's political discourse.

What I remember more than anything else of Leah Rabin's conversation with us on that occasion was a moment when she addressed me directly. She said: 'There is something I must tell you personally. This is the first time we have met, and I have something to tell you that you do not know and which is important you should hear.' She then went on to give a somewhat tremulous account of how the former Prime Minister had first become aware of the existence of the Oslo talks, at which I represented the Palestinians: 'As you are aware, Yitzhak was not aware of Oslo when it began. When Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin told him about it, he was startled that such progress had been made in secret talks that had been held without his knowledge, and he was shaken by the entire business. But since Shimon was so set on the idea, and as many meetings had already been held, he agreed to read the minutes of the meetings that led to the provisional accords, with all the reports and summaries attached to them. He said to Shimon and Yossi, "Just give me a week so that I can satisfy myself over all this, and then I can sell it to the people." Afterwards,' she went on, 'Yitzhak gave Shimon the green light to carry on with the negotiations and from then on kept abreast of developments down to the smallest details. He accepted the results

and defended them fiercely up to now, until his eventual murder by this right-wing Jewish extremist.'

The Peres interregnum

After Rabin's death, the position of Prime Minister of Israel devolved on Shimon Peres, who had been Deputy Prime Minister and was asked by the President to form a new government. The constitutional position was confused, as recent reforms had provided for the direct election of the Prime Minister, but no election had yet been held under the new rules. Shimon Peres was also a staunch Zionist. He was born in Poland in 1923, had migrated to Palestine in 1934 with his parents, and was, like Rabin, a veteran of Israeli politics. The interregnum was a time when Israel was beset with grief, struggle, fear, and suspicion. The activities of religious extremists were a problem. But Israel's history was one of self-confidence and the country was not to be subdued. The skill of Israel's military leadership had accustomed it to victory, and war had led to territorial expansion. It had at its disposal an arsenal of some 200 nuclear weapons. It was a nation that rested secure in the knowledge that its income was sufficient and its technological achievements were impressive. Despite the difficult situation he had inherited, Peres had not abandoned his dreams of leading Israel to peace. He radiated political courage, forward-looking ideas, eloquence, and mental agility. Over a long career, he had built up impressive political credentials as he transformed himself from a hawk in the Ben Gurion era into one of Israel's leading doves. The early exponents of the peace camp in Israel were the first in the Zionist movement to adopt a philosophy of reconciliation, founded on the recognition of Palestinian rights. The Zionists had never previously regarded coexistence as an option in relations between the Jews and the Palestinians. On the other hand, despite their tribulations, the Palestinians had never ceased to cling to their land, yearn for justice, and long for freedom and a life of dignity and peace. The ambition of the peace movement was to reconcile the ambitions of two proud and headstrong peoples.

Rabin's sudden departure from the scene had initially seemed to be a potentially fatal setback to the peace process. As a former high-ranking soldier and the leader of the Labour Party, he had not been a typical advocate of peace. As I have suggested, I believe he was, in the end, the victim

of his conversion, having made too many enemies through his abandonment of his erstwhile hawkish position. The determination with which he advocated the idea of a peace agreement to the Israeli public and pushed it through the Knesset served to alienate those who took a contrary view of how Israel should secure its future. His dramatic disappearance came just as a backlash against his policies had begun to emerge, as the extremists started to gain ground in their opposition to the peace process. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the political difficulties Rabin had been facing inside his party were to some extent resolved when Peres succeeded him.

Peres's reputation as a peace campaigner was already notorious and had in the past cost him much popularity. Nevertheless, when he suddenly became Prime Minister in 1995, there was immediate and broad support for the new leader, whose innovative ideas and flawless political record served to compensate to some extent for the loss of Rabin. The succession of Peres gave a temporary boost to the peace process, as it was he who had initially been the principal driving force behind the momentum of Oslo on the Israeli side. He also had the courage, imagination, and intelligence to attempt to make a change to the order of Israel's priorities. This enabled him to explore new avenues in his determination to implement the agreements that had already been signed and to fulfil Israel's new commitments, which Peres defended fiercely in the face of right-wing opposition at home and abroad.

Peres's dream of ending the conflict with the Palestinians, which he hoped would bring peace to the region, had led him on a tortuous political journey. He began as a conservative figure within the Labour Party. In 1957, he inaugurated the Israeli nuclear project at Dimona in the Negev. His belief at that time was that nuclear capability would safeguard Israel's security. From this hawkish position, he undertook a political odyssey that culminated in his signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993. Once he had committed himself to peace, he worked untiringly to realise his ambitions, transforming himself from an advocate of nuclear deterrence into an advocate of a peaceful and prosperous Middle East, and the principal architect of the peace process on the Israeli side. Peres's influence was decisive over the long series of negotiations we held from Oslo to Taba.

The peace movement in Israel had its origins in small groups of activists of varying backgrounds, mainly intellectuals, artists, trade unionists, pacifists and academics. From an early date, there were those who called for the recognition of Palestinian rights, the withdrawal of occupation forces,

and the creation of two independent states coexisting in a spirit of good neighbourliness and mutual benefit. This trend gathered strength after the shock of the October War of 1973, which shook Israel's image of itself as invincible. From the onset of the Intifada in December 1987, Israel was further undermined by the effective rhetoric of the Palestinians. At that time, many Israelis felt that their country had become decadent. Israel seemed to have strayed far from the Zionist dream of the founding fathers, realised by the vanguard of Jewish pioneers and romantics. In more modern times, this dream had begun to take a different form, with the military victories of the Jewish state against the Zionist state's Arab enemies, with the unstinting support of the United States. This was a development that worried many thoughtful Israelis. Though Jews had once lived side by side with Arabs, over time the Palestinian enemy began to be portrayed as composed of bloodthirsty savages. Many Israelis, however, were increasingly unconvinced by the contemptuous nature of Israel's official view of its Arab neighbours and felt that the state had lost its direction.

Shimon Peres and his close associates, such as Yossi Beilin, Uri Savir, and Avi Gil, who had played a part in the clandestine Oslo process, all came to the fore against the background of this broad ideological transformation. When the official peace process opened in Madrid in 1991 in the aftermath of the Gulf conflict of 1990–1, this group decided the time had come to make a serious and fundamental attempt to resolve the Middle East conflict. Their conclusion was that this could not be achieved if the central issues were ignored, as had been the case with all previous Israeli attempts. Instead, the most difficult problems had to be confronted head on. It seemed to Peres and his friends that Israel had no alternative but to negotiate with the sole political representative of the Palestinian people, namely the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The official Israeli position was to refuse to acknowledge the existence of the PLO. Israeli citizens were at the time prohibited from any contact with the PLO, because of the fear that any contact could be taken as implying recognition of the PLO's political existence and of Palestine's national rights. The Peres plan was to cautiously edge towards discussion of the most sensitive issue of all, namely the establishment of a Palestinian state. This had always been the PLO's central objective, and the level recognition the PLO had achieved from the international community had aroused Palestinian hopes that the goal was achievable. Peres was also aware, as were others in the Israeli

peace camp, that if there was to be no rapprochement with the PLO, the result could be a serious escalation in Israel's confrontation with the Palestinians. Such a clash seemed likely to be bitter and violent. Worse still, Israeli analysts feared that if Israel failed to establish links with the PLO the result could be to promote a radical and dangerous transformation of the conflict. The clash between Israel and the Palestinians, these analysts feared, could cease to be secular and nationalist and become instead a religious conflict. The ultimate outcome might well be the establishment of a rigid Islamic state.

Peres therefore became an iconic leader for a younger generation of Israelis, eager to save Israel by changing its priorities. Their position was that Israel could no longer afford the material and moral price of occupation. They argued that the futility of using military force in internal matters had been amply demonstrated, and that Israel's erstwhile security doctrine, based on expansion and occupation, was no longer viable. Their contention was that, in the modern world, Israel's true strength no longer lay in force and weapons but in its educational system and the abilities of its citizens, in its technological and economic superiority, and in the competitiveness of its products in international markets. Above all, Peres showed political insight and moral courage when he argued that no nation had the right to control the lives of the people of another. He pointed out that Israel could not choose its neighbours, nor could it afford to discriminate between those with whom it was willing to negotiate and those with whom it would not. In his view, continued hostility in the region, and the perpetuation of Israel's state of siege, would lead in the end only to unending oppression and destitution for the Palestinians. Most of the population was condemned to perpetual unemployment and faced a bleak future. This, in turn, would become an unending source of hatred and violence. Young Palestinians might well come to believe that the promise of paradise after death was a more inviting alternative than the life they were obliged to lead in the narrow alleys and tiny, crowded houses of Gaza, and the refugee camps of the West Bank.

In late 1995, as he was propelled unexpectedly into the Prime Minister's office by Rabin's death, these and other similar considerations were uppermost in Peres's mind. Many moderate Israelis believed their interim Prime Minister would be able to lead the Labour Party into peace and coexistence with the Palestinians, and hoped he would be able to consolidate his position through the ballot box. The Israeli right wing, on the

other hand, accused him of exposing the Jewish state and its settlement programme to the real possibility of catastrophe, arguing that the peace option disregarded Israel's vital interests and amounted virtually to treason. Peres was assisted by a change in the attitude of the Palestinians, who had abandoned the 'all or nothing' mentality characteristic of Arab politics that had hitherto predominated in the positions taken by Arab leaders, governments, parties, and even individuals, leading only to continued weakness, repeated failures, and disappointment. No Arab politician or intellectual had previously succeeded in making an alteration in this counterproductive attitude. Though it was supposed to be the Palestinians who would be the beneficiaries of Arab intransigence, it was left to Fatah and the PLO to change this demonstrably unproductive attitude. The result was our step-by-step success in bringing the Israeli occupation to an end. We were able to establish our first territorial basis and transform the Palestinian entity into a recognised element in the political map of the region, ending the anomalous position of the Palestinians. We had hitherto been a people whose existence lay only in the history books, since Palestine had existed in the past but featured no longer on the map. We had become international pariahs, celebrated only in our own literature and song. In future, this would no longer be the case.

Peres pressed on with the implementation of the agreements Israel had already concluded. If the late Yitzhak Rabin had a fault, it was that he had seen no compulsion to rush to implement agreements made with the Palestinians until his government and Israeli public opinion saw fit. Peres took the opposite view, as a far-sighted politician whose eyes were more on the future than the present. His view was that agreements on paper counted for nothing. He rejected the logic of force and stood out among Israeli leaders in his determination to convince Israeli public opinion of the counterproductive nature of the concept of a Greater Israel, based on military strength. He knew that Israel would in reality soon become exhausted by the demands of the conflict and that what international support Israel currently enjoyed was on the wane. Israel's long-held presuppositions were being undermined, and the strategy of indefinite protraction of the conflict seemed unlikely to bear fruit. Shimon Peres strove constantly to find a compromise with the Palestinians, where losses and gains would be shared. He knew neither party could annihilate the other, but each was in a position to make the other's life unliveable.

However, in practice, when the moment came, Peres failed to achieve election as Prime Minister in his own right. On 29 May 1996, having misread the extent of his support in the country, he opted to go to the polls in the first-ever direct election for Prime Minister following Israel's electoral reforms. The result of the election was extremely close, but after much scrutiny and some legal challenges, Binyamin Netanyahu, the new leader of Likud, was declared the winner. Labour, however, won more seats in the Knesset, and Netanyahu was never able to operate freely because he lacked a parliamentary majority based on his own party. Shimon Peres appears to have lost because of events out of his control. A series of suicide bombings by Palestinian Islamist groups in February and March 1996 fatally undermined his authority. During his brief period in office, he did in fact succeed in implementing many articles of the agreement, including Israel's withdrawal from the cities, towns, and villages of the West Bank, except for Hebron where withdrawal was postponed until after the elections. Other developments to Peres's credit included the organisation of the first Palestinian presidential and legislative elections in Palestinian history in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. He also began quietly to take steps to limit the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, though this process was destined to be short-lived.

These practical achievements represented a major turning point for the Palestinian national movement, which had hitherto been able to rely on little but the fickle political support of the Arab countries. Henceforth, the Palestinian movement would draw strength from its western-style democratic institutions, freely and directly elected. On this basis, fresh dimensions of the Palestinian identity soon began to emerge that promised to provide a secure basis for the consolidation of the Palestinian polity. Within a short space of time, the cornerstone was laid not only of a Palestinian national authority but also of a future Palestinian state. Peres had all this clearly in mind. In his speech at the Knesset session held to ratify the Oslo Accord he said, 'What is the logic of the status quo? The time has come to change policies, not governments.' In his book *The New Middle East*, he declared, 'Although Israel is strategically and militarily strong, and can face down any Arab coalition, total victory is forever out of reach . . . War solves no problems; peace is the solution.'

Unfortunately, besides these positive aspects of Peres's time in office, there were also negatives. There was a lack of political will on the part of the other members of Israel's cabinet, a problem Rabin had also

faced. Under the influence of ministers not fully committed to the peace process, Israel soon began to shirk and delay the implementation of what had been agreed. Despite Peres's good will, Israeli officials deliberately humiliated the Palestinians with every centimetre of withdrawal they made. Members of the Palestinian public continued to be abused and insulted at military checkpoints as they had been previously. Worse, Israel failed to halt the activities of the settlers and reneged on its promises to release prisoners. It also failed to take steps to improve the deteriorating economic situation of the Palestinians. Actions were taken that antagonised Islamic groups. Among other things, Israeli forces launched the so-called Grapes of Wrath punitive action against Hizbullah in southern Lebanon and Israeli troops committed the Qana massacre. The result was to deflate the optimism of the Palestinians, which had hitherto been enough to halt suicide bombings. It was against the backdrop of these tragic scenes that Peres decided to go to the country to seek a new mandate. The upshot was his electoral defeat at the hands of Binyamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu was an ideologue and politician of the extreme right, implacably opposed to the Oslo Accord, which he had described as a catastrophe.

In the Palestinian leadership, we were sad to see Peres go. We had agreed to postpone the withdrawal from Hebron to improve his electoral prospects. We encouraged our brethren inside the Green Line who were Israeli citizens to vote for him, in order to prevent Netanyahu's victory. However, our worst fears were realised. Henceforth, our most implacable foe, Netanyahu, was to be our interlocutor across the negotiating table. It must be said that Peres at some basic level lacked the necessary skills of a successful politician, and that his failure at this crucial moment was characteristic of the failures that had dogged him throughout his career. However, on this occasion it could be said that the defeat was a bigger blow for the Palestinians than it was even for the Israeli Labour Party itself. We were sorry to see power pass from an open-minded figure such as Peres to a fundamentalist of Netanyahu's stamp, who was also a demagogue and a skilled manipulator of the media. He had risen to power at the head of a political faction that was no less extreme and arrogant than he was himself, and the peace process fell into his hands at a crucial and delicate phase.

Amending the Palestinian National Charter

Both during the negotiation of the Oslo Declaration of Principles (DOP) and in the talks over the mutual recognition agreement all the Israeli negotiators with whom we spoke appeared obsessed by the idea of having us amend certain articles of the Palestinian National Charter. They repeatedly insisted on the abolition of eight specific articles of the Charter, making this a prerequisite for reaching any agreement with the PLO. Paradoxically, the very fact of their insistence was almost enough to make us dig in our heels and refuse, even though the wording of the Palestinian Charter was no longer an issue of great importance to us. Within the Palestinian leadership, and the various movements that made up the PLO, a view began to emerge that we could perhaps put pressure on the Israelis by retaining the Charter intact, at least in the early phase of the negotiations. It was felt by some that we should only consider amending it after we had achieved our own declared objectives of liberation, self-determination, and the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

I found myself in the midst of the heated arguments that took place as we tried to fend off the insistence of the Israelis on this point. I informed them that our Charter, with its thirty-three articles, first written in 1964 and then redrafted in 1986, was a piece of the Palestinian patrimony, an important part of our history, and not an arbitrary document that we could simply amend at the behest of outsiders. On the other hand, I also explained that it had in practice come to occupy a less prominent place in our thinking. I pointed out to them that their insistence on abolishing some of its articles had actually had the opposite effect to that intended, giving it a new lease of life by enhancing its standing in the eyes of the people. Israel's very insistence on seeing it amended had led some of us to feel that perhaps after all it should be retained as part of our historic goal to liberate Palestine 'from the river to the sea'. However, I did not torment the Israelis by telling them this. Instead, I dealt frankly with them, explaining that the Charter, to which they appeared to believe alterations were so important, was neither a holy book for the Palestine Liberation Organisation, nor a Chinese-style 'little red book' for the Palestinian people. It had never truly become part of Palestinian popular culture. Palestinian children were not taught about it in school. Since 1974, it had not been debated by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) or any of the other Palestinian institutions.

In fact, the Palestinian National Council had in effect sidelined the Charter at least twenty-five years before. The Palestinians had become aware that such polemical texts, which had originated in the context of the radical liberation movement of the 1960s, were no longer appropriate to the modern needs of Palestinian policy. We told the Israelis that the preference of the Palestinian leadership would be to repeal the Charter on the eve of the establishment of a Palestinian Authority and its legislative institutions. We would do this not simply to comply with conditions imposed by Israel, but in pursuit of our own changing political needs in the process of constructing our new political entity. This would be a greater gain for Israel. However, we added that, if Israel were to continue to be so keen to see sections of the Charter repealed, our price would be nothing less than the full recognition by Israel of the Palestine Liberation Organisation as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Following the Palestinian presidential and legislative elections in 1996, the moment seemed ripe for the Palestinians to fulfil what President Arafat had promised in relation to the Charter in his letter of 10 September 1993 to the late Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. That letter said: 'Those Articles of the Palestinian Charter which deny Israel's right to exist and those provisions of the Charter which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid. Consequently, the Palestine Liberation Organisation undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Charter.' Some of those points, which had long ago been left out of account by the Palestinian National Council when it approved the ten-point political programme of 9 June 1974, had already been effectively abandoned at the Council's session in 1988. The Palestinian National Council's 20th session, held in Algiers on the eve of the Madrid Conference, laid no particular stress on the remaining articles. That PNC session issued a communiqué welcoming the peace plan launched by President Bush and President Gorbachev and the intention to hold a conference to settle the Middle East dispute. The communiqué stressed that the forthcoming conference should rest on international legitimacy and especially on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

On 24 April 1996, a month before the Knesset elections in Israel, the 21st session of the Palestinian National Council was convened, meeting on Palestinian territory for the first time since 1967. Israel temporarily lifted restrictions on entry for all members of the Council, even including

those accused of hijacking civilian aircraft. Hundreds of members flocked to Gaza City, after what for some had been an absence of thirty years. The reason the members of the Palestinian National Council decided the moment had come for the Charter to be changed was to forestall any attempt by Israel to use it as an excuse to backtrack on its promises. Our priorities had become the restoration of our freedom, democracy, and economic development, rather than the destruction of the State of Israel. Thus, our focus would no longer be on the fate of Israel but would now concentrate on the future of Palestine and the Palestinian people. The Council repealed the articles of the Charter that declared the armed struggle to be the sole way to liberate Palestine and guerrilla action to be the core of the war of popular liberation. Other repealed articles included the rejection as null and void of the partition of Palestine in 1947. After the Palestinian National Council heard a report by the legal committee formed to draft amendments to the National Charter to suit the new circumstances, it adopted the resolution amending the Charter by a majority of 504 against fifty-four with the abstention of fourteen members. The Palestinian National Council's subsequent declaration was as follows:

Reference is made to the declaration of independence and the policy statement adopted at the Palestinian National Council's 19th session held in Algiers on 15 November 1988, which stressed the principle of solving disputes by peaceful means and the adoption of a two-state solution.

At its 21st session, held in Gaza, the Council also refers to the introduction to the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington on 13 September 1993. This contains the agreement by both parties to end the decades of confrontation and dispute, recognise each other's legitimate political rights, work towards peaceful coexistence, and achieve a just, permanent and comprehensive settlement through the agreed peace process.

On the basis of international law, arising from the UN resolutions regarding the issue of Palestine, including Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, and the final status issues, as well as UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, the Council reaffirms the obligations entered into by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the Declaration of Principles (Oslo 1), the Cairo agreement, the mutual recognition letters signed on 9 and 10 September 1993, the Interim

Israeli Palestinian Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Oslo 2) signed in Washington on 28 September 1995, and the resolution adopted by the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in October 1993 which approved the Oslo Accord and all its appendices.

On the basis of the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference and the Washington negotiations, the Council decides:

Firstly: To amend the National Charter by abrogating the articles that contradict the letters exchanged between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Government of Israel on 9 and 10 September 1993.

Secondly: The Palestinian National Council authorises the legal committee to rephrase the National Charter and to present the amended charter to the Central Council at its next meeting.

CHAPTER TWO

NETANYAHU AS PRIME MINISTER

Binyamin Netanyahu was Israel's permanent envoy to the UN from 1984 to 1988. In 1988, he was elected as a member of the Knesset and from 1988 to 1992 he held various offices in governments headed by Yitzhak Shamir. He first came to the attention of the Palestinians in 1991 when, as Deputy Foreign Minister, he served as spokesman for the Israeli delegation to the Madrid Peace Conference. There, his native command of English and his skill in handling the international media enabled him to present the Israeli position in the best possible light. His media abilities also helped him to build up his reputation in the eyes of the Israeli public. Israel was thirsty for a charismatic personality after the dismal performance of Yitzhak Shamir's previous spokesmen, who were all as unprepossessing as was Shamir himself. The self-assurance, polished performance, and rhetorical virtuosity that were Netanyahu's stock in trade appealed even across party barriers and began to attract even Israeli left-wingers. Nevertheless, under Yitzhak Rabin's leadership, the Israeli Labour Party achieved victory in the Knesset elections in 1992, ousting Shamir's Likud. In 1993, following this poor electoral showing, Yitzhak Shamir stepped down and Netanyahu assumed the leadership of the Likud, heading the opposition to Yitzhak Rabin's government. As opposition leader, Netanyahu spoke out strongly against the Oslo Agreement as soon as it was revealed. In the three-day Knesset debate on the Oslo Declaration of Principles, which was put to the vote on 23 September 1993, Netanyahu made a vituperative speech in which he conveyed the depth of his personal antipathy to the peace process, a level of hostility he maintained after he came to power. His main anxiety was that the DOP would lead inexorably to the establishment of a Palestinian state. As he said to the Knesset, 'What this agreement does is lay the foundations of a Palestinian state. This very fact is, in itself, a good reason to reject it in its entirety.' He

went on to talk about the threat the Oslo Agreement posed to Jewish settlements and settlers, to the status of Jerusalem and to Israel's security along the Green Line, before returning to the dangers of a Palestinian state. He continued: 'One does not need to be a prophet to be able to see in advance what will happen in this region after the establishment of a Palestinian state. You may comfort yourselves with the idea that it would be a small state. But it will not remain small . . . Arafat will devour Jordan and assimilate its army . . . You are strengthening our enemies and weakening us.'

In a surprise victory on 28 May 1996, Netanyahu overcame Shimon Peres in the first direct election in Israel for the position of Prime Minister. Peres had been tempted by favourable opinion polls to bring forward the date set for the elections, but his gamble did not pay off. At the age of forty-five, Binyamin Netanyahu finally achieved the power he sought. Netanyahu's emergence as the leading figure in Israeli politics created an entirely new situation for those of us who were attempting to press on with the implementation of the Oslo Agreement. Netanyahu's vehement opposition to Oslo was founded in his ideology. The heated debate on the issue that he promoted, and in which he played a leading part both inside and outside the Knesset, was a stick he used to beat his Labour Party political foes and any others who disagreed with him. He played to the gallery of those in Israel who were obsessed with security and wanted to prioritise it above peace. As leader of the opposition he had already stirred up antagonism against the peacemakers, whom he alleged had betrayed Israel's interests. He mobilised antagonism against Oslo in every way he could. My personal opinion is that Netanyahu's hectic political activity helped to create the febrile atmosphere that accompanied Yitzhak Rabin's murder in 1995 and the defeat of Peres at the polls in 1996. In any case, the initial result was to install Netanyahu, the arch-enemy of Oslo, as the arbiter of the future of the peace process. From that moment on, our situation deteriorated without respite.

All in all, Netanyahu's three years in office were a wretched time for the peace process. It was a nightmare not only for the Palestinians but also for many level-headed Israelis, who were increasingly alarmed by the Prime Minister's behaviour. The Arab states were without exception antagonistic to Netanyahu and ostracised his government. Egypt and Jordan, which had made peace with Israel, froze their relations. On the international scene, Netanyahu was virtually isolated. The European Union

cold-shouldered him. The United States, in all normal circumstances Israel's strongest supporter, found itself in a dilemma, since Washington had explicitly committed itself to the implementation of the Oslo Agreement. The United States therefore slid into a veiled confrontation with an Israeli government that was failing to honour the pledges Israel had already made and seemed bent on destroying the peace process entirely. This confrontation finally emerged into the open during the Wye River Conference in October 1998. During that conference, there were unprecedentedly sharp exchanges between Netanyahu and President Clinton, and afterwards the American administration directed unusually sharp criticism at Israel. Netanyahu, meanwhile, failed to implement even the measures he had himself agreed, albeit under duress.

The beleaguered Oslo Agreement in fact survived Netanyahu's tenure of office, against all the odds. It must be said, though, that in their opposition to peace the more fanatical Zionists, who entertained fantasies about the destiny of Israel, became increasingly detached from reality. Right-wing Israelis opposed to the peace process began once more to insist that the West Bank was the true heart of the Jewish homeland, and to pursue an ever more aggressive policy of settlement. On 21–23 June 1996, the leaders of the Arab states involved in the Madrid peace process held a summit meeting in Cairo at which they voiced their demand that the new Israeli leadership should commit itself, at the very least, to the implementation of agreements that had already been concluded. It was after this that Egypt and Jordan formally reduced the level of their diplomatic relations with Israel. As to the Palestinians, we took the view that Israel, as it persisted in its aggressive attitude, had lost its way. The only policy option Netanyahu seemed able to drum up was to embark on a provocative new wave of settlements. This was concentrated particularly in East Jerusalem and neighbouring areas such as Burj Al-Laqlaq, within the north-east corner of the Old City, and Ras Al-Amoud, a Palestinian area of East Jerusalem to the south of the Old City. His objective was to establish more of what the Israelis called 'facts on the ground'. The new settlement planned by Israel on the top of the hill at Abu Ghneim, which the Israelis called Har Homa, led to such a serious confrontation that it prompted a United Nations Security Council meeting and an emergency session of the General Assembly. Settlement expansion also took place close to the existing Israeli settlements at Ma'ale Adumim, Giv'at Ze'ev, and other sites around Jerusalem.

The first two months of the Netanyahu government reduced to despair those of us who sought peace, as the new Israeli Prime Minister went to ever greater lengths in his apparent efforts to relegate the Oslo Agreement to history. He snubbed President Arafat and attempted to revoke Israel's recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. He also stirred up deliberate confusion in his relations with the Palestinian Authority as part of his strategy to avoid the implementation of the agreements. Among his other complaints, he alleged that the Palestinian National Council had so far still failed to repeal the articles from Palestinian National Charter that referred to Israel's right to exist. His claim was that the procedural measures taken at the meeting of the Palestinian National Council in Gaza on 24 April 1996 did not go far enough and that various issues had been avoided, so that the cancellation of the articles still needed to be explicitly confirmed.

Then, perhaps under American pressure, Netanyahu abruptly changed his tune. Verbally, at least, he began to acknowledge his commitment to implement the agreements Israel had already made with the Palestinians. On 23 July 1996, he sent his Foreign Minister, David Levy, to hold his government's first meeting with President Arafat, at the Erez crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, it soon became evident that, whatever the appearances, Netanyahu's real policies were in practice unaltered. He continued to act as if he was determined to obstruct progress towards peace in every way he could. Within the Palestinian leadership, we had the depressing sensation that our relations with Israel were regressing to the point from which we had set out, years before. The relationship between Israel and the Palestinians declined from the modest level of understanding and partial reconciliation that had been achieved into an escalating and debilitating confrontation with the Netanyahu government over the building of new settlements and other issues.

Despairing of ever being able to bring political influence to bear, the Palestinian Authority fought back against Netanyahu's settlement policy in the only way we could, by direct action on the ground. We encouraged demonstrations in the Jerusalem area, as well as at Abu Ghneim. Members of the Palestinian leadership, myself included, took part in these sit-ins and protests. We also convened the Palestinian Legislative Council to consider ways to counter the provocative actions of the settlers. I personally came alarmingly close to being physically assaulted by extremist

settlers as I took part in various actions. The places where we mounted our protests were Burj Al-Laqlaq and Ras Al-Amoud, as well as at the tented encampment we established on top of Abu Ghneim. At the same time, it must be said that tens of thousands of Israelis were also horrified to see the peace process unravel and themselves began to demonstrate against the policies of their own government.

On 4 September 1996, at the Erez checkpoint, Netanyahu met Yasser Arafat face to face for the first time. At this meeting, Netanyahu paid lip service once more to what he claimed was his commitment to the implementation of Oslo 2. In practice, however, his provocative actions continued. On 23 September 1996, he precipitated a wave of violence when he approved the creation by Israeli archaeologists of a new entry from the Via Dolorosa in the Old City into the so-called Hasmonean tunnel under the Aqsa Mosque. The Palestinian Authority's reaction was that any interference with the Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount, as the Israelis call it), including archaeological activity underneath it, was an assault on the Muslim faith and its institutions. Israel's security forces ruthlessly crushed the widespread Palestinian demonstrations that followed over the succeeding three days. Bloody clashes spread through virtually all the towns and refugee camps of the West Bank and Gaza. At least sixty-two Palestinians died and some 1,300 were injured, while fifteen Israeli soldiers were killed. On 29 September President Clinton issued a summons to Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat to attend a summit meeting in Washington, together with King Hussein of Jordan. The meeting took place on 1–2 October, and calm was restored as the result of the ensuing regional and international diplomacy. Afterwards, notwithstanding President Clinton's intervention, the aggressive posture of Netanyahu's government continued unabated.

The final status talks between Israel and the Palestinians had in fact already been formally inaugurated on 5 May 1996, while Shimon Peres was still Prime Minister, at a symbolic meeting held three weeks before the Israeli elections. Once Netanyahu came to power, however, he failed to continue these talks, which were not in practice to resume until November 1999, after Ehud Barak had taken over the reins of government. Netanyahu's cabinet dragged its feet on many issues, including specifically the provision of the safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the release of our prisoners and the establishment of Gaza's planned air and seaports. Netanyahu's strategy appeared to be to

renegotiate everything, while in reality committing himself to nothing except further prevarication.

Meanwhile, the systematic expansion of Jewish settlements all around Jerusalem on which Israel had embarked began to create a barrier separating the northern part of the West Bank from the southern part, which had the effect of dividing the centres of Palestinian population from each other. Netanyahu also stepped up the pressures on the Palestinian population of Jerusalem itself. Some houses belonging to Palestinian families were demolished on the pretext that they had been built without proper permission, and the identity cards of many Palestinian residents were withdrawn on a variety of pretexts. This made it hard for certain Palestinians to continue to live in the city, including some who had long been residents but had lost their entitlement for whatever trumped up reason. Netanyahu also increased local taxes in Jerusalem, simply to make life more difficult for the less wealthy Palestinian inhabitants. Another ploy he used to create a division between Jerusalem and the remainder of the Palestinian territories was to close down various Palestinian institutions in the city on the pretended grounds that they were linked to the Palestinian Authority, which was not meant to operate there.

Though the main concentration of Netanyahu's settlement policy was on Jerusalem and its surroundings, he also confiscated thousands of acres of land in the West Bank, either to make way for new settlements or to expand existing ones. This was the case particularly in the area known as Kassarat, between Tulkarem and Qalqilya. At the same time, the Minister of Infrastructure, Ariel Sharon, with little publicity, quietly built thousands of new homes in the existing settlements and expanded their amenities, in collusion with the settlers and with the assistance of other members of the cabinet. Sharon was a major figure in Israel's recent past and was destined once more in the future to hold the highest office. Thus, Netanyahu and his ministers did their utmost to breach the agreements that had been made from Oslo onward, both in letter and in spirit. The agreements clearly laid down that neither party should take any action that might prejudice the progress of the implementation of the transitional phase or the principal issues on the agenda of the final status negotiations.

The American administration was painfully conscious of the situation. President Clinton called for new talks to renegotiate contentious issues, including the agreement on Hebron that we believed had already been

finalised as part of the Oslo 2 Agreement. We felt this reopening of old files was a dangerous precedent. On 24 December 1996, Netanyahu came once more to the Erez crossing point to talk to President Arafat. These talks resulted in what was known then as the Hebron Protocol, which was signed on 15 January 1997, after a further meeting at Erez. At this meeting, Dennis Ross, the US Under-Secretary of State, joined Netanyahu and Arafat. Under the terms of the new agreement, Israel was to withdraw from 80 per cent of Hebron, but a fanatical faction of Jewish settlers was permitted to remain, entrenched in a small area under stringent security arrangements. Elsewhere, Netanyahu continued to take reckless actions, of which the most conspicuous example was the attempt by Israeli agents in Amman on 25 September 1997 to assassinate Khaled Mish'al, the head of the political bureau of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement. This rash intelligence operation cast a heavy shadow over the already fragile relationship between Israel and Jordan. To mollify King Hussein, who was furious, Netanyahu was obliged to release Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder of Hamas, in exchange for two Mossad agents who had been detained by the Jordanian police.

During all this time, President Clinton continued to keep a close watch on the situation in the Middle East, and, in February and April 1997, he twice received Netanyahu at the White House. On 10 September, the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, came to Israel and spoke separately to Netanyahu and Arafat. President Clinton was extremely anxious to reopen direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians and in November 1997 he once again summoned Netanyahu to the White House. On 20–22 January 1998, President Clinton met Netanyahu and Arafat separately in Washington to urge the two leaders to resume their contacts. All these efforts on the part of the Americans finally bore fruit in October 1998. Between 16 and 23 October, a summit between Israel and the Palestinians took place at the Wye River Conference centre, a secluded venue in Maryland not far from Washington DC, favoured by the American administration for discreet and difficult encounters. After many vicissitudes, this meeting yielded the agreement that became known as the Wye River Memorandum. In this, Netanyahu committed himself to a timetable for further Israeli troop withdrawals from the West Bank and the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. In return, the PLO pledged itself to convene the Palestinian National Council again, to ratify, as we had promised, the abrogation of items in the National Charter relating to Israel's right to live in peace.

After Netanyahu's history of reckless political adventures, and despite his earlier and apparently deliberate attempts to create confusion, it seemed as if he was at last about to embark on at least a partial retreat from his ideological position of antagonism towards the Oslo Accord and Oslo 2. To the distraught settlers and fanatical extremists who were alarmed by this, he said, 'Believe you me, I have not changed. It is the reality which has changed.' This was true. Netanyahu had not changed. However, the international community and governments in the region were now implacably opposed to the ideas of an extremist Prime Minister whose declared aim was nothing less than the destruction of the peace process, heedless of the strenuous efforts made to foster it over the previous few years. The voices of those within Israel who supported the peace process were once more being heard. In the end, Netanyahu had to listen to a storm of protests, from both within Israel and without. The Israeli peace camp held Netanyahu totally responsible for undermining the peace process, and for the dissipation of the economic gains that Israel had made as a consequence of the opening of certain Arab and Muslim countries to Israel's goods and services, and to Israeli tourists.

As I have suggested, Netanyahu continued to procrastinate, and this applied, astonishingly, even to his own Wye River Agreement. He claimed that the Palestinians had failed to fulfil other conditions that had been agreed there and therefore refused to carry out his promised redeployment of the Israeli occupying forces. On 15 December 1998, President Clinton took forceful action, calling Netanyahu and Arafat to an urgent summit at the Erez crossing. Before the summit took place, President Clinton visited Gaza, and on 14 December he made a point of attending the meeting of the Palestinian National Council convened specifically to abolish those clauses in the National Charter allegedly threatening Israel's existence. To Clinton's annoyance, the outcome of the summit was unsatisfactory. Netanyahu still refused to implement the redeployment unless the Palestinians ceased, as he put it, to encourage violence. He also formulated a set of five demands that the Palestinians must fulfil before the Wye River Memorandum would be implemented by Israel. These were:

- 1) The Palestinians must refrain from any move towards the establishment of a Palestinian state;
- 2) The Palestinian Authority must halt all violence;
- 3) The Palestinian Authority must halt incitement to violence;

- 4) The Palestinians must not ask for the release of prisoners who have shed blood;
- 5) The Palestinians should take steps to collect illegal weapons and must cooperate with Israel in combating terrorism.

Netanyahu announced these conditions just hours after the Erez meeting. They were broadly based on the Wye River Agreement, but in the agreement it was not specified that action by the Palestinians on what was required of them should precede the implementation by Israel of its commitments.

Netanyahu appeared to consider that he was entitled to continue to behave with arrogance and to disregard the international community. However, his support within Israel was draining away. Ironically, this was largely due to the chaos and confusion he had caused over the peace process, though the ideological basis of all he did was that he was acting to protect Israel. The concessions he had been obliged to make at Wye River had lost him the backing of elements of the right wing, and his belated attempt to act tough in December failed to win them back. At the same time, those middle-of-the-road Israelis who had initially given him their support were now turning against him. He faced a vote of no-confidence in the Knesset that his advisers told him he would lose, and decided to risk holding early elections. On 17 May 1999, in the Prime Ministerial election called by Netanyahu, the new leader of the Israeli Labour Party, Ehud Barak, won a convincing victory.

My first meeting with Sharon

During Netanyahu's period in office, once we had taken stock of what we faced, we felt we should take the diplomatic initiative. Our weapons were the prevailing popular Palestinian unrest, the moral pressure on Israel from its allies to implement its commitments, and a generally favourable international situation. Over time, the balance of international opinion was tipping increasingly towards us, thanks to Netanyahu's recklessness. The pressure on him from the Arab states, from Europe, and even from the United States – in normal times Israel's staunchest ally – was growing day by day. Netanyahu's cynical manoeuvring and his systematic efforts to undermine the peace process had shocked the American administration.

Eventually, all this had the effect of weakening him both internally and externally, amid a storm of criticism from all directions.

Nevertheless, Netanyahu's obstruction of the peace process had begun to create real problems for the Palestinians. It was no longer merely that we were not going forward. Our position began to slip back. The economic situation of the Palestinian people continued to deteriorate. More importantly, the continued authority of our institutions depended on maintaining the momentum of the peace process. The Palestinian leadership needed the implementation of the existing agreements to maintain its popular credibility. Without negotiations with the Israeli government over the main issues that would form part of the final status talks, we were increasingly in limbo. Nevertheless, even after a year of Netanyahu's government, we still took the view that the window of opportunity for further negotiation needed to be kept open, no matter how narrow that window might be. In practical terms, we knew our room for manoeuvre was extremely restricted, with an Israeli interlocutor whose hostility was utterly entrenched.

As to my own position at the time, because of the absorbing nature of my duties as the first Speaker of the newly elected Palestinian Legislative Council, I had stepped back from my previous responsibility for the peace process. Other Palestinian negotiators, all highly capable, had been giving their best efforts. However, as we have seen, the advent of Binyamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister of Israel was a development that had profound effects on the progress of the peace process. This began to draw me back in. We had little or no prior contact with Netanyahu, but someone had to take the plunge. My colleagues within the Palestinian leadership asked me to engineer behind the scenes contacts with Netanyahu's government. This was a task that was clearly going to be difficult, but one I judged would not be impossible. We were resolved not to give up the struggle, and were steadfast in our determination to keep our hopes alive. I therefore found myself resuming my contacts with the Israelis after a gap of some two years. I must admit that the circumstances were very unpropitious.

My first move was to contact Ariel Sharon. We were well aware that Sharon was the key figure in Netanyahu's cabinet. Within the Likud government, his role was more important than was suggested by his formal title, Minister of Infrastructure, though this was already significant enough, given his part in expanding settlement in the West Bank in general and

around Jerusalem in particular. We understood that the extent of Sharon's influence within the government and the Likud Party meant that he enjoyed more power than his official position as infrastructure minister would have given him. We also knew that he wielded great personal influence over Netanyahu, though they had earlier fought for the leadership of the Likud Party. Sharon and Netanyahu had an unusual but close relationship. Sharon was well known for his tendency to resent anyone superior in rank to himself, whether in the army, the party, or the government. Nonetheless, he had worked out a *modus vivendi* with 'Bibi' Netanyahu, as he was known. These were all reasons to contact Sharon. On the other hand, we were a little reluctant to approach Sharon. For the Palestinians, he was the bogey man. We were not frightened of him, but his name was linked in our minds with wars, massacres, and with the theft of our land through the creation of settlements. He was in effect the godfather of the settler movement, and the cynosure of every kind of Israeli fanatic and extremist.

On balance, however, we nevertheless decided it was to Sharon that we should make our initial approach. Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) headed a group representing the Palestinian leadership in which I participated. This was the first time Abu Mazen had encountered Sharon. Abu Mazen was at this time Secretary General of the PLO Executive Committee, which made him in effect Arafat's executive deputy. The meeting could never have been anything other than difficult, given Sharon's reputation. The encounter took place in June 1997, at Sharon's ranch in the Negev, under strict security precautions. Soon afterwards, news of the meeting was leaked to the Israeli press in order to discover how the Israeli public would react to such contacts. Although the meeting did not give us much optimism for a breakthrough, the fact that it happened at all was an indication that it was worth persisting with contacts between ourselves and the Israelis, with the hope that the momentum of the peace process might at least be regained.

The Palestinian leadership then asked me to continue the dialogue with Sharon alone. I agreed, though I felt apprehensive over what might happen. If the Palestinian leadership was nervous of making contact with Sharon, the Palestinian public was deeply hostile to him. Frankly, I was concerned how Palestinian public opinion might react if it were discovered that I was meeting him. I feared that I could become the object of hostility on the part of Palestinians in general and in particular from certain radical

Palestinian factions. I was genuinely concerned that I might find myself the target of a hate campaign. On the most basic level, I was also worried about how to conduct the meetings, fearing that my skill in talking to the Israelis might have become rusty, and having before talked to Israeli liberals rather than to right-wing extremists.

My initial one-to-one meeting with Sharon took place on 17 February 1998 at the King David Hotel in West Jerusalem. This was followed by a series of encounters with both Sharon and Netanyahu. My preconceived view of Ariel Sharon was that taken by most Palestinians. I took him to be an aggressive politician whose personality had been marked by his period as a military commander, when he had shown himself to be both ruthless and cunning, and apparently without remorse. I also believed that his hostile attitude to the Palestinians was not feigned, and that he actually genuinely detested us. These were the views generally held in Palestinian circles, at all levels. Before I came face to face with Sharon, I thought I should widen my knowledge of him, so I sought information from people who knew him and read a hostile biography written by the Israeli journalist Uzi Benziman, entitled *Sharon: An Israeli Caesar*. Sharon had refused to cooperate with the author of this book, who had spent three years gathering his material. My attention was attracted by a paragraph relating to Sharon's time as Minister of Agriculture under Menachem Begin. This spoke of him as both impetuous and aggressive. 'Although his closest associates in the Ministry of Agriculture described him as a methodical and careful planner, it is difficult to reconcile this characterisation with his brutal and violent outbursts during government meetings . . . It is far more likely that these were spontaneous outbursts, expressions of his frustration and anger at the ability of others to thwart his strongest ambitions. His behaviour . . . was a re-enactment of his actions and demeanour during his military career. His ability for elaborate and thorough planning contrasted with his moodiness and loss of control whenever he became angry . . . He was violent and irritable, eternally suspicious of everyone. He was power-hungry and refused to put up with any delays or obstructions in his pursuit of this power.'

From the outset, Sharon seemed to want to go straight to a discussion of the principal issues between Israel and the Palestinians. The first encounter between us went beyond mere familiarisation. On the other hand, it stopped short of real negotiation. The formal exchanges of politeness were kept short, and we ranged over many substantive issues. The

meeting had no prearranged agenda, and we observed no diplomatic formalities. In fact, at the opening of our conversation at least, the atmosphere could be said to have been antagonistic. With virtually no preamble, Sharon began to rehearse his version of the suffering of the Jews. Without blinking, he began to spin me a grotesque yarn of how the Jews in Israel faced injustice and oppression at the hands of the Palestinians. The Palestinians, he said, had unjustly rejected the claim of the Israelis to the land of their forefathers and had perpetrated massacres against the Jews, slaughtering even the survivors of the Holocaust. He was, incredibly, attempting to make me feel guilty for the sufferings of the Jews, and seemed to want me to accept that the Palestinian people were responsible for the Jews' misfortunes. He appeared to have a profound belief in his own propaganda. When he had completed his recital of what I regarded as a blatant misrepresentation of the facts, I told him that I now wanted him to listen to the story of the real victims in the case. I told him about the endless grievances of the Palestinians and enumerated the atrocities and massacres that the Palestinians had suffered at the hands of the Israelis.

After this fruitless exchange, we agreed to stop looking backwards, and to waste no further time or effort in rehearsing contradictory historical accounts on which we would never agree. Instead, we agreed to focus on the possibility that we could cooperate to build a better future. This enabled us immediately to embark on a wide-ranging discussion of future opportunities, with candid exchanges about our opposing positions, the conflicting nature of our rights, and the discrepancy between our commitments and actions. We explored ways to halt the deterioration of the situation, bearing in mind the existence of the commitments laid down in the existing agreements between us. It must be said that, whatever our differences, we appeared at least to share the hope of putting a halt to the bloodshed and of avoiding the proliferation of dangerous situations, with the ultimate aim of coexistence between our two peoples.

Sharon, who was aged seventy at the time, was an impressive presence. He was still every inch the supremely self-confident military commander. He was a man in the prime of life, basking in the glory of his past achievements. His belief in the logic of strength went back to the early days of his military career in 1948, when the Jews imposed their will in Palestine by force of arms. He was faithful to the philosophy of the gun, and it was clear that he would not shrink from employing intimidation and persecution in his political career, just as he had done

as a soldier. His ideological standpoint was more extreme than that of Netanyahu. I had the impression that even had Netanyahu shown any inclination to compromise with us, Sharon would have been prepared to do what he could to prevent it.

It could almost be said that Sharon was operating as an extreme right-wing opposition from within the already right-wing Israeli government. Sharon promoted a view very different from that of Netanyahu on the settlement issues that were so important to him. He also differed from Netanyahu on less crucial questions such as the airport in the Gaza Strip and the construction of Gaza's industrial base. Sharon was well aware that the Palestinian entity we had created already had some of the characteristics of a Palestinian state and saw this development 'before our very eyes,' as he put it, as 'unfortunate'. He maintained an implacable opposition to the Oslo Agreement and the subsequent agreements that had fleshed out the Declaration of Principles. His strategy was to turn his back on what had been agreed at Oslo, while constantly coming up with alternative suggestions that were meant to convince the Palestinians that a permanent settlement was an unrealistic ambition but that some sort of coexistence might nonetheless be thrashed out. His proposals included suggestions on the key issues of Jerusalem, refugees, frontiers, and territory. He introduced his own proposals on settlements and water resources. I perceived that his strategy would be to win time by embarking on a lengthy and rambling process of negotiation with the Palestinians that would not be finalised for decades, if ever. His objective was to suspend negotiations on major controversial issues such as Jerusalem and the return of refugees, while at the same time agreeing to see some kind of truncated Palestinian entity established. He also refused to budge from his determination that in the last resort it was for Israel alone to decide whether or not such a Palestinian entity would have the right to become a state. This was scarcely compatible with our conception of our sovereign rights.

I concluded from what Sharon said to me at that time, speaking personally and in confidence, that he regarded his position as not entirely negative. He was in fact prepared to enter into a series of compromises with the Palestinians. He believed these would in the short term reduce friction, while also laying down the basis for longer term cooperation. He also wanted to build confidence through a number of joint economic, social, and security ventures. In his view, this would lead to the emergence

of something less than the final settlement that was the Palestinian goal, but would still allow the Palestinians to extend their control to some 40 per cent of the territory of the West Bank. As he saw it, a kind of territorial continuity between the Palestinian areas could be achieved, to the extent that this was physically possible, through the construction of tunnels or bridges. Sharon believed this would enable the Palestinians to coexist and establish relatively stable relations with Israel. Israel would then, graciously, offer permanent work permits to tens of thousands of Palestinian labourers to work in Israel, offering them in addition other worthless benefits. I could not imagine this would tempt any Palestinian to take up what I saw as an arrogant and racist offer. The Palestinian leadership was certainly not interested in his concept of a Palestinian state of some kind in 40 per cent of the territory of the West Bank, with no real sovereignty. Sharon, however, had convinced himself that the Palestinians would eventually accept his ideas, when they saw that no other alternative was available to them and after they had been driven to accept the reality of the accumulated and irremovable weight of Israel's settlements. Sharon's ideas were a throwback, and were rooted in the tradition of conservative Israeli thinking as it had existed before 1993, in the minds of both Likud and Labour politicians.

Despite the chasm of disagreement between Sharon and myself at that first meeting, which continued for two hours without producing any tangible results, I was able to make an assessment of his position. It became clear to me that Sharon's ideas, as the leader of the settlement and expansion camp, were even worse for the Palestinians than the position adopted by Netanyahu. What Sharon said to me was, 'Let us be realistic; the road to permanent settlement is closed. If we cannot agree on minor issues within the framework of a provisional agreement, what will happen when we get to the issues of Jerusalem, the refugees, and the security zones that Israel does not intend to give up? If we carry on as we are, our present trajectory will lead to a major explosion, and who knows what will happen then? I suggest that we follow a different route.' This meeting revealed that Sharon enjoyed the backing of a substantial element within Israel's right-wing government and that the ideas of these people appeared to be conditioned by two underlying factors.

The first of these was the fear that the Palestinian Authority truly intended to declare the establishment of a Palestinian state no later than 4 May 1999, in other words at the end of the transitional period as

provided for in Oslo 2. I should put on record here that it was I myself who first proposed that we should proclaim the existence of the Palestinian state at the end of the transitional period. Several figures within the Palestinian leadership, including Abu Mazen, initially disagreed with me, while Abu Ammar refrained at first from committing himself one way or the other. I made the proposal for a number of reasons. Israel was apparently pulling back from the timetables for implementation laid down in the agreements we had signed even though the timetables were an essential feature of the agreements. If we were in consequence unable to complete the transitional phase before the date laid down for the opening of the final status negotiations, Israel might think it had the right to impose its own unilateral solution on all these issues and over the final status as well. However, if we were to declare the existence of the state within the 4 June 1967 frontiers, as already recognised in international law, with Jerusalem as its capital, this would by itself constitute a basis for final status, if international recognition could be secured. In the event, after a few weeks of discussion, the proposal to declare the existence of the state was adopted as policy by all the Palestinian institutions, though with no detail of how the declaration would be put into effect. The Israeli right wing was apprehensive, as it was aware that the Palestinian people would overwhelmingly approve a declaration by Arafat of an independent state, and that it would be recognised by virtually the whole world. The only action available to the Israeli government to counter this move would be unilaterally to abrogate the existing agreements and to reoccupy at least some Palestinian territory, with all the adverse reactions that this would entail, from the Palestinians, the Arab states and the international community. For Israel, this could have been a public relations disaster.

What Sharon was trying to bring about, therefore, was either the postponement of the anticipated Palestinian declaration of the state, or to emasculate it by including it in a declaration of statehood, within a formula to be agreed upon, in the framework of a joint statement by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This would declare that Israel and the Palestinian Authority accepted that an independent Palestinian state would come into existence side by side with Israel, but at some future time and at the end of a lengthy process. Such a joint statement, which would be Sharon's preferred option, would be broadly compatible with Netanyahu's position that there should be 'something less than a state, barred from the possession of heavy weapons, and prohibited from forming external

military alliances'. Sharon calculated that the Palestinians would be satisfied if they were able to claim that a significant concession had been made and would in return consent to extend the time limit for the implementation of Oslo 2. This would help avoid the creation of the highly explosive situation in Israel and elsewhere that could follow from a declaration of Palestinian independence on 4 May 1999. The Israeli occupation would continue, but would now be seen as having Palestinian consent. Israel's underlying motive seemed to be to offer the Palestinians a sop, while over time continuing to undermine the notion of a truly viable independent Palestinian state by covering the Palestinian territories with more and more Israeli settlements.

The second consideration that motivated those members of Likud who backed Sharon was their fear that the American administration, which was already stepping up its diplomatic pressure, would decide to launch a new diplomatic initiative. The idea of such an initiative was already being aired in American circles in early 1998. This would have been a serious precedent in the region, as Washington had in the past given a pledge not to launch substantive proposals without first consulting the Israeli government. The United States, however, was becoming seriously irritated by Likud's adoption of policies that defied agreements that the United States had underwritten. Consequently, Netanyahu and his ministers were increasingly worried that the Clinton administration might launch an initiative that would make it impossible for Netanyahu and Sharon to continue with their policy of simply turning their backs on what the previous Israeli government had agreed.

At the King David Hotel, Sharon alluded directly to this concern when he said, 'You know that the pressures the United States will bring to bear on us will not be helpful. It will be better if we talk together without outside pressures, without mediators, and without unnecessary intervention. Let us sit together and talk. You are aware that the present government in Israel is not a transient phenomenon. We are the only government that can reach a settlement with you. Netanyahu is strong, and he will be so for a long time to come. As time passes, his strength will only increase. We believe we can gradually build a network of relations between us. We may be able to make progress after we have eliminated mutual suspicion. In the meantime, this is how it is. I say that as seriously as I can. The Prime Minister agrees with what I say, and he is following the progress of these talks.'

This meeting with Sharon opened the way to the resumption of exchanges between ourselves and Israeli politicians at the highest level. In such meetings, I always took the opportunity to push forward the dialogue on all the issues related to the position of the Palestinians, and I was at least able to explain to the Israelis the Palestinian concept of what would constitute peace between us. I also conveyed directly to the Israelis the Palestinian Authority's position on the crucial nature of the three Israeli redeployments, as provided for in the Interim Agreement. I explained the importance we attached to the early transfer of territory, where 14.2 per cent of the territory of the West Bank was due to be moved from Zone B to Zone A (i.e., from partial to full Palestinian control). Other topics I returned to insistently included the release of the Palestinian prisoners and the finalisation of negotiations on the remaining issues of the transitional phase, such as the airport and seaport, the provision of safe passage from Gaza to the West Bank, the proposed industrial zone, and economic cooperation. I stressed the need to halt the establishment of new Israeli settlements, to stop the construction of new bypass roads, and to prevent other violations of the territorial status quo. Finally, I asked the Israelis to abide by the agreed timetables and maps, in order to pave the way for a return to the final status negotiations. Much of this, I felt, was whistling in the wind. The underlying drift was that, by mid-1998, those in Israel who opposed peace had contrived to bring the faltering peace process to a virtually complete halt.

Extracts from the minutes of my meeting with Ariel Sharon (17 February 1998)

Sharon: I am very pleased we are holding this meeting. I learned about the Palestinian meeting yesterday with the Prime Minister [Binyamin Netanyahu met Abu Mazen on 16 February] and I gather that you have been on an international tour since we met last time. It is a pleasant thing to be the Speaker of a Parliament. I hope that your festival has gone well [the Eid al-Fitr at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan took place on 30 January 1998] and that life is back to normal. We agreed last time that Abu Ala would give a presentation on the situation of the Palestinians and their grievances. I have put ideas before you for your consideration. By the way, have you acquired protective masks? [There was concern in

Israel at the time over possible gas attacks by Iraq, and Israel was issuing gas masks to its own citizens.]

Abu Ala: Thank you. I have been on parliamentary tours of Scandinavia, Russia, and Ukraine. The feast went well. We shall get gas masks from America. The Palestinian Minister of Health has asked for them.

Sharon: Although the Americans are both our friends and yours, they cannot impose their conditions, because what matters is what we are able to agree on together between ourselves. Last time, I explained our difficulties and positions, and we agreed that we would hear yours.

Abu Ala: I am also pleased we are holding this meeting. It is important to explore each other's positions in order to get closer to each other. I would like to tell you again that I brief President Arafat on the details of these meetings, which gives him satisfaction. I want to recapitulate a little to know how we should get started. We understand the suffering and injustice that befell the Jews in Europe, and you cannot fail to understand the suffering and the injustice done to us on our land. We share with you many of our habits, traditions, behaviour, and principles.

Sharon: Our language . . .

Abu Ala: Our languages share the same basis.

Sharon: During the Ottoman era, there was a lawyer in Jaffa called David Moyal who died in 1950 at the age of eighty. He wrote a translation of the Quran into Hebrew.

Abu Ala: After I came back from Tunis, I went to visit Uri Savir. By ill luck, his mother, who had wanted to meet me, had just passed away. So I went to Jerusalem to offer him my condolences. Uri said his mother had never touched a book from his father's library since his death except to pick out an ancient copy of the Holy Quran that she presented to me as a gift. Uri's late father had been very interested in the Quran, and had bought this copy in Cairo. The Quran fascinated his father, in the same way the Torah is of great interest to the Palestinians. I do not claim to be a historian, but, if we read history, we find there is more in common

between us than there are differences. Nowadays, we are living through a difficult time. I do not wish to hark back to the 1940s and 1950s, but, regardless of the circumstances, we, the Palestinians, are the true victims of the current situation. Without rehearsing all the causes and events of 1948, what the Palestinian people regard as their ‘catastrophe’ – the ‘nakba’ – came to pass. The consequence was that they fled from their homes and went to live in camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and other places. Attempts were subsequently made to find a solution to this grave problem, which threatened the future of an entire people as well as the stability of the region as a whole. In the 1960s, there emerged two organisations, Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Their goal, despite the adversity they faced, was to put an end to the dispute. While the PLO was brought into existence by the Arab regimes, the Palestinian people themselves established Fatah. From the start, Fatah sought to remedy the plight of the Palestinians by whatever means it could. At first, we attracted fierce condemnation from the international community. Our initial proposal was the establishment of a secular democratic state for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Of course, that was rejected. In 1974, we put forward a new plan calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. We said we would establish this state on any land evacuated by the Israeli occupation forces. That was our message to the world at a time when an international peace conference was being discussed. Other plans followed. The initiative of Saudi Arabia’s King Fahd, which was fully agreed by us, was the first Arab plan to recognise the UN Security Council Resolution 242. To give more scope for the establishment of peace, we proposed a confederation with Jordan. That resolution, which was adopted by Palestinian National Council, still stands, although it received no response.

Sharon: Jordan wants to be an independent state. It continues to mistrust such ideas.

Abu Ala: I know Minister Sharon’s view on that, and I shall ask him about it later. There were other initiatives, including the meeting between King Hussein and President Reagan, which were endorsed by President Arafat. Now, I want to come to Madrid and Oslo. Madrid was the precursor of Oslo. We did not escape from Madrid to go to Oslo. Our intention was only to escape the detrimental media coverage that was focused on the

Palestinian and Israeli negotiators. I attended Oslo from A to Z. They were really hard negotiations, because they were the first serious negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. Delegates from the PLO and Israel exchanged frank views and reviewed our mutual history. In the end, we reached what I think was a fair agreement. We took into consideration the balance of power and the underlying nature of the problem, the need for a solution fair to both sides and offering prospects for the future. Our agreement provided for a programme of confidence-building in a transitional period. Its principle was to proceed step by step. Our intention was to explore and come to know each other, like two people preparing for marriage. The agreement rested on three pillars. The first of these was the gradual withdrawal of Israeli troops, leading to full withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with final status issues left for later. Withdrawal took place in fact from Gaza, Jericho, populated areas, and parts of Hebron. Then we agreed on an additional redeployment which has not yet been carried out and whose absence has left us with a real problem. Second, we agreed that security must be put in place, both for the Palestinians and for Israel. The objectives and philosophy are clear. Unfortunately, acts of violence have led to many setbacks and more effort must be made. Third, both sides accepted the gradual construction of the Palestinian entity. The PLO was a Palestinian liberation movement, both inside and outside Palestine. We left Beirut, and now we are a Palestinian National Authority with an elected leader and an elected legislative council, together with institutions, ministries, and courts.

Sharon: I should get a medal for driving you out of Beirut.

Abu Ala: Leaving Beirut enabled us to reach the position we are in now. In Tunis, we became truly independent in what we did for our people and how we tackled our problems. What we did in Tunis put us in a position to go to Madrid and Oslo. However, now we are back in Palestine our status is unclear. We have an autonomous government, but it is transitional. We repealed our National Charter before we returned. We recognised the State of Israel before we had achieved a definite existence ourselves. I do not know yet for sure how we shall govern ourselves in the future, but we definitely know what we want. We have held presidential and legislative elections and have gradually begun to build the Palestinian entity. However, the progress of the Palestinian Authority is

predicated on the end of occupation and cooperation over security. The advent of the present Israeli government has placed this project in doubt and has held up the developments that were scheduled. There is a wide gap at the moment between the Israeli government and us, because Israel has the power on the ground and can impose its will on all issues. It imposes closures upon us and can freeze the implementation of the agreement. On our side, the only power we have is to insist on the agreement with all our might. We have taken a risk, which will lead us to political suicide if we fail. That is why we cling to this agreement, and I, personally, am committed to it because I think it is a very balanced document which is beneficial to both of us.

Sharon: We used to have the joint Arab–Jewish Club, the only one in the country. We used to dine together, Jews and Arabs. There were Arabs employed by Jews and Jews working for Arabs.

Abu Ala: The Palestinians had great expectations of the peace process with Israel. They believe they have paid a high price. There is nobody other than our Brother President, Yasser Arafat, who can persuade the Palestinians to go along with such an agreement. He has used all his political and military credit to get it accepted. Therefore, when the agreement faces a problem, Arafat suffers, together with all his colleagues who opted for peace and for this agreement. What were the expectations of the Palestinians? At the very least, they believed that with the conclusion of the agreement their economic circumstances would improve. We have made a comparative study of the present economic situation and that in 1993 and, sadly, we have found that the situation is worse today. The Palestinians also expected that as soon as the agreement was signed, the building of settlements would stop. Unfortunately, nothing of the sort happened.

Sharon: But the economic situation is bound to get worse. There are Palestinian workers in the settlements.

Abu Ala: Instead of building settlements, let us have joint projects. There have been attempts to establish industrial zones alongside the Green Line.

Sharon: I have talked about constructing joint roads, tunnels, and bridges connecting all areas.

Abu Ala: Once we have agreed the ideas and principles, everything will be possible. I am talking about joint projects and not an infrastructure intended to divide the land. We have accepted the partition of Palestine, and we cannot now accept the partition of the West Bank.

Sharon: It was you who rejected the UN partition resolution.

Abu Ala: Last time, we lost. This time, we shall both lose. We do not want to argue about who won and who lost. I just want to explain to you the frustration we feel.

Sharon: In 1938, when I was ten years old, a plan to partition Palestine was rejected, although it was better than the 1947 plan. Then Britain issued the White Paper in 1939, allowing 75,000 Jews to arrive in the country over five years, but it was rejected. The Arab uprising in Palestine meant that we lost millions of victims in Europe.

Abu Ala: In short, everybody paid a price, but we are the ones who have not been compensated yet. We are still suffering. Therefore, let us talk about the future. We have already paid dearly for that period.

Sharon: I remember that 5,000 Arabs died as a result of rivalry between the Husseini and Nashashibi families. We lost 1,000 people.

Abu Ala: Let us learn the lessons of the past instead of crying over it.

Sharon: I acknowledge your difficulties and your tragedy and I understand them fully. Therefore, we should look for realistic solutions.

Abu Ala: Returning to the present situation, our people were enthusiastic when we first convinced them to accept this agreement. But the hopes of various factions amongst us have been frustrated and they have attempted to turn people against it. For instance, before the agreement, Palestinian individuals were able to move freely between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Now, they say that the agreement has made matters

worse for them. The same could be said about the movement of goods. There are many restrictions. Trucks are made to wait long hours and there is the practical complication of the 'back to back' system [where cargoes are unloaded at the border of the Gaza Strip or the West Bank and reloaded on to Israeli trucks for transit].

Sharon: Our people also have doubts about the peace process. They have observed that while the process was going on there were terrorist acts, and that when the process was halted, there were no terrorist acts.

Abu Ala: In 1993, a total of 120,000 Palestinians were working in Israel. Nowadays, the figure fluctuates, but is never more than 35,000. This means that you have burdened the Palestinian Authority with some 90,000 unemployed workers who have joined the army of our unemployed. The problem is that since 1967, the Palestinian economy has become dependent on Israel in trade, exports, imports, employment, currency, and the banking system. In other words, it has become subordinate to the Israeli economy. These are the reasons why the man in the Palestinian street is frustrated. The average man says, 'I have courageously and pragmatically moved forward, and I have looked realistically to the future, leaving the past behind me, but today I can see nothing encouraging.' So, today, we face a problem. Practical difficulties are resolvable, but there is also a political issue. We do not know whether we are in agreement with you on the principles and concepts to which we shall adhere until the achievement of the final status, or if we disagree fundamentally on the principles and concepts of the peace process. Thus, we face a problem of a political nature. The Americans are your friends and are also our friends, but they are not in a position to enforce measures on either of us. They can help us but cannot impose things on us or on you. The original Oslo talks succeeded because we worked together. Even at Oslo 2, we met for seven months in secret here in this hotel, as well as in Tel Aviv and in Italy, until we succeeded in building the agreement. You have to help us economically by lifting restrictions. We were the only Arabs not to benefit from the oil boom in the 1970s, because we were under occupation. All the other countries drew the benefit from oil during this period. I must also be frank when I say we have taken over a country that has been damaged and the land despoiled. In it we saw two very different things. On the one hand, there were the modern Israeli settlements; on the other hand,

the Palestinian towns and villages were in a desperate plight, undeveloped and allowed to fall into ruin.

Sharon: But there are beautiful places, for example, between Jerusalem and Ramallah.

Abu Ala: Let me talk, for instance, about my own home town, Abu Dis, which I left in 1967. When I returned there in 1994, I found it unchanged, with a complete absence of development and no modernisation. I am talking about roads, water, electricity, and sewage systems. The same tragedy has befallen all Palestine's towns and villages.

Sharon: We should change these things. Our people pay for the services they receive, such as sanitation and power. Electricity corporations lay down the infrastructure, but the consumers pay for it.

Abu Ala: We can do the same, but you have to lift restrictions so we can acquire the financial resources we would need.

Sharon: You can go to donor countries for grants or loans. I would like to have a meeting with you specifically to discuss all these matters. We should distinguish between two tracks. On the one hand, there is the political track. On the other hand, there are the humanitarian issues that we can resolve together. These would include such things as movement of labour, checkpoints, educational provision, and infrastructure. The Prime Minister has told me there are many issues that need attention.

Abu Ala: You have to help us, so that the Palestinian people will continue to look to us to fulfil their hope for a better future, in terms of their standard of living and in political terms.

Sharon: We can help you in material terms.

Abu Ala: I want you to help us by creating better conditions in which we can help ourselves. To me, the most important thing is hope, since frustration leads only to violence while hope will lead to peace and stability. Look at any Palestinian village in terms of its administrative structure and the use it can make of its land. Abu Dis, for instance, cannot expand its

built-up area a single metre, though its lands stretch eastwards as far as the Dead Sea. This and other villages remain confined to their present periphery.

Sharon: I would like to do many things but have found nobody to discuss them with. When I was commander of the southern region, I noticed that terrorist acts increase on Fridays and Saturdays and I discovered that this was because the workers are free. I would like to stress the need to prevent any phenomenon that could give the Israeli public the impression that you support Iraq. Otherwise, it would be difficult for us to get their support or convince them of any step we would take in the future regarding the peace process. I do not know whether the Prime Minister has brought you up to date on the Interim Agreement.

Abu Ala: We talked to the Prime Minister about the extent of the planned redeployment and his reasons for it. But uncertainty will remain about any agreement while we fail to discuss the amount of territory involved.

Sharon: Have you been told yet that it is to be 12 or 13 per cent?

Abu Ala: Yes, we have heard this, but it is difficult for us to accept as it is not in line with the principles of the agreement.

Sharon: Why – because it is too small or too large?

Abu Ala: I shall speak my mind openly. I don't want to talk about percentages, but about principles and concepts. If we can agree on principles and concepts, then I shall talk about percentages. If we are unable to agree, then the percentages may be the underlying reason. If you have any problem over the timetable, we can discuss it between us. But first we have to agree on the principle of withdrawal. You hold all the cards and have the power on the ground. If you want security, I can offer you the arrangements and measures that will guarantee you that. But, I am not prepared to cede more land to you, as this is all I have left. I said to the Prime Minister: 'You can bring an army and put it on the roof of my house if that gives you security, on condition that you recognise the house as mine and not claim I am your tenant in that house.' If we agree on the principles, all else is detail.

Sharon: What about the Interim Agreement? We do not know whether you want to do this in three small stages after which we talk about the final status, or one stage after which we move straight on to the final status negotiations?

Abu Ala: What do you prefer?

Sharon: We do not know what you want for the final stage.

Abu Ala: We want to discuss this issue.

Sharon: Our problem is with the security zones. We would like to talk about this subject. Last time, I told you why we wanted them. We could go together to see where they are to be.

Abu Ala: I come back to my question, are these zones meant to be for the final status or during the transitional phase? And are these zones meant to be temporary and for a limited time?

Sharon: The zones are intended to be part of the final status. We need to define the status of the zones. Cultivators in the zones could carry on farming the land. I have explained the Israeli government's position and my personal position, and there are two possibilities. We could continue the process of negotiation to the very end and attempt to reach peace once and for all. But such an arrangement holds many problems. There are the issues of Jerusalem and the security zones.

Abu Ala: And there are the refugees.

Sharon: That is an issue that requires a committee all of its own. What concerns me is that these problems will hold us back, because if we were to come up against an obstacle, the situation would become more difficult. The Israeli people are in a bad mood, and lack patience. The public reacts quickly to anything that happens. I sense the prevalence of what I once called 'crazy Israel'. I am inclining towards a restricted but definite objective that would be achievable. This will not be peace, but a stage below it, a kind of truce. We need an entity made up of geographically linked territories under the Palestinian Authority, with which we would

cooperate closely in all fields, in order to have stable relations. This would be less than an official state of peace, but we can see then how relations would develop while we continue to look for solutions. I would like to see a situation where Jenin is linked to Nablus by bridges and tunnels. We should establish relations between us and see how things develop. What would frighten me would be coming to a dead end. That is why what we want is a period of stability, and then we can talk about the following period. I have not discussed this with the government.

Abu Ala: I would like to ask some questions off the record. What would we call the arrangements you are suggesting? What do we call the residual and undefined areas? How can we guarantee that the conflict will not persist if there continue to be residual lands? I am impressed by the boldness with which you present this idea, but I am not so taken with the idea itself.

Sharon: After our last meeting, I started to think over this subject, after I had suggested to you the idea of the security zones. You asked about how long we would be holding on to such zones and I said indefinitely. When you said you would consider the idea if it were for a limited period of time, I started to think about the subject harder. Regarding your first question, we can call it a 'no war agreement', until we arrive at a final settlement. We can discuss cooperation and building of relations during this period of time. The positive thing about this situation would be the absence of dispute. I am trying to avoid anything that could lead to a rapid return of confrontation; something that will reassure me there will be no confrontation. That way, we will have obtained less than everything we want and you will have obtained less than everything you want, but we will have achieved a stability that would make it easier to reach a solution. As for the subject the Prime Minister talked to you about – the implementation of existing commitments – you will have to take the implementation of all items of the Hebron Agreement very seriously. This is a direction that could bring definite hope. We have no ambition to administer Arab land, nor do we wish to control the lives of the inhabitants, and we have no territorial ambitions. Our interests lie only in certain areas that overlook our villages and some crossroads. Perhaps we can consider this issue further. As for the undefined areas, I know that your fear is that they will have no administrative link with you. That is

not our problem. My concern is that one day someone will come and say to us, 'Come on, you have to leave this land.'

Abu Ala: Do these proposals come merely from the mistrust that obsesses Israel? Are you sure it is not a ruse to gain control of our land? I want to live with you as a neighbour. If you do not trust us, that is one thing, but if you came to have a degree of confidence in us, then that would be another story.

Sharon: On matters that relate to our existence, we rely only on ourselves. We cannot depend on anyone for our survival. We have had a difficult experience. Going back to 1920, I do not think that the Jews decided, all of a sudden, to go and kill Arabs. This was so also for the events of 1921, 1929, 1933, 1936, and 1939. With the onset of war on 29 November 1948, as well as the attacks on roads, the Palestinians fought for five months before the arrival of the Arab armies. At some locations, they fought fiercely and to the death. Thousands of Jews and Palestinians were killed. In the autumn of 1948, the first terrorist operation took place when they killed a watchman and cut off his ears. A cycle of violence began. Jews never take the initiative to wage war. But we will not depend on anybody. That is the lesson we learned. As a private individual, I would have entrusted my rifle to my host. I cannot do that when I am responsible for a nation.

Abu Ala: Egypt is the largest and most influential Arab country, and strives for peace, to which it is dedicated. It has exhorted everybody in the region, including ourselves, to back peace. Egypt signed a peace treaty with you, but was still not able by its own efforts to open any other Arab door for you. When we signed the Declaration of Principles agreement with you, on the other hand, the doors of many Arab, Muslim, and non-aligned capitals were opened to you for the first time. One of the most important events in Israel's history was the economic conference held in Casablanca, where Israel's government and leadership, as well as the leaders of world Jewry, sat side by side with Arab leaders. Therefore, a stable peace agreement with your Palestinian neighbours would be to your great advantage as well as ours. We must build good relations in all fields, including our economies. The Oslo Agreement paid attention to this point and that is why it included an addendum on cooperation and the

‘people to people’ programme. A while ago, I met with representatives of both Palestinian and Israeli youth groups. Both sides talked to me with one voice. I am sure that they would speak in the same way to Minister Sharon. I do not ask for mistrust to be set aside without safeguards. The solution that we envisage includes security arrangements, because, if we fail to agree on this, the discussion of other ideas could lead us into disputes and confrontations. But I do want you first of all to acknowledge that this land belongs to me. Then we can discuss these security-related points about which you are concerned.

Sharon: As I see it, all the areas from Beit She’an to Arad need to be security zones. Shall I explain why?

Abu Ala: I want to know first whose territory it is, and then we shall not disagree on security. I don’t want to talk about the cultivation of the land. The peace process in which I have been involved recognises that if there is to be no dispute, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip must belong to the Palestinians.

Sharon: I have been thinking about an alternative solution, for example with linked economic zones. This is far from what you want, but it could provide stability without confrontation during this period, and perhaps different kinds of relationships could quickly develop. If economic relationships and other kinds of linkages could take root, Israel could in the future be more generous. Another option is that of withdrawals, with the gradual transfer of areas either in three stages or one, without going into percentages, on condition that the commitments of the Hebron Agreement are met. Why should we seek to go in other directions? We will not do what the Americans ask us to do. They cannot dictate to you or to us. That is why we have to settle matters together between ourselves. Final settlement will rest on three pillars: security zones; water problems, including the distribution and conservation of water; and the management of historic and religious areas. On the economy, there are amazing possibilities for cooperation, such as the importation of Saudi natural gas through Palestinian Authority territories.

Abu Ala: These are ideas that give us cause for concern and considerable apprehension. Your underlying purpose is to divide the West Bank,

something we cannot agree to and don't accept. As for gas, why don't you get it from Egypt?

Sharon: Egypt has refused, for political reasons.

Abu Ala: How do you see your relationship with Egypt?

Sharon: It is not the peace we hoped for. Our belief is that they are building up the strongest army in the Middle East.

Abu Ala: I think that at the present moment it would be difficult to get gas from Saudi Arabia. But if you move forward with the peace process, it could become possible.

Sharon: We can bring gas by sea from Qatar or Russia. I would like to discuss the refugees and humanitarian issues.

Abu Ala: I would like to talk about our official attitude to the Iraqi crisis. Our position is clear. We explained it to the Prime Minister. We take the view that no force should be used against Iraq, and that the Iraqi people should not continue to go hungry. We would like to see Iraq implement the United Nations resolutions. The Palestinian leadership met on Friday evening and the media reported our position on Saturday. Both you and the Americans ought to be aware of this. As for the working groups, we agreed with the Prime Minister that in the case of outstanding problems faced by these groups, the heads of each group should go separately to Arafat and Netanyahu to settle outstanding issues at the earliest possible date. I made this suggestion today and I shall discuss it with President Arafat. However, there are matters that can only be resolved by Israel, such as the industrial zone and why it should be subject to closure. Why should certain individuals be banned from making use of the safe passages?

Sharon: Let us sit down and go over things again. I want to stress, once more, that the utmost effort must be made to prevent acts of terrorism, particularly if Iraq were to be attacked, because reaction from the Israeli public opinion would be strong.

Abu Ala: We are against any attack on Iraq. We would prefer to see a political solution. On Tuesday, the Palestinian Legislative Council will hold a session at which there is bound to be anger against what will be referred to as the application of double standards. We shall issue a statement expressing disapproval of any military strike against Iraq that will at the same time call on Iraq to abide by the United Nations resolutions.

Face to face with Netanyahu

The Palestinian leadership also felt we should talk directly to Netanyahu himself, and again I was asked to take the lead. I decided to begin by making contact with someone close to Netanyahu, and chose to approach an acquaintance of Netanyahu whom I had previously met. This was the Israeli lawyer Yitzik Molho, a friend of the Israeli Prime Minister. Netanyahu trusted Molho, an able lawyer who headed a law practice in Jerusalem. Married to a professor at the Hebrew University, he came from a wealthy Jerusalem business family and owned a handsome residence in West Jerusalem. He also had a luxurious second home in Caesarea, where on a previous occasion I had met the famous Canadian philanthropist Charles Bronfman at a dinner attended by Uri Savir as well as by the daughter of Israel's President, Ezer Weizman, and her husband. Molho had chosen to continue with his legal career rather than taking up a ministerial portfolio under Netanyahu. He was very keen to pour oil on troubled waters to ensure the survival of his friend's government, especially after Netanyahu began to face criticism from inside Likud as well as from outside. Molho's motives for backing Netanyahu were more personal than political. In fact, he was not particularly hard-line in his personal approach to political issues, which was a further qualification for him to be a mediator.

On 10 August 1998, through Yitzik Molho's good offices, I had my first face-to-face encounter with Netanyahu, at the Prime Minister's house in West Jerusalem. Molho himself and Yitzhak Mordechai, Minister of Defence, were also present. Over the next two months, Netanyahu and I met on a number of occasions. Our second meeting took place the following day, 11 August, and we met again on 15 August and 27 September. We held a fifth encounter on 30 September and a sixth on 15 October. All these meetings took place in Jerusalem. The seventh and final meeting between us took place on 3 March 1999 in Zürich, towards the

end of Netanyahu's time in office, in the presence of Molho and Terje Rød-Larsen. My personal belief was that Netanyahu would never change his ideology and political convictions, whatever developments there might be in the local and international political arenas and no matter how serious these might be. The topics we discussed in our confidential encounters were the completion of the withdrawal and redeployment of Israel's troops, the issue of settlements, and preparations for the continuation of the final status negotiations. It should be said that during these meetings Netanyahu did not behave at all like the arrogant figure made familiar by the media. At the personal level, he was courteous and amicable, even kindly and warm. At Netanyahu's first meeting with Yasser Arafat, to which Netanyahu eventually agreed, with much reluctance, Abu Ammar gave Netanyahu a box of luxury Cuban cigars, which the Prime Minister accepted with obvious pleasure. He always showed personal respect for President Arafat and appeared to understand why and how Arafat operated as he did. At the same time, Netanyahu never concealed his apprehension and concern over what steps Arafat might take in his dealings with Israel.

We never met alone. Molho was usually there, and Netanyahu often brought with him other ministers, including Avigdor Kahalani and Yitzhak Mordechai. Sometimes I held discussions with Kahalani and Mordechai, while Netanyahu listened attentively. On one occasion, I noticed that Kahalani, who was Minister for Security, did not appear to oppose the withdrawals from the West Bank that Israel was due to make, though he was vehemently opposed to withdrawal from the Golan Heights. I was aware that Kahalani, who headed a four-member Knesset committee, had served in the Golan as an army officer. Afterwards, he set up a pressure group known as the 'Golan Lobby'. He was prepared to make compromises on many issues except in relation to quitting Golan, which in his view had a unique strategic significance for Israel.

During one of my meetings with Netanyahu, I went to the Prime Minister's residence with Abu Mazen. Yitzik Molho had invited us to lunch at his home and then drove us on to Netanyahu's house in his own car. We met in a salon where one of the pictures was a landscape of the town of Safad, Abu Mazen's birthplace. Abu Mazen said later he felt that by making sure we saw this picture Netanyahu intended to imply that Israel's possession of Safad, and other formerly Arab towns, was beyond debate. Netanyahu and Abu Mazen talked about the memories they shared of Safad, then Netanyahu turned to another of the pictures in the room, a

portrait of his elder brother, Yonatan. Yonatan Netanyahu had been killed in the action at Entebbe airport in Uganda on 3 July 1976, when Israeli commandos rescued Israeli hostages from a hijacked Air France plane. Netanyahu spoke with glowing admiration about his brother's achievements and what a fine man he had been.

Before these face-to-face meetings, much time had been spent on unproductive indirect exchanges between Israel and the Palestinians. An American initiative calling for Israel to withdraw from 13 per cent of the West Bank had absorbed much attention. Meanwhile, the timetable for the first, second and third phases of redeployment was frozen, while the pace of settlement building accelerated and the Israeli campaign to step up the Jewish presence in East Jerusalem was intensified. At my meetings with Netanyahu, I took the opportunity to make absolutely clear the Palestinian position on the outstanding issues of the transitional phase. These included the following:

- 1) The first, second and third troop redeployments;
- 2) The transfer of 14.2 per cent of the territory of the West Bank from Zone B to Zone A (i.e. from partial to full Palestinian control);
- 3) The settlement of security issues, in the light of the Memorandum of Understanding agreed by the Palestinians, Israelis, and Americans;
- 4) The release of Palestinian prisoners;
- 5) The settlement of the remaining issues, including the airport, the seaport, the safe passages, the industrial zone, economic issues, and water resources;
- 6) Unilateral actions by Israel which included a freeze on further settlements, bypasses, and sundry territorial violations in and around Jerusalem;
- 7) The timetable for all the above issues;
- 8) The preparation of the ground for the final status negotiations.

Many of the measures taken by Netanyahu's government were aimed at the creation of what the Israelis liked to call 'new facts on the ground'. The intended effect of this was to confirm the occupation of our territory and to obstruct the implementation of agreements. Such moves

included the settlement of Abu Ghneim (Har Homa), south of Jerusalem in the spring of 1997, which constituted a serious violation of existing agreements, and in general Netanyahu's intensification of the process of settlement in 1997. Of the 130 West Bank settlements that existed when Netanyahu came to power, 93 were expanded. Work was started on the construction of nearly 7,000 homes with the objective of augmenting the number of settlers by 10 per cent. At least thirteen locations were earmarked for new settlements. In addition, the Netanyahu government lifted the freeze on the construction of new settlements that Rabin had begun to enforce, decreeing that building could begin without official approval. The opening of the new door into the Hasmonean tunnel under the Aqsa Mosque in September 1996 further aggravated the situation. The Palestinians saw this as a threat to the status of Jerusalem and the Muslim holy places, which were protected by international law and bilateral agreements. The move led to the outbreak of what was called at the time the 'tunnel uprising'.

My last encounter with Netanyahu took place in Switzerland in March 1999. When we met, Netanyahu had frequently raised the notion of reciprocity, claiming it was the Palestinians who never implemented their commitments. At this final meeting, I said to him, 'Give me a list of the ten items you want us to implement and I will convey it directly to President Arafat,' adding, 'I will wager my political future that they will be done.' Netanyahu immediately changed the subject, saying, 'There is another issue, which is the declaration of the Palestinian state.' At that moment, I perceived that he would persist in his evasive tactics whatever he was offered, since his true motive was to avoid at all costs the implementation of any of Israel's existing commitments. Whatever he was offered, he would ask for more, or suddenly discover he had wanted something else all along, in order to avoid having to agree with us on any issue. Because of this, I decided to meet him no further. I learned one thing that greatly interested me, however, and this was that Ariel Sharon was the real power in Israel. At one of our meetings, Netanyahu himself said I should pursue my contacts with Sharon. According to Netanyahu, Sharon was the major power in the government, and without his approval Netanyahu himself was unable to make any substantive policy decisions.

My second encounter with Sharon

By 1998, despite our efforts, the situation had reached deadlock. Against this background, the United States continued to make intensive diplomatic efforts. After much activity on the part of the Americans, official negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians at the highest level were finally reopened. Finally, in the summer of 1998, the Americans decided to convene the summit meeting in the United States, which eventually took place at Wye River. On the Palestinian side, I must say that we were encouraged by the prospect. We made genuine efforts, to the best of our ability, to overcome whatever obstacles might stand in the way of the summit's success.

On 3 October 1998, as preparations for Wye River were under way, Ariel Sharon became Minister of Foreign Affairs, a major post commensurate with his real status within the government. His elevation gave his already extensive influence a further boost. With the approval of the Palestinian leadership, I telephoned Sharon to offer him our congratulations. During the brief conversation we held, we agreed to hold a second meeting as soon as possible. On 13 October 1998, we met at the Hotel Laromme in Jerusalem, shortly before the two delegations were about to travel to Washington to attend the Wye River summit. As we sat down to talk, it was very much on Sharon's mind that an Israeli citizen had just been murdered near the village of Walajah, south of Jerusalem. He expressed his displeasure at the news, and insisted yet again that the Palestinian Authority should step up its action against terrorism, 'waging war', as he put it, on terrorists and their infrastructure. He accepted that his own Likud government had failed to resolve Israel's security problem, but in effect asked us to do the job for him by taking pre-emptive action against those whom Israel regarded as terrorists. He re-emphasised that Israel would refuse to sign any agreement in Washington if the Palestinians failed to implement all the articles of the Hebron Agreement.

In terms of its results, it could not be said that this meeting with Sharon was successful. However, I like to think I opened a small breach in the wall that Sharon had worked hard to build between Israel and the Palestinians. Sharon urged me to agree with him that we should resolve as many issues as we could between ourselves before going to Washington. He also wanted to make detailed preparations for the summit, and emphasised that Netanyahu would not sign a blanket agreement that deferred

any issues to a later date. He stressed that the summit's success depended on a commitment by the Palestinians to take specific security actions, and on the amendment of the Palestinian National Charter. However, he promised us he would personally reactivate all the sub-committees attached to the steering committee on his return from Washington. He told me he had many proposals to pursue in the fields of cooperation over water, electricity, and railways. I present here a partial reconstruction of our conversation from notes taken at the time:

Abu Ala: I am here to offer you my congratulations in person, following our telephone conversation on the day you were elevated to your new position.

Sharon: I was pleased to get your call, but though I was flattered I have told nobody that you rang me. The murder near Walajah today was a bad business.

Abu Ala: There are bad people on both sides of the divide between us.

Sharon: Yes, but their numbers are not equal. When are you setting off for Washington?

Abu Ala: Tomorrow we travel to London. Then, once we are in the United States we shall pay a call at the Mayo Clinic in Baltimore to visit King Hussein. Then, we shall go on to Washington DC. First, there are to be separate meetings at the White House for the two sides, after which both delegations leave for Wye River . . . How long do the Israelis plan to stay there?

Sharon: The delegation must leave the United States on 19 October to be back here on the morning of 20 October.

Abu Ala: Amongst us, everybody is saying the outcome is entirely in your personal hands.

Sharon: The Prime Minister is the Prime Minister. It would have been better to finalise everything before we leave here in order to be better prepared.

Abu Ala: What is the problem? Sometimes people make an issue out of nothing . . . The issue of redeployment from 13 per cent of the land has been resolved.

Sharon: How?

Abu Ala: Are you still opposed to the proposed formula we have come up with?

Sharon: Yes, because I do not think it is right. We want you first to implement all the commitments of the Hebron Agreement.

Abu Ala: As a practical man you are aware that what happens on the ground is more important than agreements. Uri Savir and I are better aware of that than anyone else.

Sharon: I don't believe Israel will sign anything unless you agree to take certain measures and undertake an anti-terrorist plan, with an unrelenting campaign against terrorists. This has been demonstrated by the death of the woman soldier in the Jordan valley not long ago, and the Walajah affair today.

Abu Ala: These events were regrettable, but such things happen everywhere. As President Arafat said, we make a 100 per cent effort to prevent such actions but cannot guarantee a 100 per cent result.

Sharon: There is no real effort on your part against the infrastructure of the terrorist organisations.

Abu Ala: What infrastructure? As if there is some vast infrastructure! It is important you should understand what this infrastructure is that you are talking about.

Sharon: We believe that there should be a systematic struggle against terrorism. Israel will not withdraw unless you take serious measures to fight terror.

Abu Ala: I have a question for you, as a military expert. Comparing Likud's time in power with the previous era, which is better, from a security point of view?

Sharon: It was better under Labour. Still, on your side, you do not take the initiative to fight terror; you only react to it after it has happened.

Abu Ala: We never cease to take the issue seriously, and the Israeli security services are well aware of that.

Sharon: In any event, nobody should avoid the implementation of commitments.

Abu Ala: But both parties should implement their commitments simultaneously.

Sharon: I am talking to you because I believe that you want to move matters on and make progress. The obstacle that stands in our way is your failure to implement your security commitments. It would have been better to sort all these things out before travelling to Washington.

Abu Ala: What obstacles remain? The additional 13 per cent of redeployment has been resolved and the same can be said about the transfer of 14.2 per cent of Zone B to Zone A.

Sharon: I did not know that.

Abu Ala: It is there. According to the agreements, all B zones should by now have been transferred to Zone A. As for the security plan, real efforts are being made to have it finalised. On the issues related to the transitional stage, the remaining gaps between the two parties are narrow and we can bridge them. I believe that if we resolve these issues and get to the final status negotiations, then we can do serious business.

Sharon: I don't think the Prime Minister can sign anything unless there is a complete package covering everything.

Abu Ala: We also want a package deal.

Sharon: There is the issue of the third phase of redeployment, which the Prime Minister has said should cover 1 per cent only.

Abu Ala: Nobody will accept that.

Sharon: I know Bibi well. He has said you are his favourite interlocutor and that he enjoyed meeting you. We know you are an intelligent man, and we do not underestimate you. I say this sincerely. Nevertheless, I do not think that you have fully grasped the situation. Today's killing was too bad.

Abu Ala: Let us look for the reasons for occurrences like this and eliminate them. This situation is an embarrassment to us and has unfortunate consequences for our people. On the other hand, the murders committed by that settler in Hebron did just as much damage. I was in Hebron today and people were angry with me. They asked me, 'Why are you going to Washington? Look what they are doing here.' Settlement building has to be stopped. You cannot negotiate while you are continuing to create settlements. Our prisoners must be released as well.

Sharon: The Palestinian Authority undertook to take action in Hebron and has not done so.

Abu Ala: Why are you building more units at Rumeidah Hill [near Hebron], and at this critical time, in particular?

Sharon: What do you want? Do you want the settlers to be buried alive at Rumeidah Hill?

Abu Ala: No, but your reaction should not have been like that. The enemies of peace have thrown a bomb by building a settlement. We want no reasons for hostility between us.

Sharon: These things keep happening all the time and we have to defend our people.

Abu Ala: You cannot defend yourselves by penalising our entire people.

Sharon: Who is penalising an entire people? There are 100,000 labourers entering Israel everyday.

Abu Ala: This statistic is not enough for us. What would be enough would be an end to the closures, the blockades, the demolition of our homes, the daily provocations, the ongoing settlement building, and the continual violations of the status quo in Jerusalem.

Sharon: Three days ago, Israeli homes were fired on. This is not an act of coexistence.

Abu Ala: You must admit that coexistence in Hebron has failed.

Sharon: You know that my opinion was that we should have only 2,000 Palestinians under our control within a limited area, not 17,000. I also suggested that the Hebron market should be moved somewhere else.

Abu Ala: That would be acceptable on a temporary basis, but not permanently.

Sharon: There is a Jewish area that must be preserved, which includes Jewish cemeteries thousands of years old. In Hebron, you can touch stones that are a thousand years old.

Abu Ala: I passed through the old town in Hebron just today. It looked fine, but there is no normal life in it.

Sharon: There must be an alternative location for the market. We could go there together and find a suitable solution.

Abu Ala: There is enough hostility between us already. It is not good to stir it up. I am prepared to work with you to resolve the problems.

Sharon: With pleasure: when I come back from Washington, I shall reactivate the sub-committees for water, electricity, and the Gaza–Tulkarem railway. Representatives of an American company came to me, but I had no Palestinians to discuss it with.

Abu Ala: If you like, we could meet President Arafat for a session dedicated to this during the Wye River summit.

Sharon: Let us leave it for another time. There is a lot of serious work on rail links we could embark on without making them conditional on the seaport. We could build a railway connecting the port of Ashdod with the industrial zone and then with Egypt.

Abu Ala: We do want your support for the seaport, which will take between three and four years to build.

Sharon: There is no problem if it is at the old location. The new one is unacceptable because it will be difficult to access from Netzarim for security purposes.

Abu Ala: Did you know that there are 65,000 members of the Jericho Casino Club, of whom the majority are Israelis? The common denominators of coexistence between us outnumber reasons for enmity.

Sharon: I believe that. However, we have to find ways to live together. I want you to understand that the only way forward is for you to fight terrorism. Israel will suffer if you do not do so, and there will be no agreement in Washington if you are not prepared to fight terrorism. Furthermore, the Palestinian National Charter must be abolished. Don't try to tell us that it has already been done. We hear that Salim al-Zanun, the chairman of the Palestinian National Council, is already preparing the Palestinian people for the declaration of independence.

Abu Ala: We want your help in reaching an agreement on our plans to declare independence. We cannot live with mere autonomy.

Sharon: The Palestinian National Council must be convened.

Abu Ala: Will you agree to allow in those of its members who oppose the peace process?

Sharon: They can be allowed in to vote at the Council and then leave. I still don't think you understand the point I have reiterated many times, that Israel will not sign a deal unless the security issues are resolved.

Abu Ala: Again and again, I observe that Israel never defines what it means by terrorism.

Sharon: To me, it is perfectly well defined and well understood. We know what it is we want you to do.

Abu Ala: We already do more than you ask for, and there is full cooperation between our respective security services.

Sharon: We gave you a list of names but you did nothing.

Abu Ala: What do you want us to do to them? Do you want us to kill them?

Sharon: Extradite them to us.

Abu Ala: So why don't you hand over to us those Israelis who kill Palestinians? Instead you give them early release from prison.

Sharon: That is not true.

Abu Ala: In any case, rest assured that we have lists of the names of those Israelis who have been involved in killing Palestinians and we monitor this situation very closely. But we do not want to spark off a vendetta, as in Algeria. However, we cannot allow Israel to dictate to us. We must devise ways together to build confidence between us, not just parrot these old accusations that we fail to fight terrorism.

Sharon: How people view each other depends on what happens before people's eyes. The people of Israel will not condone murder.

Abu Ala: We do not condone it either; so, we both have to act against it. When we draw up our own plan to combat terrorism, you have to accept our independence of action. We must not appear to be your agents. We fulfil our obligation to safeguard both Israeli and Palestinian security and we implement our commitments. This will consolidate our coexistence on a basis of mutual respect.

Sharon: You must be relentless against terrorism. This is not for our benefit alone but also for yours. God forbid, nobody is asking you to be our agent. We want this done so that we can make progress on the economic issues. We want to press on with cooperation in water, electricity, and the industrial sector. On water, you have signed two contracts with an American company and one with a German firm, but neither of these is doing its job properly. You have the eastern region that you can exploit, and we can help you there. On electricity, we want to know what your requirements are. You need to decide whether you want a separate power station or one that will also supply us.

Abu Ala: We would like a separate power station. We don't want to go into detail on that at the moment. In principle, however, we would like to cooperate with you in all spheres.

Sharon: I shall activate all the sub-committees after Washington. But time will be wasted if you do not fulfil all your commitments.

Abu Ala: And you have to implement all your commitments.

Sharon: Certainly, but you will be mistaken if you think that pressure will influence our decisions.

Abu Ala: I am aware that pressure would not be fruitful. However, I also know that I am nevertheless in a position to bring pressure to bear on you to a greater extent than any third country, and the same is true for you in relation to us.

Sharon: The remaining hours before the summit should be used to narrow the gaps. While you were a businessman, I was a soldier. I am sure you know that it was our crossing of the Suez Canal that brought peace with Egypt.

Abu Ala: I assure you that on the Palestinian side we are all making sincere efforts to lay foundations for the future. We hope that the Washington conference will succeed so that we can afterwards meet on a regular basis.

Sharon: I am even more interested in that than you are. But, as a friend, you have to understand that there are things we cannot compromise on. I know that you have many problems, but the Prime Minister could well come back from Washington without signing anything. I would like him to sign, though.

Abu Ala: That would be bad.

Sharon: It will be bad for everybody. When I heard Sheikh Yassin say that in thirty years Israel will be no more, I thought of getting back on my tank.

Abu Ala: What he says makes no sense.

Sharon: But people listen to it.

Abu Ala: We would like to bury a century of enmity between us.

Sharon: When an Arab kills a Jew, you say he is merely deranged.

Abu Ala: And you say the same.

Sharon: You underestimate the security problem.

Abu Ala: We do not. This is a serious matter, but exaggerating it leads to undesirable results. We have devised a way to handle this, based on the agreements we have both signed, which does not look as if we are acting under dictation by Israel. You talk about reciprocity in security matters, but reciprocity means decommissioning illegal arms and extraditing murderers on both sides.

Sharon: You must take the decision to dismantle terror groups.

Abu Ala: President Arafat, as our leader, is perfectly able to deal with the Islamist organisations, and to contain them. Just let us finalise this stage now, and then we can move on to a new phase of trust, cooperation, and mutual respect. Let us stop exchanging recriminations about the past, because we both have our own history. But we have to look to the future.

Wye River

What led to the Wye River summit was President Clinton's mounting frustration at Netanyahu's persistent obstruction of the peace process and Clinton's own determination to make a breakthrough in the Middle East before leaving office. The year of stagnation had left him frustrated. On 30 July 1997, in the wake of a suicide bombing which claimed the lives of eighteen Israelis, the Netanyahu government had suspended negotiations with the Palestinians. A month later, on 30 August 1997, Israel failed to implement the scheduled redeployment of its forces in the West Bank. The American administration concluded that an already poor situation was deteriorating still further, with no hint there might be any improvement. On 10 September 1997, the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, began a visit to Israel, at the end of which an announcement was made that contacts between Israel and the Palestinians would resume. A second summit meeting between Israel and the Palestinians took place on 8 October 1997. From 6 to 10 December 1997, the American Middle East envoy, Dennis Ross, visited the region, but no breakthrough in the peace process followed. Then, on 14 January 1998, Israel announced its decision to retain control over parts of the West Bank, whatever kind of agreement was signed with the Palestinians. On 30 March 1998, Israel rejected the American initiative calling on it to withdraw from around 13 per cent of the West Bank. On 29 April 1998, the Palestinian Authority approved the American initiative. Israel's position remained unaltered, however, until Netanyahu declared, under intense pressure and after repeated diplomatic interventions on the part of the Americans, that he would agree to the withdrawal.

As a result of the mounting tension, and in an attempt to clear the air, a brief tripartite summit meeting in Washington was convened by President Clinton in Washington on 28 September 1998, to be attended by himself, Yasser Arafat, and Benjamin Netanyahu. At this preliminary meeting, the idea of the larger-scale conference eventually to take place at Wye River was first mooted. A few days after that, Sharon became Israel's Foreign Minister. On 7 October 1998, the American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, announced at the end of her visit to Gaza that Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to a prolonged summit meeting to be held in the United States, which would begin on 15 October 1998. This was to be the most significant event of Netanyahu's period in office, the so-called

Wye River summit, which led to the conclusion of the second agreement between Netanyahu and Arafat. The agreement made there was signed on 23 October 1998 and became known as the Wye River Memorandum, which aimed to facilitate the implementation of the transitional phase, as laid down in the so-called 'Interim Agreement'. It provided in principle for the implementation of the first and second phases of Israeli redeployment in the West Bank, as well as for cooperation on security issues and the attempt to curb terrorist incidents. Illegal weapons were to be collected by the Palestinians and the articles of the Palestinian Charter that alarmed the Israelis were to be repealed. There was continued disagreement with Israel on a range of issues connected with the transitional period, including the timetable and details of the first and second withdrawals.

Issues of subsidiary importance included in the Memorandum were agreement in principle on the construction of the safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the airport at Gaza, the construction of the seaport, the establishment of industrial zones, and future arrangements for bilateral cooperation. Major issues left undecided included the status of Jerusalem, a final agreement about the frontiers of the Palestinian state, the release of our prisoners and the third redeployment. Other issues deferred included the utilisation of water resources, the reciprocity of security commitments, and our grievance over Israel's unilateral measures in Jerusalem, though both sides were enjoined to refrain from taking unilateral measures elsewhere. The American administration had put a great deal of effort into the summit. Madeleine Albright made repeated visits to Israel to put pressure on Netanyahu to attend. Wye River is a secluded conference centre in Maryland, some 100 kilometres from Washington DC. The estate had once belonged to William Paca, a historic governor of Maryland, who had signed the American declaration of independence. Within the complex, overlooking the Wye River, there are gardens that date back to the eighteenth century as well as a well-appointed conference centre, a complex of luxury chalets, sports facilities, and a gymnasium. All this lies amid deep woods filled with an abundance of wildlife. President Clinton's hope was that the peaceful atmosphere, not unlike that in Camp David, would give us space and free us from external pressures in a way that might help to break the deadlock. Security considerations also played a part. The conference centre had extensive grounds, and was far away from possible intruders. It was

easy to keep outsiders away. In 1995, unofficial talks between Israel and Syria had been held there.

The Americans insisted that the talks should be held in total confidentiality, and negotiators were asked not to talk to the media. The talks opened on 15 October 1998 in Washington DC, with a morning session at the White House between President Clinton, Chairman Arafat, and Prime Minister Netanyahu. The two delegations then moved on to Wye River, accompanied by Secretary of State Albright. President Clinton joined them in the afternoon and held separate talks with Arafat and Netanyahu. At the end of the day a private dinner was scheduled for Netanyahu and Arafat with Albright and Clinton. At the first session of negotiations, Clinton and Albright faced the two delegations across the table, with Arafat, myself, and Abu Mazen on his right side. On the left sat Netanyahu and the Israeli delegation. Netanyahu got up from his chair to shake hands with us, one by one. Abu Ammar reciprocated and shook hands with the other members of the Israeli delegation. President Clinton said, 'We have a tough task ahead of us, to reach agreement and push the peace process forward. We are going to need a little time to achieve success.' Clinton repeated his determination to do all that was in his power to revive the peace process, some seventeen months after it had stalled. In particular, he said he aimed to secure an early Israeli military withdrawal from 13 per cent of the West Bank, and to make it possible to initiate negotiations on the final status of the occupied Palestinian territories.

There were meant to have been four days of talks, ending on Sunday evening, 18 October. Because of the plethora of controversial issues, however, and the evasive tactics of the Israelis, the Americans were obliged to extend the talks, a day at a time, until the Memorandum was at last signed, on the morning of 23 October. The apparent goal of the Israelis was to obtain a partial agreement, while the Palestinians refused and stood firm for all or nothing, backed up in this by the Americans. In desperation, the Americans finally asked for the help of the late King Hussein of Jordan, who was at the time receiving palliative treatment for his cancer at the Mayo Clinic. Though ill and weak, King Hussein came twice to Wye River, and as a figure respected by all parties was in fact able to help engineer an agreement. A real surprise was that Ariel Sharon came over from Israel on the fourth day. Because of Sharon's notorious extremism, both the Americans and the Palestinians saw this as a bad omen. However, it seemed the Israelis felt that only Sharon could save the talks. We had

observed that Netanyahu's strategy prior to Sharon's arrival had been to play for time and avoid substantive issues. Once the Israelis had returned home, however, Sharon would be able to provide Netanyahu with a shield against the recriminations of the settlers and the fanatical right wing, thus enabling Netanyahu to agree to the concessions he needed to make.

A highly contentious issue, which Netanyahu had insisted on including in the talks, was his demand for the extradition of thirty Palestinians wanted by Israel, including Brigadier General Ghazi Al-Jabali, the Chief Superintendent of the Palestinian police force, and some other police functionaries. It was completely inconceivable that the Palestinian delegation could agree to such a provocative demand. While Netanyahu was wasting time in this way, we busied ourselves in improving our relations with the Americans. We won promises of generous financial support. We also agreed to set up permanent joint committees with the Americans that would be active in the future, covering various fields of cooperation. We were encouraged that the Americans seemed willing to deal with us virtually as if we were already a sovereign state. We also reached an agreement on security issues, under the auspices of the Americans, which was in principle accepted by the Israeli delegation. Netanyahu, however, withheld his approval, and when Sharon arrived, he flatly rejected the security deal. Sharon declared that Israel would never sign any such agreement. At that point, it was our impression, and that of the Americans, that Sharon had come simply to torpedo the negotiations. It soon emerged that Sharon's motivation was slightly different. He wanted to show his power by demonstrating to the Israeli public that he had the final say-so, and that he was able, if he chose, to frustrate the summit. Among a number of impossible demands Sharon brought with him was the demand that Egypt should release the convicted Israeli spy, Azzam Azzam, which was beyond our remit and powers and would in any case have been unacceptable to both Egypt and the United States. However, Sharon also had other ideas in mind, some of which were more practical and positive.

Netanyahu's behaviour during the first four days of the summit, before Sharon's arrival, was described in confidence by one of the Americans present as pathetic. Even some members of the Israeli delegation found his performance less than satisfactory. He used his intelligence to play games with all present, and flooded the negotiations with unrealistic demands, as if Wye River was a stage on which he was giving a one-man

performance. We agreed it was impossible to discern whether there were real objectives behind all his ploys and charades, or if he was merely trying to dazzle us with his cleverness. When Sharon came on the scene, he dominated the conference room with his physical presence and his hard-headed approach. Matters at once began to take an unexpected direction. Sharon dropped Netanyahu's original demand to have the wanted Palestinians extradited to Israel, asking instead that the American CIA should play a part in their arrest and detention. He agreed in principle to the opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and to the construction of a seaport in Gaza.

Netanyahu still seemed to us to be plagued by his fear of the consequences of taking any definite step. His indecision prevented him from making a positive response to the pressure the Americans brought to bear. He ran away from difficult confrontations. On one occasion, Netanyahu failed to join his delegation at a meeting on the pretext that he needed to take a bath. After a long wait, Abu Ammar turned to the Israeli delegation and said: 'I fear your Prime Minister may have drowned: you had better go and look for him!' A few hours later, the rumour ran around that Netanyahu had packed his things and was ready to leave. On the last day of the talks, which seemed endless, efforts were focused on settling the release of Palestinian prisoners. Midnight passed, and the delegations were still talking. At 2 a.m. Arafat, Netanyahu, and Clinton held a private meeting to discuss the subject. While the meeting was in session, Chairman Arafat suddenly emerged from the room and strode off angrily. Following him out of the room minutes later, President Clinton could be heard saying: 'This is dreadful. I can't bear this dirty business.'

It later transpired that while the three leaders were discussing the release of the prisoners Netanyahu had suddenly said he would release 500 prisoners if Arafat would 'see to' Ghazi Al-Jabali, the senior Palestinian police official wanted by Israel, and arrest the policemen among the list of thirty suspects Israel had named. Arafat asked, 'What do you mean by "see to"? Do you mean I should execute him?' Netanyahu replied, 'I shall not ask and you will not reply.' It was this exchange that brought the meeting to a halt. The violence of President Clinton's reaction was something Netanyahu could not ignore. He went back to ask for a private meeting with the American leader, at which President Clinton demanded the release of 750 Palestinian prisoners, a request to which Netanyahu gave his consent. A deal was in place by 6.45 a.m. However, almost incredibly, Netanyahu

reverted to his old ways, causing another row by threatening to renege on the deal, which was on the point of being announced, unless the United States released an American citizen, Jonathan Pollard, who had spied for Israel. Pollard had been given a long prison sentence in America after being convicted of divulging American intelligence information and military secrets to the Israeli security agency. The Americans absolutely rejected this demand. This last hurdle was surmounted only when Netanyahu dropped his request in regard to Pollard.

On 23 October 1998, Yasser Arafat and Binyamin Netanyahu signed an agreement at the White House at a ceremony presided over by President Clinton, at which King Hussein was also present. Eighteen months of deadlock was broken, with an agreement founded on the principle of land for security. Under the terms of the agreement, direct talks on final status were to start at once between the two sides and Israel was to withdraw in stages from 13 per cent of the West Bank. For our part, on the day after the completion of the Israeli withdrawal, we agreed to the session of the full Palestinian National Council in Gaza. This would be attended by representatives of all the Palestinian institutions and popular organisations. The meeting would enact and ratify as necessary the required amendments to the Palestinian National Charter. In addition, Israel agreed to implement a number of the items of the transitional agreement, including the safe passage from the West Bank to Gaza, the construction of the seaport and the opening of the Gaza Airport.

At the signing ceremony held at the White House, Chairman Arafat gave an address in which he described Netanyahu as 'My new co-partner in the peace process'. He continued, 'This is an important and happy day, a day of achievement that we will always remember with optimism and hope. It is true that what we have achieved is only temporary, [and] that has been late . . . We will never leave the peace process and we will never go back to violence and confrontation.' He added, 'This reconciliation between the two peoples, the Palestinian and the Israeli people, will not divert from its path and will go through negotiations on the table and not through tanks, grenades and barbed wire.' He went on to call for 'the implementation of the Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace, the achievement of political rights of the Palestinian people, and putting every effort possible in the service of achieving security for all, particularly for the Israeli people.' He also called for progress reaching an agreement on final status by 4 May 1999,

and asked President Clinton to maintain his efforts to ensure that the agreement was implemented.

President Clinton said the negotiation of the Wye River summit had been lengthy and arduous, and admonished both parties to build on what had been achieved, embarking on the long journey towards a permanent settlement of their differences. He promised to ask the US Congress to discuss an aid package for the parties. He even undertook to look again at the Pollard affair, but stopped short of committing himself to any policy change on this. He concluded by saying that he would personally attend the Palestinian National Council's intended meeting in Gaza and would give a speech there. He also commended King Hussein for his contribution to the agreement, saying to him, 'We are profoundly in your debt.'

As for Netanyahu, he amazed us by giving an address in which he thanked everybody personally, including Chairman Arafat, saying that Israel and the Middle East as a whole had become a safer place, thanks to the agreement. He went on, 'We are more secure today because, for the first time since the signing of the Oslo Accord, we will see concrete and verifiable commitments carried out. Our Palestinian partners will join us in fighting terrorism . . . But it has been said here, and it is true, that we are just at the beginning, or maybe at the middle, of the road to permanent peace. We will soon embark on negotiations for a permanent peace settlement between two peoples. Now I guarantee you it will not be easy and it will not be simple . . . But I am today brimming with some confidence.' He said also that the signing of the Memorandum 'fills me with the confidence that we are able to tackle the larger challenges that still await us and that still await our two peoples'.

Although Netanyahu relapsed into his old ways after signing the Wye River Memorandum, of which he implemented only what was referred to as the first 'tempo' of the military withdrawals to which he had committed himself, this did not negate the possibilities opened up at Wye River. The significance of the summit as a whole outweighed the individual concessions made to the Palestinians. These included an understanding about the proportion of the territory to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority and the principle construction of the safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the sphere of the economy, concessions we won were the principle that an industrial zone should be constructed in Gaza and that Gaza's international airport and seaport were to be realised. Other issues resolved were the payment of funds to

the Palestinians by the Israeli treasury, and a commitment to the rapid resumption of final status negotiations in order to reach an agreement before 4 May 1999, in other words before the agreed date for the end of the transitional period.

Though many of these items were never implemented, my view is that Wye River was still highly significant in political terms. Not least, the agreement was a turning point for the Likud Party. After Oslo, Likud had vowed never to hand over what it called 'the heart of the Jewish homeland' to the 'enemies of Israel', but it had now accepted the principle of withdrawal from the West Bank. When Binyamin Netanyahu signed the Wye River Memorandum, it was tantamount to the abandonment of the Likud concept of a 'Greater Israel'. Netanyahu was far away from Israel when he made this concession, and would live to regret it when he returned to face the full fury of his right-wing supporters. In addition, the Wye River summit demonstrated the full extent to which America had committed itself to the attempt to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians. This was unprecedented since Oslo, five years before. It opened up new and wider possibilities for the improvement of relations between the Palestinians and the United States, which in practice reached a high point after Wye River. Our brother Abu Ammar, once characterised by the Americans as the arch-terrorist, became, in his new role as the President of the Palestinian Authority, a virtually semi-permanent guest at the White House. The Israelis were not slow to understand the implications of those repeated visits. The reaction of the Likud Party, however, was to rebuke Netanyahu for allowing such an upturn in American–Palestinian relations to take place. The peak of the new Palestinian relationship with the United States came in December 1998, when President Clinton, as he had promised, visited the territories governed by the Palestinian Authority.

Looking back on Wye River, it was in fact the presence and involvement of the Americans that was the most salient feature. The negotiations went on for nine days, with the participation of nearly twenty people in each group, and throughout the whole complex process the dedication of the Americans did not flag. President Clinton's energy and commitment were extraordinary. On some days, talks went on non-stop for twenty hours. Nonetheless, President Clinton made it his business to be present throughout, as far as his other commitments permitted. A number of his foreign policy aides were equally dedicated. These included Secretary of

State Albright, the National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, the CIA director, George Tenet, and Dennis Ross, US Under-Secretary of State who acted as coordinator for the peace process, as well as Vice-President Al Gore. President Clinton outdid them all, seeming to be ever present and often staying up all night as delegates began to drift away to bed in the small hours. He seemed only to need a shower and a little exercise in the morning to refresh himself and restore his alertness. We wondered how he coped without sleep.

I should set down here some of the events that took place in the margin of the talks. Unforgettably, Madeleine Albright made a significant gesture towards the Palestinian delegation on a night that was distinguished by a heated debate on the release of Palestinian prisoners. While Netanyahu and his team were talking about identifying prisoners with 'bloodstained' hands who had to be held, as distinct from others that could over time be released, Albright rose quietly from her seat and took me to one side. What she told me was that we should reject Israel's arguments and insist on the release of all the prisoners, a position we stuck to right to the end.

When Netanyahu threatened to leave, after a tense night when we had shouted at each other and traded harsh words, with everybody's nerves frayed, President Clinton remained admirably unmoved. The climax of the tension came when Netanyahu asked Clinton to release Jonathan Pollard. President Clinton reacted angrily to that and banged the table with his fist, describing the demand as absurd. The Israeli delegation was dismayed and threatened to depart. President Clinton coolly replied that he would force nobody to stay who wished to go. In reaction to another of Netanyahu's threats, made after a night of real tension, when Netanyahu said he should 'burn down Washington', the US National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, who was of the Jewish faith, rose to the occasion. He spoke angrily to Dani Naveh, the Israeli Cabinet Secretary, saying that if President Clinton did not feel it was proper for him to respond to such provocations, Berger would if necessary personally humiliate Netanyahu if he made any further such flippant and contemptuous statements.

In all, the Israeli Prime Minister, who led a disunited delegation whose members openly disagreed over a number of issues, threatened three times to walk out. Each time his bluff was called and the American protocol staff simply came to tell him that the arrangements for his departure had been made. Then Netanyahu would recant, aware that Washington would

hold him up as responsible for the collapse of the talks if he left, and knowing that he could not afford the internal political consequences of failure that would ensue in Israel. Of course, the irony was that, for Netanyahu, the consequences of success were almost as damaging. Having lost the support of the settlers and the extremists, he knew a hasty departure would not help him win it back. In any event, many on the extreme right in Israel abandoned Netanyahu anyway, describing the Wye River Memorandum as a sell-out, as treason, and a serious precedent that could later cost Israel dearly. In due course, this lost Netanyahu both the position of Prime Minister and the leadership of his party.

The first American president on Palestinian soil

I have suggested that one of the most valuable achievements the Palestinians drew from Wye River was the amelioration of relations between the Palestinians and the United States. The Americans began to display an unprecedented level of sympathy with our aspirations. This change in American attitudes resulted in part from the sustained diplomatic effort by my Palestinian colleagues at Wye River and elsewhere, but also because of Netanyahu's bad management and mistakes. Netanyahu's performance deeply annoyed the Americans. As accounts of his behaviour at Wye River began to emerge, Israeli public opinion was also shocked by his apparent disregard of the consequences of his histrionics. His abortive manoeuvres, his empty threats to depart, his disputes with the Americans over protocol, and finally his demeaning clash with President Clinton over Jonathan Pollard, who was regarded in the United States as no more than a convicted criminal, all counted against him.

The first fruit of Palestinian success at Wye River was evident in President Clinton's visit to the Palestinian Authority's territories to address the Palestinian National Council at the session held to amend the Charter, as demanded by Netanyahu. Like other Israelis before him, Netanyahu seemed obsessed by his fears of what he regarded as the hostile clauses of the Palestinian National Charter. Though the offending articles of the Charter were in fact repealed, as the Israelis demanded, in what might have seemed like a victory for Israeli policy, the visit made by Clinton came over as a boost for us and as a rebuke to Netanyahu for his provocation of the Americans. Clinton's visit was a great pleasure to us and a clear endorsement

of our success. On the other hand, it worried many Israelis, who saw it as the clearest possible recognition by the Americans that there was a Palestinian entity, if not a Palestinian state in the making. We ourselves regarded the visit as a major milestone on the road to establishing the independent state.

President Clinton arrived in Israel on 12 December and met Netanyahu on 13 December. On 14 December he flew by helicopter to Gaza Airport, opened on 25 November as a direct result of the Wye Memorandum. His first official engagement was to officiate at the formal opening ceremony for the airport. The Palestinian airport was an object of pride for us and a poignant symbol of the Palestinian nation-to-be, whose citizens had in the past been subjected to so much arbitrary humiliation around the world at the air terminals of other countries, where officials often looked askance at our travel documents. As the red carpet was laid for the first American president ever to set foot on Palestinian soil, the implications of the visit were clear to us and to others. The US president inspected a guard of honour made up of what Israel would have called 'former terrorists' and then stood beneath the American and Palestinian flags to hear the Palestinian national anthem, which celebrates our long struggle against Israel. Millions of Palestinians were thrilled by the scene, which was broadcast in full on international television news channels. Two flags fluttered in the breeze of Gaza, one of them the Stars and Stripes, a flag that in less happy days the Palestinian demonstrators used to burn alongside the flag of Israel. The two presidents, the American and the Palestinian, stood together, shoulder to shoulder. Until recently they had represented two opposing poles of world politics. Now, in the interests of peace, understanding was the order of the day on both sides.

Meanwhile, Israel's leaders recriminated amongst themselves over what they saw as the diplomatic error that had allowed this visit to take place. They asked themselves how the Palestinians had carried off this coup, when until recently Yasser Arafat had been a pariah, banned even from entering American air space on his way to address the UN General Assembly. Now, Arafat had been hosted by the White House and received by Congress, and was suddenly in a position to return that hospitality on his own national soil, inviting to Palestinian territory the leader of the world's sole superpower. Following Wye River, the United States, hitherto always regarded as Israel's particular ally, had begun to deal more even-handedly in all aspects of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and

had even begun to bring pressure to bear on Israel. This was a situation that angered Netanyahu's government further, as it became increasingly apprehensive that the United States was about to recognise Palestinian statehood, whilst Israel was no longer able to rely on the unwavering support of Washington. On 14 December, in President Clinton's speech at the meeting of the Palestinian National Council, he spoke warmly of the commitment to peace shown by the Palestinians and re-emphasised the commitment of the United States to support their efforts. The Palestinian National Council then went into session and repealed the offending clauses of the Palestinian National Charter. Netanyahu, speaking in Israel on the same day, said that this was welcome. However, typically, he said it was only the first step of what the Palestinians would need to do before he would consider implementing the Wye Memorandum. He said the Palestinians should drop their plans to declare statehood, accept Israel's lists of prisoners to be released, halt violence, collect up illegal weapons and cease, as he put it, to incite hostility against Israel.

On 15 December, the day after the PNC meeting, President Clinton and President Arafat met Binyamin Netanyahu for a short summit meeting at the Erez checkpoint, as part of the effort by the United States to start the implementation of the Wye Memorandum. Madeleine Albright, Sandy Berger, and Dennis Ross accompanied President Clinton. The Palestinian delegation consisted of President Arafat, Abu Mazen, Sa'eb Erekat, Abed Rabbo, and myself. Netanyahu and Sharon represented Israel. Sharon made a spectacle of himself when he ostentatiously refused to shake hands with Arafat. He also made an open threat to use the Israeli army against the Palestinians unless what he called Palestinian 'missile factories' were closed down.

On 16 December, President Clinton, together with his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and their daughter, Chelsea, visited Bethlehem with Abu Ammar and his wife, Suha. Guarded by both Palestinian security forces and American security personnel, he toured the Church of the Nativity and other sites. It was clear to us that the Clinton family was thrilled by this historic visit, which, under our supervision, went without a hitch. President Clinton's speech was encouraging and contained expressions of support and undertakings that left us optimistic. Clinton was visibly disappointed, however, by the attitude of the Israeli government and the indications that it had begun already to wash its hands of the Wye River Memorandum. Israel was already failing at every turn to carry out its

commitments according to the specified timetables, and was in particular dragging its feet over the release of prisoners. In fact, the Israelis undertook a foolish ploy when the first batch they released proved to be mostly criminal prisoners and not political detainees. The intention was to hold on to the latter for use in bargaining, which angered President Clinton. I have little doubt that the American leader went home frustrated at Israel's evasive behaviour, at a moment when the ink of the Wye River Memorandum was scarcely dry.

Sharon puts out feelers

A month before the planned date of my third meeting with Ariel Sharon, I was contacted by Michael Wahbeh, an Israeli Arab who was a member of the Likud Party and one of Sharon's assistants. His proposal was to open a further channel of communication between Israel and the Palestinians in addition to those that already existed, with the specific objective of implementing the Wye Memorandum. It appeared that Sharon was, after all, interested in an exchange of ideas with us about the Memorandum, from which other members of the Israeli government were beginning to distance themselves. On 22 December 1998, I met Wahbeh, together with Tomer Orni, Sharon's political adviser. Orni confirmed that he was meeting me at Sharon's request, and said Sharon attached great importance to maintaining his direct relationship with me at such a critical period for Palestinian–Israeli relations. Orni said Sharon wanted to convey that, in spite of the likelihood of early elections in Israel, the Israeli government still wished to continue its effort to make progress with the Palestinians. He said Likud would ask for early elections – within three to six months – although the option of attempting to form a national unity government was still open.

I took the chance to convey my concern over certain key points. The first of these was the issue of settlement building. We found worrying the continual statements made by Israeli officials about the desirability of such building, including plans for new settlements, the expansion of existing ones, and the construction of bypass roads using broad swathes of Palestinian land. Israeli plans to build at Abu Ghneim (Har Homa), at Ras Al-Amoud, and elsewhere, were giving us great concern. We knew that the Israelis always threatened more than they were likely to do, but

we judged much of what they proposed to be serious. We were particularly alarmed by Sharon's exhortation to the settlers to seize the summits of Palestinian hills. This aroused our anger, and my personal reaction was to encourage the Palestinian public to block any such move by any means at their disposal.

The second issue that concerned us was that of the prisoner releases. This had occupied much time and effort at Wye River. I had personally given it much attention and had discussed it repeatedly with President Clinton and other members of the American delegation as well as directly with Netanyahu and his colleagues. It is an issue close to the sentiments of every Palestinian, and I admit there is a temptation to allow emotion to cloud judgement and to exaggerate the issues. The release of 750 prisoners had finally been agreed at Wye River, together with the establishment of a committee to apply the criteria agreed in the Interim Agreement for the later release of the remainder of the Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons. I told Orni that it had come as a big surprise to all of us when out of the first batch of 250 prisoners released, 150 were criminals while only 100 could be described as the 'security' prisoners whose release we had been expecting. We had not been talking about criminals. We had demanded the release of political prisoners who were the victims of the stalled peace process. In spite of the sensitivity of this issue, the Israeli government continued to duck the issue and maintained its insistence on withholding political prisoners from release.

Orni's response was to reiterate that Israel and its government had accepted the Wye Memorandum and continued to see it as fundamental to what we were both trying to do. He asserted that there was a new government decree banning the construction of new settlements. He claimed that Sharon's appeal to the settlers to occupy mountain tops had been merely rash rhetorical flourish, and said Sharon had hastened to clarify his statement, explaining he meant to refer only to areas that were already scheduled for settlement. Israel wanted to reaffirm that its policy was not to build new settlements over and above what was already planned. He added that the new bypass roads for settlers were actually meant to reduce friction between the two sides and were therefore not a contradiction of the Wye Agreement. He also claimed that troop redeployment made it necessary to build new settler roads.

My third encounter with Sharon

Only a few weeks after signing the Wye River Memorandum in Washington on 23 October 1998, general elections became inevitable in Israel after Netanyahu lost his parliamentary majority and as he seemed increasingly unlikely to be able to form a government of national unity. Netanyahu was by this time totally disregarding the commitments he had entered into at Wye River, which threatened to undermine all our efforts, and especially those made by the Americans. The United States continued to press Israel to fulfil its commitments, but in vain. Meanwhile, the Palestinians continued to believe that we should keep the door open to Israel in the hope of avoiding a deadlock that we feared could lead to the loss of all the gains made at Wye River.

We decided in spite of everything to maintain our policy of keeping up contacts with the Israeli government, exploring every possibility of forestalling the loss of what had been agreed. For this reason we decided once more to contact Sharon. Again the task fell to me, because of the personal relationship I had by now established with him. Sharon agreed, through intermediaries, to meet me again, and on 22 January 1999 we met at Havat Hashikmim, his ranch in the Negev. I accepted this willingly, hoping the less formal atmosphere would be conducive to a more open exchange of views. Sharon and his late wife, Lilli, greeted me warmly. Lilli had baked a cake, which Sharon said was a privilege as this was a thing she seldom did. He clearly intended to impress upon me their determination to receive me with hospitality and civility. Notwithstanding his courteous welcome, however, Sharon maintained his usual extremist stance in our conversation.

Once he had told me how pleased he was to receive me at his home, he moved on immediately to talk about internal Israeli political issues, expressing his regret that Yitzhak Mordechai, the Defence Minister in the Netanyahu government, had not been given a place on the Likud list. He regarded that as a mistake. However, he stressed his confidence that Netanyahu would be re-elected as Prime Minister and would thereafter form a government of national unity. He said that this could not now happen before the end of June and for that reason we should therefore get on with our talks rather than waiting for the new government to be formed. He claimed that Israel was actually ready to implement the Wye Agreement, up to and including the redeployment and the release of

prisoners, even during the election campaign, if the Palestinians carried out their commitments. He added that there was no reason why the agreement should not be implemented, and that Likud had nothing to gain in electoral terms from delaying. However, he went on to say that even if the implementation of Wye River were not to prove feasible Israel could not neglect its relations with the Palestinians. He said he believed progress could still be made on economic issues, with improvements in the day-to-day lives of Palestinians. This was already happening, he claimed. More family reunion applications were being approved, Gaza students were allowed to go to their universities in the West Bank, and Palestinian traders were issued permits to enter Israel.

Sharon added that there was a strong possibility of opening the southern safe crossing after minor technical issues were resolved. He also said he saw no problem with opening the northern crossing except for the need for a checkpoint that he said should be set up to the west of Ramallah. However, he stated he was not in favour of the allocation of additional Israeli land to us for the corridors linking the West Bank to the Gaza Strip. As for the Gaza seaport, he said he had concluded it was not necessary and suggested that sea containers be checked in at Netzarim before being sent on to Gaza. Sharon suggested that we could work along three tracks simultaneously. Those were, first, the implementation as far as possible of the Wye River Agreement; second, the activation of all the committees, including the legal committee; and third, the opening of final status negotiations, with each party putting forward the issues it regarded as important. An example of this for Israel, he said, would be the question of the security zones Israel wanted to retain, which he wanted us to talk seriously about. He also explained that Israel would want the Palestinian areas to be demilitarised and the Palestinian Authority to be banned from signing treaties and establishing air links with certain other countries, particularly Iraq and Iran. Because of the shortness of the time available, Sharon suggested that separate phases should be amalgamated, and that he should hold regular meetings with Abu Mazen and with myself, either separately or jointly, so that we could brief President Arafat on progress.

He also spoke about the issue of what he called continuing terrorist activities, which he claimed were an issue of great importance for Israel, adding that no Israeli government could stand idly by in the face of the threat. He objected strongly to what he called the 'revolving door' policy,

whereby, as he alleged, members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad were imprisoned by the Palestinian legal system only to be released soon afterwards. On the collection of arms, he said that the Israeli government was aware of the difficulty of collecting arms in the possession of civilians at one fell swoop, and that the process had to be continuous, with illegal arms in the hands of the Palestinian police being collected first. He also claimed Israel had information that the smuggling of illegal arms via Rafah was continuing.

Sharon suggested a number of detailed economic measures. These were as follows:

- 1) The establishment of a fund to finance small industries with an estimated capital of \$200 million, contributed to by the Gulf States;
- 2) The construction of a desalination plant with a capacity of 50 million cubic metres, something which he had suggested to the Europeans and Americans;
- 3) The establishment of an Egyptian–Israeli–Palestinian free trade zone in Rafah, for which he said he was prepared to allocate a piece of land on the Israeli side.

He also said negotiations were going on to import natural gas from Egypt, which we could also use in a power station of our own. He affirmed he had other economic proposals, but claimed he could find nobody on the Palestinian side to talk to seriously about them. He added that he had the authority to take action in these spheres and to move matters forward.

After a long intervention on his part, I thanked him for his proposals. I pointed out that we had no intention of getting involved in Israeli internal affairs, namely, the Knesset elections. They were none of our concern, and we would respect the Israeli electorate's choice, whatever it might be. Nevertheless, I said, we obviously took an interest in the outcome of the elections since this would impact directly on our welfare. I asked Sharon for a clear and explicit answer to the question of whether Israel was prepared to implement the Wye River Agreement during the election campaign, and in particular the redeployment, the release of prisoners, and the moratorium on unilateral measures. I raised this question because Netanyahu had implied that implementation of the agreement had been put on hold. I stressed to Sharon that we were prepared to carry

out all our commitments but rejected his suggestion that the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum and the work of the various committees should proceed in tandem with the final status negotiations. I also re-emphasised our view that both sides should implement what had been agreed at Wye River and that the serious work being done in all the negotiating sub-committees should be reactivated.

On the issue of additional land for the corridors from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, I emphasised to Sharon that in principle there should be a corridor linking both areas but that we would not make this a demand during the transitional period. I stressed that a further condition on our part was that we wanted any additional land to be acquired from its owners in Israel by consent and not compulsion. The safe corridor was intended to preserve the dignity of our citizens and facilitate their movement between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and we did not want it to be the object of resentment in Israel. I agreed with Sharon that terrorism was a key issue for Israel and that I understood that neither Israel nor any other state could stand by inactive in the face of such a threat. At the same time, I pointed out that what was needed was an examination of the roots of the problem, since the removal of Palestinian grievances would largely halt terrorism, by taking away its justification. There would also be no further reason for outside countries to support it. Concerning what Sharon called 'the revolving door policy', I emphasised that I was in any case personally opposed to political detention. However, the apparent freeze of the Wye River Agreement and the continuation of Israel's settlement activities had left the Palestinian Authority in a weak position in the eyes of Palestinian public opinion. On the other hand, if there were a significant level of troop redeployment, especially if prisoners were also released and settlement activities frozen, the Palestinian Authority would be in a better position to impose its decisions. I informed Sharon that we had embarked on a programme of collecting arms, though Israel's reluctance to implement its agreements had aggravated Palestinian resentment and made this a more difficult task.

To all Sharon's proposals for setting up a fund to finance small industries, desalination, a free trade zone and other activities, I agreed, in principle. However, I told him that the Palestinian leadership was for the moment reluctant to talk about matters which we regarded as of secondary importance, as we felt that this was not the right time to expend energy and attention on them. For us, the important matter was Israel's answer

to two big questions, whether Israel would implement the promised redeployments, and whether it would release our prisoners, as it had undertaken to do. This would enhance our authority in the eyes of the Palestinian people, thus enabling us to carry out our commitments towards Israel over sensitive issues. At the close of our meeting, we agreed to activate all the sub-committees within a week. We also agreed to keep our meeting secret and to meet again at the end of the following week after I had returned from a further trip abroad.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ADVENT OF BARAK

On 17 May 1999, Ehud Barak, the new leader of the Israeli Labour Party, stood for election as Prime Minister at the head of the One Israel list, which had been constructed for the purposes of this election as a means to broaden Labour's electoral base. He won the election and became Prime Minister with a majority of 400,000 votes over Binyamin Netanyahu. Some 300,000 of the votes cast for him were those of Israeli Arabs. By the time Netanyahu had left office, the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which had flourished in 1993, was almost extinct, struggling to stay alive in the face of Netanyahu's hostility. To us, the Netanyahu period seemed to have dragged on interminably, while the hope we had felt when we signed the Oslo Agreement had been almost extinguished. Increasingly, we came to realise how bad a stroke of luck Rabin's death had been for us. During the Netanyahu years, we saw the emergence within Israel of new extremes of hostility to the Palestinians, resulting in part from suicide bombings and other violent tactics on the part of Palestinian groups. Worst of all, such hostility was no longer confined to those on the extreme right of Israel's political spectrum.

By the time of Rabin's death, within a couple of years of the Oslo Agreement, the Palestinians had already begun to observe that on the right wing of Israeli politics opposition to the peace process of the most extreme kind had begun to emerge. Under Netanyahu, the Israeli government embarked on a discreditable strategy of evasion and procrastination, accompanied by the acquisition of our land by dribs and drabs through the expansion of settlements. Meanwhile, we fought tooth and nail to retain what we had achieved during the first phase, continuing all the while in international and domestic arenas to wage what diplomatic and political battles we could against Israeli policy. Sometimes, direct action against Israeli settlement activities was our sole recourse. Meanwhile, we attempted to extend our range of contacts in Israel, establishing relations with

political factions across the spectrum. We even decided to cultivate what links we could with Likud itself, on the assumption that Netanyahu's leadership of the party would be a temporary phenomenon. So, the time was not seen as entirely wasted. Though there were regrettable 'facts on the ground', which we could not ignore, there were also positive developments that should not be forgotten. We gained small footholds, which were better than nothing.

Despite all our efforts, however, by 1999, when Ehud Barak at last took power, the Oslo Agreement seemed to have withered almost to the point of extinction. However, all was not lost: a spark of life remained which even the most implacable opponents of Oslo could not afford entirely to ignore. Despite the despair caused to the Palestinians by setbacks in the peace process, Oslo remained a solid achievement, and had given the three million Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank a basis on which to construct their first political entity and wage their battle against Israel's encroachments. When Ehud Barak's victory came, it was an immense relief, appearing to us to be no less than a counter-revolution against the putsch carried out by Binyamin Netanyahu three years earlier. Labour was again in power in Israel, and our traditional partner in the construction of the Oslo Agreement was once more centre stage. There seemed to be a renewed glimmer of hope. As we were soon to learn, however, the Israeli Labour Party of 1999 was not the Labour movement of Rabin and Peres; and, sadly, our hopes soon proved to be illusory.

Nevertheless, from our point of view Barak appeared to start well. During his election campaign he referred to the Palestinians in a manner that seemed to us to show understanding of our plight. Until shortly before his entry into politics, Barak had been a military man, with all the commitment to Israel's security that this implied. He was the archetype of a hard-bitten Israeli hero. In 1973, he had personally led an Israeli army commando operation to murder three of our leaders in Beirut. Nevertheless, the Israeli press reported him on one occasion as saying, 'If I were a young Palestinian, I would have joined a terrorist organisation.' On another occasion, he said he would not permit the settlers 'to act against the interests of the state and of the majority of its citizens'. Barak rose high in the army and his uniform bore the marks of senior rank and of Israel's highest decorations. Once in civilian dress, however, he seemed able to acknowledge the anguish of the Palestinian people.

We believed all this could herald a new understanding of our struggle.

It seemed to augur well for the historic settlement we sought, whose moral dimensions were no less important than its political aspects. However, Barak's list succeeded in taking only twenty-six seats in the new Knesset, and though it was the largest party it was unable to govern alone. This was to be our undoing. Once in power, Barak was obliged to construct a coalition. In the end, he went for a broad coalition, and on 6 July 1999 he officially took office as Prime Minister after announcing the formation of a government that included six other parties in addition to his own in order to command a majority of 75 of the 120 parliamentary seats. The coalition included such disparate factions as the Shas Party, broadly representative of Israel's Sephardi Jews from North Africa and the Middle East, and his majority crucially depended on Shas's seventeen seats. In these circumstances, the views Barak was able to espouse in public were restricted, with consequent frustration for the hopes of the Palestinians. From the very outset, he defined a number of principles and gave a definite 'no' to a number of issues. His red lines included 'no return to the 1967 frontiers', 'no to the sharing of Jerusalem, the eternal united capital of Israel', 'no to the presence of any foreign force to the west of the Jordan River', 'no to the dismantling of settlements', and 'no to the return of the Palestinian refugees'.

In addition, Barak adopted a new negotiating tactic. In effect, he suspended the Interim Agreement, which the Palestinian Authority had hoped would once more come into effect with Netanyahu's departure. His scheme was to defer the implementation of the commitments that were originally supposed to form part of the transitional phase until the construction of the final status, which would in theory prevail after Israel's eventual withdrawal. For the moment, therefore, changes on the ground came to a halt. Crucially, he refused to commit himself over the area of the land from which Israel would eventually agree to withdraw, keeping this as a bargaining counter to be retained until the final status negotiations. In practice, he followed the precedent established by Netanyahu, who had piled procrastination upon delay by demanding to renegotiate all the commitments included in agreements he inherited, and even in those he had made himself, in other words from Oslo to Wye River.

Barak's departure from the tradition of Rabin and Peres became only too evident when he began to announce his own proposals. These differed from previous Israeli ideas, though Barak insisted they were based on guidelines derived from the Declaration of Principles. His plan was to

bypass the Interim Agreement, with its step-by-step approach, jumping ahead instead to questions related to the final status, including major and complex issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, borders, and settlements. Barak believed that Israel could encounter problems if it continued to implement the commitments provided for in the Interim Agreement, including planned withdrawals from territory and the handing over of powers. His logic was that if Israel implemented all its commitments in a transitional period, it would have no further bargaining chips with which to obtain concessions from the Palestinians. Barak's plan was to retain these commitments to bargain with at a later stage, when Israel might be able to obtain yet more concessions by belatedly agreeing to implement them. This would in effect be a form of sleight of hand, since concessions had already been made by the Palestinians to obtain Israel's commitments in the first place.

Further, it was clear to all of us involved in the peace process that Barak also intended to do his utmost to exclude the involvement of any external partner. He sought to minimise the involvement of the United States, thus effectively excluding from the negotiating process the world's one superpower, which had thrown its weight behind the Oslo Agreement and had thereafter been the principal sponsor of the peace process. On our side, opinions varied within the Palestinian leadership about how to respond to Barak's offers, which in any case fluctuated from day to day, as well as to what we took to be tactical manoeuvres on his part. Some argued we should insist that all existing agreements should be applied in both letter and spirit, and that we should require Barak to adhere to all that was meant to be implemented in the transitional period. Others were prepared to hear what Barak had to say and even felt that his plan to move straight on to negotiations on the final status might offer us new opportunities.

This stressful situation began to cause disunity in the Palestinian ranks. There were sharp differences of views within Yasser Arafat's inner circle as to what to do, at a time when optimism mingled unnervingly with pessimism. A number of different ideas were floated, but the circumstances were confused and unsettling. In practical terms, an undeclared struggle began to emerge between the senior members of the Palestinian leadership over who would take responsibility for relations with Israel, make contacts, and keep open the door for negotiations with the new Israeli Prime Minister. As dissent grew within the Palestinian leadership,

Abu Ammar kept his options open and stayed aloof. In due course, contacts between Israel and the Palestinians began once more, at various levels of responsibility on both sides. Negotiating teams were organised, and the lawyers and specialists in Abu Mazen's negotiations department began to prepare for a new series of talks.

In fact, we soon concluded after Ehud Barak took office that there was in reality little difference between him and Netanyahu, not only in his approach to the implementation of agreements but also in his underlying attitude towards the Palestinian people. Settlement building went on under Barak's government with even more vigour than under Netanyahu. The systematic destruction of the Palestinian economy also continued, with closures, blockades, and restrictions placed on the movement of individuals and goods. Consequently, unemployment soared and poverty became more widespread among the Palestinian population. While refusing to implement the agreements already signed, which would have promoted trust between the two peoples, Israel under Barak continued to behave like an occupier. Israeli forces continued to attack alleged terrorist targets with extreme violence, while ordinary Palestinians were continually humiliated at checkpoints and border crossings by young Israeli conscripts. This served only to exacerbate the tendency of many Palestinians, especially our own young men, to throw themselves into violence, extremism and the cycle of revenge.

Barak was happy to go through the motions of negotiation, however. After his election, he made it clear he intended to look to Egypt's good offices. His first trip abroad, on 9 July 1999, was to Alexandria to meet Egypt's President, Husni Mubarak. When meetings between the Palestinians and the Israelis have been held at short notice, the Erez crossing point at the northern entrance to Gaza Strip, close to Beit Hanoun, has often been for the sake of convenience the chosen venue. On 11 July 1999, Ehud Barak held his first meeting with President Arafat at Erez, and then on 15 July, for the first time as Prime Minister, he made the journey to the United States to meet President Clinton. Despite Barak's apparent reluctance to allow the Americans to play a significant role in the peace process, the United States remained very active. The Americans made great efforts to persuade Barak to enter into substantive talks with the Palestinians, and their insistence was to bear fruit within a couple of months when the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement was concluded.

On 11 July 1999, after Barak's first meeting with Abu Ammar, he

made a declaration as follows: 'In cooperation with Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, we shall develop a way to combine the final status negotiations with the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum.' From this, we concluded that Barak's motive was to avoid carrying out the redeployments already scheduled, on the pretext of his already stated preference for proceeding straight to the final status talks. After his first meeting with President Clinton in the United States, Barak made a statement claiming he was working with the Palestinians towards an agreement on the framework of a final status settlement within a timescale of a year or fifteen months. Barak met Arafat for a second time at Erez on 27 July 1999, less than three weeks after their first encounter. At this second meeting with Arafat, further hints about Barak's plans emerged. His strategy was to agree to release prisoners, activate the safe passages between the West Bank and Gaza, and grant economic aid, but all in exchange for postponing the scheduled third withdrawal until after signing the famous 'framework agreement', a stage on the way to the final status, about which the Israeli Prime Minister made constant statements to the media.

In reaction to this strategy on the part of the Israelis, we laid constant stress on the importance we placed on the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum as a prerequisite for the improvement of relations and confidence-building. Even while negotiating teams continued their technical meetings at various venues to discuss the release of prisoners, the provision of safe passage, and other such matters, the leading Palestinian negotiators continued their efforts to get the Israelis to implement their commitments under the Wye River Memorandum. These included the transfer of parts of the West Bank from category 'C' to category 'B' or category 'A', which was supposed to be undertaken ahead of Israel's proposed framework agreement. We wanted these transfers to proceed in tandem with a freeze on settlements and the construction of roads. Both the United States and our Egyptian brethren made efforts to reconcile the positions of the two sides, but we stuck to our position. To step up Palestinian pressure on Israel, President Arafat said he intended to strike out of the Wye River Memorandum an item which stated that both parties must refrain from taking unilateral steps that could affect the final status negotiations. Here, he meant to imply that if Israeli settlement activities continued, he could return to the plan to declare the existence of a Palestinian state.

The hint of a possible declaration of Palestinian statehood in the shorter term led to an intensification of American involvement, the very thing that Barak had tried to restrict or reduce. At the beginning of September 1999, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrived in the region and on 2 September she met Ehud Barak in Jerusalem. Plans for a summit had already been carefully laid, and, on 4 September 1999, the first Israeli–Palestinian agreement reached at Sharm el-Sheikh was signed by Ehud Barak and Abu Ammar in the presence of President Mubarak of Egypt and King Abdullah II of Jordan. Madeleine Albright signed for the United States. The degree and direction of the Clinton administration's involvement in the Middle East peace process had clearly been stepped up, with the United States now acting not only as a key mediator but also as a participant. In this capacity it was able to exercise a stronger influence on the negotiating parties, especially Israel. The Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement was seen as opening the way for the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum.

Under Barak, Sharm El-Sheikh became the venue of choice for meetings between Israel and the Palestinians. Both Egypt and the United States frequently participated in such meetings, as well as other outside parties. The United States initiated, sponsored, and mediated virtually every meeting held at Sharm el-Sheikh, where the facilities for high-level diplomatic encounters and conferences were soon put in place in what had become a tourist resort since it was returned to Egypt by Israel in 1982. Sharm el-Sheikh's proximity to Israel and the Palestinian territories and its facilities are both important. My personal feeling, however, is that the attraction of Sharm el-Sheikh as a venue for negotiations connected with the peace process was the vital nature of Egypt's role. During Ehud Barak's brief tenure of office, from 1999 to 2000, Sharm el-Sheikh was frequently used for talks.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement of 4 September 1999 paid more than lip service to Barak's insistence on moving straight to the final status negotiations but also committed Israel to fulfilling the commitments of the transitional phase as the final status talks got under way. The agreement stipulated that these negotiations, whose objective should be an agreement leading to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, should be resumed no later than 13 September. Efforts were to be made to reach a framework agreement within five months, and thereafter to complete the final status negotiations within one year of

resumption, on or before 13 September 2000. Barak also gave a pledge on Israel's behalf to implement the redeployment of the Israeli occupying forces in the stages that had been provided for in the Wye River Memorandum. He further agreed to the release of those Palestinian prisoners whose offences had been committed before 13 September 1993, in other words before the signing of the Oslo Agreement, and who had been imprisoned before 4 May 1994. Prisoner release was to begin on 5 September. Other provisions agreed by Barak related to the safe passages and to economic developments. On 9 September, Israel released 199 prisoners. On 10 September a land transfer was made of 7 per cent of the West Bank from Zone C to Zone B.

Though the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum brought some gains for the Palestinians, including the reopening of the path towards the final status negotiations, it also represented a gain for Barak's new concept of negotiation. Not only did he want to shift away from negotiations on the transitional phase, neglecting the implementation of any commitments that formed part of it, in order to place the emphasis instead on talks on the final status, he also developed the concept of a framework agreement, which was supposed to precede the final status and prepare the way for it, without specifying the detail of the agreement itself. The framework agreement would include principles, guidelines, and definite timetables, with the two parties pledging to make no unilateral change in the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip until a year had elapsed. This was intended to pave the way for a final status agreement to be signed later. The next scheduled Israeli redeployment would be postponed for three months, after which the final status negotiations could begin.

On 13 September 1999, the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement was formally endorsed at a ceremony at the Erez crossing point, attended by Israel's Foreign Minister, David Levy, and Mahmoud Abbas; and on 16 September, President Arafat met Ehud Barak again in Israel. However, in practice the agreement was soon sidelined, while Barak's attention was engaged elsewhere. Instead of pursuing the Palestinian track, Barak occupied himself with plans for a settlement with Syria and his strategy for a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. In view of this, and especially when we began to become aware that the Israeli ruling coalition was showing signs of disintegration, we began to think that the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement would in due course be virtually set aside, as previous agreements had been.

On 13 September 1999, in these difficult circumstances, and after a three-year break, the final status negotiations were resumed as provided for at Sharm el-Sheikh. Talks were held alternately in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority territories. We also agreed that the body known as the Monitoring and Steering Committee provided for in the Interim Agreement of 28 September 1995 would hold its sessions simultaneously with the final status negotiations to discuss ways of implementing the existing transitional period agreements. In fact, twenty-one rounds of final status negotiations were held, and although the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement provided for participation by the Americans, most of them took place without American observers.

The end result of all these rounds of talks, however, was nil. The Israeli side stuck to Barak's red lines – his list of 'noes' – and, bizarrely, the new phenomenon of Israel's insisting that UN Security Council resolution 242 did not apply to the West Bank. At the same time, to our consternation, Barak's government declared its intention to build 5,752 homes in various settlements around Jerusalem. For us, this was a clear indication that Barak was anything but interested in making peace with the Palestinians. In fact, our suspicion that his priorities lay elsewhere in the region seemed to be confirmed, especially after intensive American efforts brought about a meeting between Barak and the Syrian Foreign Minister, Farouq el-Shara'a. This took place between 3 and 10 January 2000 at the Sheperdstown Conference Center near Washington DC and was overseen by President Clinton. We began to ask ourselves whether he had entirely abandoned the idea of peace with the Palestinians in favour of agreements with neighbouring Arab states, which he may have hoped would in some sense encircle us and leave us without Arab support, thus undermining our position.

The series of confusing offers, policy statements and declarations offered by the new Israeli Prime Minister left the Palestinian leadership unsettled and aggrieved, while the Palestinian public was disappointed. We remembered our fervent hope that Barak would take a different line from Netanyahu. We had begun with a belief, perhaps too innocently held, that he would return to the basic position of the Labour Party and deal fairly with the Palestinian Authority as a partner in the peace process. We now began to recall circumstances that we should never have forgotten. When Yitzhak Rabin had been in power, for example, Barak had been one of the very few prominent Labour supporters who had objected, on

security grounds, to the Oslo Agreement of 1993. Two years later, in 1995, as a member of the cabinet and the Knesset, he had abstained from voting for the ratification of Oslo 2. With hindsight we could not have failed to see that during his election campaign against Netanyahu he had failed to endorse the position of his Labour predecessors, Rabin and Peres, and had refused to give a commitment to implement those agreements already signed. It was evident, as he formed his first government, that Barak blatantly ensured that those who had been associated with Oslo, such as Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin, were excluded from the process of negotiation with the Palestinians and from policymaking on the peace process.

Meanwhile, a 'back channel' for negotiations was also established. On 2 November 1999, close to the anniversary of Rabin's death, President Clinton, President Arafat, and Prime Minister Barak held a summit in Oslo, in the margins of which the three leaders agreed that a channel in which to discuss issues relating to the final status away from the official talks could be useful. Abu Mazen and I were in Oslo for this gathering and Arafat decided we should be the Palestinian representatives in the 'back channel'. The Israelis nominated Shlomo Ben Ami, Israel's Internal Security Minister, and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, formerly Chief of Staff in the Israeli Defence Force and now serving as Israel's Tourism Minister. I therefore became personally involved, together with Abu Mazen, in a whole series of negotiations at various venues in Washington, Jerusalem, Eilat and Taba, relating to the final status. I was to hold many conversations with Ben Ami, Shahak, and other Israeli representatives at hotels and other venues in Israel and the West Bank, as part of what we later dubbed the 'Stockholm channel' after its meetings eventually moved for a brief but significant phase to the Swedish capital. These contacts in fact made a meaningful contribution to the negotiations over the final status.

At the same time, the public and officially avowed meetings that followed Sharm el-Sheikh were destined to fail almost from the start. This was due not merely to the chasm between the Palestinian and Israeli positions on virtually all the items on the agenda, but also to Ehud Barak's frustrating strategy of negotiation. As I have noted above, Barak had conceived the idea that the implementation of existing Israeli commitments would be made conditional on progress in a direction acceptable to Israel on the major final status issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, and so on. Barak was obsessed with the idea that if Israel were to implement all its scheduled

deployments and other commitments to the Palestinians, it would be obliged to go into the permanent status negotiations with nothing to bargain with. Barak deliberately linked discussions on troop redeployment and Israel's other transitional commitments with the key final status issues. This meant in practice that all the existing agreements, right up to the Wye River Memorandum signed by Binyamin Netanyahu, became subject to renegotiation.

When it became clear that the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum was destined to founder, Madeleine Albright initiated a new series of bilateral meetings with both parties. The Americans still appeared to believe that progress was essentially satisfactory, but that some prodding was needed. In early November 1999, Madeleine Albright again arrived in the region, accompanied by Dennis Ross. On 8 November, she held a long meeting with President Arafat, which I attended. I gained the impression that the United States was trying discreetly to put pressure on us by stressing the alleged progress being made in the Syrian track, implying that President Clinton would soon meet President Hafez al-Assad. Having given the impression the Palestinians might be sidelined, she then swung back in the other direction, promising us she would ensure that the Palestinian track would not be ignored. On that occasion, Albright put forward a timetable for a new series of talks between us and the Israelis. However, she asked us for major concessions in order to guarantee Israeli cooperation in these talks, which would then be followed up in early 2000 by a summit in Washington between President Clinton, President Arafat, and Prime Minister Barak.

At the 8 November meeting, when I had the opportunity to make my own intervention into the exchanges between Abu Ammar and Secretary Albright, I was careful to draw attention to the extent of current settlement activities in the West Bank and in particular on the outskirts of Jerusalem. I pointed out how Israel was using settlement building to bring pressure to bear on the permanent status negotiations. I also stressed the key importance of the release of prisoners. However, the American delegation seemed to show interest only in Barak's proposals on what would later be formally known as the Framework Agreement on Permanent Status (FAPS). I quote here the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 1999, which conveys the atmosphere, and sheds light on American priorities at that time.

Minutes of meeting held by President Arafat and Secretary of State Albright on Wednesday 8 November 1999

President Arafat: We would like to welcome you and express to you our appreciation of the efforts made to safeguard the peace process by President Clinton and his administration and by yourself.

Secretary Albright: First of all allow me, as a partner in this process, to inform you, as a principal partner, that my discussions in Damascus went well, which surprised me. Hence, it will be possible to resume talks on the Syrian track. The question is now to find out what lay behind President Assad's decision to enter into negotiations at this time. President Clinton will shortly announce that talks are to start soon in Washington at a high level. Please, do not say anything on this before President Clinton does.

It is my feeling that communication between us should be very candid, because there should be no misunderstandings between us.

I would like you to understand that President Clinton and I grasp fully that the Palestinian issue is at the heart of the issue of war and peace in the region. We are in no doubt over this. The President strongly desires to bring the conflict in the Middle East to an end, as do I, and all our colleagues. We are convinced that it can be solved only through the resolution of the Palestinian question.

Our commitment to you and to your people is complete. I emphasise here my own dedication and that of the President to the Israeli–Palestinian track and our readiness to do our utmost for that purpose. I confirm to you that no matter how great the efforts we expend on the Syrian track, this will never be at the expense of the Palestinian track. Please, believe me when I say this is true.

I met Barak today and he is aware of all this. I discussed the Palestinian track with him and he told me he had a proposal for a timetable to reach a framework agreement with the Palestinians on a specified date. He will put that before you when he meets you soon. This is very important.

As for us, we would like to receive by the end of this month or early next month joint papers that include the positions of both parties. It is important that serious efforts are made towards this. The question is, what can we do to encourage you and your people further? We want you to suggest proposals, with which we will assist you.

What we need is a draft framework that will include both the Palestinian and the Israeli positions. This would provide a basis for bridging the gap. The negotiators must be serious in their endeavours, whether in the main channel or any other you may open, jointly and cooperatively. The negotiating teams must be forthcoming with practical suggestions.

I am considering sending Dennis Ross to work with you in January and to remain with you for a while. If progress is made during the month of December, your meeting with President Clinton will either be this month or early next month. This will be crucial. Afterwards, Dennis Ross will arrive.

To summarise: from now and until the end of the month serious effort is required. After this, you [addressing Arafat] will meet with President Clinton in Washington. Then, Dennis Ross will arrive to work with you. At the end of next month [January], I will come again to meet you and Barak. Afterwards, I shall report back to President Clinton on whether there has been serious progress and the situation is promising. President Clinton will then invite you and Ehud Barak to Washington to attempt to close the remaining gap, provided a clear basis has been laid on which a summit meeting can succeed.

I think this is a clear schedule reflecting our commitment to help you and continue to support you, whatever happens on the Syrian track. Do not forget that we were able to help at Wye River after you had given us a clear idea of what your objectives were.

Arafat: I am aware of how important this is, and we will give it our best endeavours.

Albright: This is why it is crucial to make every effort now and not to waste time.

Arafat: However, I have some significant difficulties. I face a dangerous situation with settlement building. Even the newspaper *Ha'aretz* has strongly criticised what Barak is doing with settlement building. I need your assistance here. Settlement must be halted.

Albright: You took this up with Dennis Ross two days ago when you expressed your concern about this issue. We spoke to Barak about it today, and Dennis has talked to them about it before many times.

Arafat: Barak cannot claim he faces obstruction within his government over this, because the parties forming his coalition have given him a personal mandate over settlement issues. So, Barak himself is in a position to take a decision over it.

Albright: He has already taken a significant step. He has adopted a position on the settlement issue and has made a policy decision. He wants to talk to you face to face about it. The measure he has announced is that there should be no new projects and that he will halt the construction of 1,800 home units currently in progress.

Arafat: The total so far is 7,000 units. This is already enough to be frightening, dangerous, and damaging.

Albright: I think that Barak's action is significant and in the right direction. I am not saying that it is enough to solve your problems. You will never resolve all your problems except through a framework agreement. As for the prisoners, he will take action on that during Ramadan. It seems that there are legal procedures that have taken more time than expected.

Arafat: We know the Israelis and they know us. Israel's President, Ezer Weizman, is in a position to take action on this issue, which lies within his competence.

Albright: Now, on maps, Barak has told me what he has told you. He understands your concern here, and says that the Palestinians can present their concerns through the Steering Committee over the next stage of redeployment, relating to 6.1 per cent of the territory, due in January as provided for under the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement.

Arafat: He has never given a firm undertaking. We want a definite promise on this.

Albright: I think the Israelis will bear this in mind in the discussions in the Steering Committee.

Arafat: Let them at least give a promise to you, that you can convey to me.

Albright: I have to be honest with you. They told me that the areas you mentioned would be covered by the framework agreement.

Arafat: You know that maps have to be signed by him and by myself, or by persons he and I nominate to sign them. Therefore, we have to be in agreement on them.

Albright: We would like to be able to leave here in a position to say that the maps question has been resolved and that the second stage of redeployment will take care of the issue.

Abu Ala: First, allow me to go back to settlement activity. This problem is not incidental. It is an essential issue that preoccupies every Palestinian citizen. It would be very difficult to compromise on it in any way short of a complete resolution of the problem. Construction is continuing on all sides, under the very eyes of the Palestinians. This places President Arafat in a very embarrassing situation. Let me say that it puts us all in a difficult position. We are unable to explain it to our people. Therefore, it is imperative that we remove this major obstacle that lies in the path towards negotiations so that we can negotiate over the existing settlements. Before we talk about maps and charts, there are also other issues of which we need to be aware. For example, Barak excluded prisoners from Jerusalem from the process of prisoner release agreed at Sharm el-Sheikh, and now he is excluding areas around Jerusalem from redeployment. We cannot accept that. These areas are ours. All powers and responsibilities there are ours, in planning, regulation, construction, and even public security. Israel has only the right of hot pursuit in these areas of those it wishes to arrest. We utterly reject the discussion of these areas within the framework agreement. We do not accept these arguments, and we regard it as renegeing on agreements already made.

Dennis Ross: We know that what Barak has so far done is not sufficient for you and that it will not solve your problems. But it is a significant step. What is important for you is the negotiating timetable, on which both sides need to concentrate all their efforts. At least, there should be continuity of negotiations.

Abu Ala: The implication of this is that they want to use the settlements as a means of bringing pressure on us in the final status negotiations, and that they want to use the issue of maps to bring unacceptable pressure to bear on us regarding Jerusalem.

Arafat: We look forward to your assistance and your comprehension of our position so that we can embark on successful negotiations.

Ross: When we leave here, we would like to give a positive impression that will be conducive towards reaching a framework agreement. Sincere efforts have been made regarding the maps, and I will carry on making efforts. I have a question here: Ginossar met you to talk to you about the maps. What did he say to you? I do not know what he told you.

Arafat: He spoke in general terms and said that our comments would be taken into account in the future. I asked him to give an undertaking this would be so.

Ross: Personally, I think he will be reluctant to make any promises because he doesn't want what he says to be leaked.

Arafat: The Secretary of State appears to be in a position to declare that efforts are being made to resolve the problems over the maps, and talks will therefore continue. In particular, Yasser Abed Rabbo will meet Oded Eran tomorrow, while I intend to meet Barak.

Albright: On another issue, you recall that I spoke to you about the rule of law, whose application is in your own interest and in the interests of your people, now and in the future. In addition, I consider it is vital to permit freedom of speech to your opposition, by which I mean the peaceful opposition.

Arafat: I have nothing to say in objection to that and I understand your position. However, if you are raising this now in connection with the document recently circulated in the Palestinian territories that is being referred to as the 'Declaration of the Twenty Personalities', then that is another matter. This is a tendentious and threatening statement, and

expresses opposition to the peace process. It also advocates violence and calls for civil war.

Albright: The matter at issue is that you are in the process of constructing a new society, and I encourage you to establish the rule of law as a principle that must be observed. What I saw today in Bethlehem was much appreciated. This kind of thing is in your own interests and for the benefit of your people. For such achievements to be preserved, the rule of law is fundamental and should continue to be so. It is crucial that you construct your society with the needs of the future in mind, and an auspicious future requires the rule of law.

Arafat: We know how important this is for our society and people, and we are making efforts in this direction with our future prosperity in mind.

Albright: The point is extremely important. I just wanted to stress it to you again. The other issue that I would like to talk about is that the United States Justice Department wants to make contact with the Palestinian Ministry of Justice and the investigative police departments. The Attorney General of the United States has transmitted a list of questions to Freih Abu Medein, the Palestinian Minister of Justice, which have not so far been answered.

Arafat: Thank you. May I ask that she send her requests to me personally, and I shall reply to them.

(end of meeting)

The next meeting between Ehud Barak and President Arafat was held in Ramallah on 21 December 1999 at Abu Mazen's residence. At this meeting, our suspicions of Israeli bad faith were further aroused. Ehud Barak had brought with him his Foreign Minister, David Levy, Yossi Ginossar, and Dani Yatom, while Abu Mazen and I supported Abu Ammar. At this meeting, there was a painful and personal clash between Barak and Arafat that took a difficult turn, so that for a time the two broke off contact, though lines of communication were kept open by both sides. A meeting the following month, held on 17 January 2000 at Yossi Ginossar's house in Kochav Ya'ir, close to Tel Aviv, served only to strengthen our feelings. At that meeting,

our suspicions were at last confirmed when Barak finally showed Arafat a map specifying the 6.1 per cent Israeli withdrawal from our territory they had spoken of, which failed to include the three controversial Palestinian towns in the suburbs of Jerusalem (Abu Dis, Al-Eizeria, and Al-Sawahreh). Barak claimed he could not include these towns until after the implementation of the final status agreement.

As a result, we issued a statement accusing Barak of going back on all that had been agreed upon. The Meretz Party, the left-wing element within the ruling Israeli Labour-led coalition, gave its endorsement to our position. At the same time, we declared that 13 September 2000, one year from opening of the final status negotiations and the date on which they were due to be completed, would now be the date on which we would proclaim the establishment of the Palestinian state. On 3 February 2000, Barak again met Arafat at the Erez crossing, in what was to be the last Israeli–Palestinian summit held there.

The strong reaction on our part led to the resumption of outside efforts at third-party mediation. Acting in conjunction with the United States, the Egyptians put forward a compromise proposal to extend the deadline for the framework agreement from February to May 2000. The plan also deferred the deadline for the next agreed redeployment to 8 June 2000, though the final status negotiations were still due to be completed on 13 September, the date we had now given for the declaration of the Palestinian state. On 13 February 2000, Arafat and Barak met again at Sharm el-Sheikh, to discuss the maps of the third redeployment. Nothing, however, appeared to offer much prospect of real progress. On 7 March 2000, at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv, Abu Mazen and I met Ehud Barak to discuss the Egyptian proposal. Two days later, Abu Mazen and Barak flew to Sharm el-Sheikh to discuss the proposal with President Mubarak. Throughout all these meetings, however, Barak stood his ground and refused to budge, which brought the situation close to collapse.

Just ahead of a round of talks in Eilat between Palestinian and Israeli negotiators which opened on 30 April 2000, with Dennis Ross present, Barak announced that his government intended to build 174 new housing units in Ma'ale Adumim, east of Jerusalem. The talks rapidly broke down. Barak offered to barter the establishment of a Palestinian state on 60 per cent of the existing Palestinian territories in exchange for the postponement of the issues of Jerusalem and the refugees. He later increased the offer to 70 per cent of the Palestinian territories and then to 80 per cent.

As anticipated, the talks in Eilat ended in the same way as previous negotiations had done, with rejection by the Palestinians of Barak's proposals. In their most extreme form, these would have perpetuated Israel's occupation of 40 per cent of the West Bank and 1 per cent of the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the West Bank would have been divided into four cantons separated from each other by a string of Israeli settlements that were already being expanded under various pretexts, including the so-called natural growth of population. On 8 May 2000, a meeting was at last held in Ramallah to arrange the transfer of the towns surrounding Jerusalem (Abu Dis, Al-Izarieh, and Al-Sawahreh) from Zone B to Zone A.

Many of the official meetings between the Palestinian leadership and Barak, though deadlocked, were nevertheless very tense. To save the peace process from complete collapse, to keep the Palestinian track open, and so as not completely to abandon the implementation of the Interim Agreement, the Palestinian leadership agreed to compromise. In the end, we said we would allow Israel to reschedule the remaining transitional commitments agreed at Sharm el-Sheikh in the way the Egyptians had suggested. These commitments included the release of our prisoners and the remaining third phase of troop redeployment, together with various economic and financial measures. Even after the rescheduling, however, Barak's government continued to play for time, failing to live up to what it had consented to. It also began to equivocate even over the framework agreement it had itself promoted, and started in practice to delay and avoid discussion of all its commitments under all agreements, new and old. It seemed as if Barak was in full flight from all recognition of Israel's obligations under the peace process.

The back channel

In the circumstances, the 'back channel' we had set up came to seem like our only hope. The signing of the framework agreement provided for by the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum was intended to pave the way for a final status agreement. However, on the Palestinian side, we had long been aware that we would not be able to achieve the signing of the framework agreement on time, given the complexity of the issues involved. We also believed that Barak's government was becoming confused as a result of attempting to pursue negotiations simultaneously in too many

directions, while at the same time it had still not shown the courage to implement the measures it had committed itself to at Sharm el-Sheikh. It seemed to us that more time would necessarily pass without progress being made, and that this could only have negative consequences for a situation already eroded by lack of trust and other destabilising factors. We therefore threw ourselves into unofficial talks, in the hope of improving understanding.

While high-level official meetings were taking place towards the end of 1999 and in early 2000, I held a series of meetings with Oded Eran, Israeli Ambassador to Amman, who was acting as Israel's representative. These encounters took place outside the limelight of political officialdom, away from the prying cameras and microphones of journalists. Ambassador Eran had been mandated by Barak to engage in negotiations on all issues with the Palestinians. The occurrence of some of these meetings was acknowledged, but others were kept strictly confidential. My first meeting with Eran took place at my own house in Abu Dis on 1 December 1999. On 4 December, we met again, at Eran's house in the German quarter in West Jerusalem. A third meeting was held on 6 December 1999, also at Eran's house. Two days after that, on 8 December 1999, I met Shlomo Ben Ami at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in East Jerusalem. I held further meetings with Oded Eran on 28 December 1999 and 9 January 2000, also at the Hyatt Regency, after which Barak appointed Shlomo Ben Ami, the then Israeli Minister of Internal Security, definitively to take Eran's place. I met Ben Ami at the Hyatt Regency on 11, 17, and 26 February 2000.

This series of meetings with Oded Eran and Shlomo Ben Ami in practice formed part of what I have already described as the 'back channel' agreed in Oslo in November. In fact, eighteen such meetings were held in the context of the 'back channel', of which fifteen were held in the region, with two memorable encounters in Stockholm, and one in Washington. I took part in all these meetings, while Abu Mazen attended five, and Hassan Asfour was present at six. The meetings were held in parallel with the official bilateral meetings at which Abu Ammar and other members of the Palestinian leadership met Ehud Barak, with his advisers and ministers. I could not help thinking of our experience in Oslo in 1993, when in the strictest secrecy we started to make an attempt to bridge the widely separated positions of Israel and the Palestinians. The meetings we were now holding also served as a means to keep open some form of contact between the two sides, at a time when the

atmosphere at the official negotiations was going from bad to worse. We found them useful as a means to convey to the Israelis our ideas regarding what kind of final status we would find acceptable. We attempted to put across the general principles in which we believed, hoping this might eventually help to create the necessary context for a comprehensive solution of all the crucial issues. On the other hand, while the 'back channel' of 2000 kept communications open, it must be said that it did not result in a practical breakthrough, in the way Oslo had done.

If I were to attempt to sum up the general direction of the 'back channel' meetings, I would say the goals of the two sides were different, and that this was the origin of the tension between us. We were now talking about the final status, as the Israelis wanted, and no longer about the implementation of the Interim Agreement, as we would have preferred, but our views still sharply differed. While the Israelis were guided by Barak's principle that the framework agreement for the final status was as far as we needed to go, our position was that only the complete implementation of a detailed and fully elaborated final status agreement would put an end to the conflict between us. For example, while the Israelis demanded our consent to the principle that the borders could be adjusted, we insisted that any adjustments should be specified in detail and should in practice be minor as well as mutual and reciprocal. In contrast to their insistence on taking settlement blocks into account in the definition of borders, we refused to accept the existence of settlements as a basis for the demarcation of any section of border. They wanted to agree to border adjustments on the basis of percentages of territory, but we rejected the principle of percentages and insisted local adjustments, if any were to be made, must be fully detailed in advance and should be justified by local requirements. They asked for the right to implement their own security arrangements inside the Palestinian territories as well as maintaining a long-term Israeli presence at certain locations. We rejected any continuing Israeli presence in the Palestinian territories, but agreed to accept an international presence, or even an American force. While they rejected the right of return for Palestinian refugees, we took the view that this was one of our people's rights as confirmed by UN resolution 194, and that we were entitled to negotiate on how to apply it.

Throughout all these meetings, the principle we adopted was that Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 were the cornerstones of the

peace process. We also insisted that the detailed final status agreement we demanded must include the settlement of all the essential issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, frontiers, the release of prisoners, security, and water. Our position was that none of these issues could be postponed to a later date, so that either we agreed on them all together or there would be no agreement at all. We made it a condition that agreement on each of these issues must cover three aspects: the principle, the mechanism for its implementation, and an explicit timetable. We prescribed that Israeli troop redeployments, which we preferred to describe as Israeli 'withdrawals', must also be carried out in accordance with a clear timetable with dates defined in advance. No latitude on any issue was deliberately to be incorporated into the agreement. On the contrary, our view was that everything agreed should be fully explicit, so that in the future there should be no dispute or difference of interpretation. We did, however, now accept that the final status negotiations should proceed while commitments relating to the transitional period, including the third redeployment, were being implemented.

In the event, within our 'back channel', we were at least able to agree on a number of general principles. The Israelis recognised that the basis of the peace process should be the implementation of the Security Council resolutions. They agreed that the key issues of Jerusalem, refugees, borders and security were essential to a final settlement. They accepted that there could be no deferment of any of these essential issues. They conceded that the principle had to be 'all or nothing' and that the framework agreement should cover all the outstanding issues without exception, and should include, as we insisted, the principle, mechanism, and timetable relating to each issue. The Israelis also concurred that the movement of troops should be defined as 'withdrawal' and not 'redeployment'.

Though we were able to agree on some principles and general issues, we continued to disagree sharply over details as well as over some crucial practical issues and issues of principle. We refused categorically to accept that the conclusion of a framework agreement would be regarded as having brought to an end the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. We insisted that it should be seen as merely the preliminary stage before further negotiations on the final status. We also rejected any commitment to refrain in future from reopening further issues relating to the history of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, or to refrain from making further demands. We disallowed Israel's demand that we should promise not to

enter into any political or economic federation with a third party, though we accepted that we should agree not to conclude military pacts with an outside party. We differed strongly over refugees, as the Israelis continued to be adamant in refusing the principle of the right of return. On the other hand, the Israelis did agree to a limited programme based on family reunion and raised no objection to the establishment of an international reparations commission.

There were also strong differences between us over the proposed frontier lines. To moderate the level of disagreement between us and to avoid the need for further negotiations over this issue, we proposed that the frontiers of the Palestinian state should be defined in two stages. The first stage would cover the eastern borders along the River Jordan and Dead Sea. The Israelis appeared prepared to accept that the old border between the West Bank and Jordan would be the future Palestinian state's frontier with Jordan, though they refused at this stage to commit themselves in writing. To bring pressure to bear on them, we delayed further discussion of security matters until after agreement on the eastern Palestinian frontier and the conclusion of a binding agreement. The second stage would concern the western frontier of the Palestinian territories, currently described by Israel as the Green Line. Here, there was serious disagreement between the two sides. We refused even to discuss the maps the Israelis had prepared. In principle, we refused to accept the existence of the Israeli settlements as a factor affecting our western borders with Israel. In addition, although they promised at first to withdraw from 78 per cent of the West Bank, and then began to talk about 90 per cent, we refused to discuss the issue on the basis of pre-defined proportions. Our position on the definition of the frontiers rested on the principle that any adjustments needed to be individually defined, and also to be both small and mutual in terms of value and reciprocity. The Israelis refused the principle of security arrangements.

On Jerusalem, the Palestinian and Israeli positions differed radically. We demanded full sovereignty over East Jerusalem within the frontiers of 4 June 1967, offering in return the radical proposal that East and West Jerusalem, which would be the capitals of the two states, would remain without barriers and would be open to each other's citizens. We also pledged to guarantee free access to religious sites, with security arrangements that would be subject to discussion, including the security status of settlements surrounding the city. The Israelis proposed

an extension of the borders of Jerusalem to include the settlements of Ma'ale Adumim and Giv'at Ze'ev, as well as a number of neighbouring Palestinian villages. Their plan was to create a new territorial reality under which the whole of urban Jerusalem within the existing municipal boundaries would remain under Israeli sovereignty, as their part of the city. Meanwhile, we would gain control over an equivalent area of Palestinian locations and villages around the city that would be redefined as part of Jerusalem and become our sector. These rural areas of 'greater Jerusalem' would then be declared to be the capital of the Palestinian state, while Jerusalem within its existing municipal borders would remain the Israeli capital.

All in all, the positions of the two parties at the 'back channel' negotiations seemed to be as far apart as they could be on many specific issues. Perhaps the most regrettable of the Israeli proposals was that of keeping the religious sites under Israeli sovereignty while defining a corridor through which the Palestinians could have access to the Aqsa Mosque. The distance between us was also obvious in the matter of the release of prisoners. The Israelis refused to agree to the principle of releasing all the prisoners after the conclusion of a framework agreement. Instead, they proposed to defer the release until they had obtained our acceptance that the framework agreement in itself would represent the termination of the conflict between us and that it should rule out any future Palestinian demands. At the end of this first phase of the 'back channel' negotiations the Palestinian position was as follows.

1. Our aim was to conclude a permanent peace agreement that would end once and for all the Arab-Israeli conflict.
2. We understood the reason for Israel's security demands and were ready to look into various models. However, we did not accept that Israel's security should be achieved at the expense of Palestinian geography.
3. On the basis of our understanding of Israel's sensitivity to security issues, we accepted the idea of a system of regional economic cooperation that would bring political benefits to all peoples of the region, thus integrating the issues of security, peace, and prosperity.
4. We were aware that the signing of a peace treaty would require a major effort on our part as well as theirs to settle all issues

related to the final status, on the principle that any unresolved issue could be the cause of renewed conflict.

5. We demanded the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 in relation to the frontiers between us, on the basis of the historical precedent of their application to Egypt and Jordan. At the same time, we agreed to consider reasonable demands for minor border adjustments on both sides, on the basis of reciprocity and equal value.
6. We demanded the recognition of the inalienable right of the Palestinian refugees to return, under the terms of UN resolution 194. We nevertheless continued to be willing to discuss all the relevant details, including lists of names, the numbers involved, and the question of possible reparations, in addition to a mechanism for the payment of such reparations for those who might not wish to return.
7. Jerusalem was to remain an open and undivided city and to serve as the capital of both states, in accordance with the Letter of Guarantee given to the Palestinians by the United States on the eve of the Madrid Conference in 1991. This provided that there should be no annexation or division of the territory of the city, and no change in the extent of the area regarded as constituting the municipality. It also provided that the future of the city should eventually be determined through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.
8. Our understanding was that the signing of a final peace agreement would conclusively bring the conflict between us to an end, and would also exclude any future demand or claim by either side.

In any event, it must be admitted that virtually no practical result emerged from all our attempts to keep alive the provisions of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum in the course of this series of off-the-record meetings with Israeli negotiators. Barak had successfully pressured the Palestinians to accept his idea that the negotiations should deal simultaneously with both transitional and final issues, and he also obtained further postponement of the deadlines for withdrawals. The final insult came when Barak belatedly released only three Palestinian prisoners, in place of the large-scale prisoner release he had promised. This act of bad faith outraged

us and angered the Palestinian people. The Americans also made it clear that they were startled and upset. Thanks to intervention by the Americans and other third parties, however, our 'back channel' was to continue, first in Stockholm and then in the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SWEDISH TRACK

On the night of 11 May 2000, Sweden's record of generous support for the Palestinians was very present in my mind as I flew northwards through the darkness to Scandinavia on a luxurious airliner of the Swedish royal flight. The Swedish Prime Minister had placed the aircraft at the disposal of the Palestinian and Israeli delegations to travel together from Israel's Ben Gurion airport to Stockholm. To me, it felt like a good omen to be travelling to Scandinavia. I had a strong memory of Oslo, and of the woods and mountains of Norway, and was very conscious of the success and good fortune which that other Scandinavian nation and its political leaders had brought us. My inner feeling was that I was making a journey to meet true friends, rather than merely to trudge through yet more tedious negotiations that might very well end in frustration, as had all other rounds of talks, official and unofficial, during Ehud Barak's period in office. I am a lifelong smoker, and the strange combination of elation and apprehension within me was so acute that it drove me in my agitation to break the rules and light a cigarette on board the king's private airliner. The members of the crew were reluctant to let me smoke, but in the event allowed me with kindness and courtesy to have my cigarette. I shall be for ever grateful.

Sweden's involvement with Palestinian affairs in modern times can be traced to 1 November 1974. This was when the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, already a noted campaigner for peace, made a special point of meeting Yasser Arafat in Algiers as our leader broke his journey there en route to New York for his historic address to the United Nations. Following this, Sweden spearheaded the advocacy for the admission of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to observer status at the United Nations, and Sweden also encouraged the PLO to open a press office in Stockholm. In 1983, Yasser Arafat visited Stockholm, where Olof Palme introduced him to Scandinavian socialist and democratic leaders. At the

same time, Sweden's Foreign Minister, Sten Andersson, began to correspond with President Arafat. In May 1988, shocked by what he saw in Israel, Andersson wrote in a letter to President Arafat, 'Finally, my eyes have been opened to the injustices committed against the Palestinians.'

On 6 December 1988, Andersson initiated a series of meetings in Stockholm between a PLO delegation headed by Arafat and a group of prominent American Jews, which produced a communiqué that became known as the Stockholm Document. This was meant to convey recognition of the State of Israel by the Palestinians, ahead of the speech to the United Nations General Assembly in Geneva by Yasser Arafat, then Chairman of the PLO. Andersson conveyed this to the American Secretary of State, George Shultz, who described it as positive but inadequate. In the end, Shultz dictated to the Swedish ambassador in Washington a form of words that would be acceptable to the Americans, to be included in Yasser Arafat's address. Shultz announced on 14 December 1988 that, as the result of Sweden's diplomatic efforts, his country had decided to initiate a dialogue with the PLO. The American ambassador in Tunis, Robert Pelletreau, in due course became the PLO's American interlocutor. This was Sweden's first major contribution to the diplomacy of the Middle East peace process. Now, in 2000, a second major Swedish contribution seemed to be on the cards.

I have already said something about the series of strenuous negotiations that I embarked on in December 1999 with various Israeli interlocutors, which took place sporadically in various venues in Tel Aviv and in and around Jerusalem. On the Israeli side, Oded Eran, Shlomo Ben Ami, Shimon Peres, Efraim Sneh, Haim Ramon, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Binyamin Ben Eliezer, Gilad Sher, and Uri Savir all participated at different times. These improved the level of mutual understanding of positions of the two sides but failed to achieve any concrete results. As the year 2000 arrived, with nothing tangible to show from our meetings, we were unaware that Sweden was again about to take a hand. On 1 April 2000, a senior Swedish official came to the region to act as the confidential envoy of the Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson, with invitations to Israel and ourselves to send representatives to Stockholm to continue our confidential talks in a more congenial atmosphere. The Swedish government said it hoped to provide a venue suitable for a private and uninhibited discussion of the basic issues. Of course, the Swedes hoped such talks would bring results, but failing anything immediate, they believed

they would at least serve to intensify the unofficial contacts between the two sides.

Among all the meetings I held with Israeli personalities in the context of the 'back channel' talks, I should like to return in detail to my meetings with Shlomo Ben Ami, at the time Israel's Internal Security Minister. These meetings were numerous, and soon began to follow a systematic agenda. In addition, Ben Ami was a cooperative negotiating partner though never less than determined to press the Israeli point of view. He showed a good understanding of Palestinian attitudes and the reasons for the positions we adopted, and he had a gift for discussing matters in a practical way. He also displayed a genuine desire to reach a peaceful agreement with the Palestinian people and its legitimate leadership, and he never ceased to lay stress on the importance of grasping whatever opportunities might present themselves. His attitude impressed us from the start, and we saw much promise in his approach to negotiation. He was not the first Israeli official I met during the preliminary negotiations that were held late in 1999 and early 2000, but he was certainly the most earnest. He seemed to want to be frank with us, and apparently wished to embark on a dialogue based on ideas very different from the hard-line positions Ehud Barak had begun to put forward. This led me personally to devote much care and attention to the pursuit of my contacts with him in the unofficial talks that intensified in April and May that preceded our journey to Stockholm, during which he was my Israeli counterpart.

Our preliminary talks took the form of an exploration of the crucial issues that lay at the core of the historical conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. We explored possible points of agreement, and familiarised ourselves with the possibilities of compromise and the likely shape of future Palestinian-Israeli relations. All these early contacts took place without approaching the detailed issues that were to take up most of the later negotiations. These key issues, on the other hand, were virtually the subject headings for the meetings Hassan Asfour and I held with Shlomo Ben Ami in Jerusalem late in March 2000 and dominated our series of talks at the Tel Aviv International Hotel up to 5 May. We also discussed the same issues at less formal meetings I occasionally held with Ben Ami, one of which Abu Mazen attended.

Before we embarked on the complicated details of the issues related to the prospective agreement on the final status, Ben Ami and I tried to lay down a theoretical framework for our talks. We also resolved to

concentrate on questions related to the future of the Israel-Palestine relationship rather than to the past, of which each side had its own very definite view from which it was unlikely to resile. I attempted, for instance, to get Ben Ami to understand the sensitivity of the Palestinians to anything touching upon their national pride, and to explain that for us a key aspect of settlement would be an end to our daily humiliation at the hands of the occupiers. I also pointed out to him that the Palestinian nation, whose influence was constantly underestimated by Israel, and despite its lack of economic and military might, nevertheless held the key to war and peace in the Middle East. I pointed out that Israel had gained nothing from making peace with Egypt, the largest and most important Arab country. Of all the Arab states, only Jordan had followed in Egypt's footsteps and no substantial change in Israel's regional and international standing had resulted. On the other hand, I argued, when Israel announced the Declaration of Principles at Oslo, its international and regional status were at once substantially altered. Arab and Muslim countries that wanted to open diplomatic and economic relations soon made approaches. I said that Israel would never be accepted in the Arab world or in the broader Muslim community without establishing peace with the Palestinians, since the Palestinians exercise what amounts to a veto on any peace overture Israel may make towards any other Arab or Muslim state. Israel, I added, must abandon its war mentality and the notion that peace is just an interval between wars. Israel must also desist from its parsimonious approach to peace, offering 1 per cent here and 1 per cent there of what the Palestinians ask for in order to make temporary and partial agreements that are unable to stand the test of time.

Somewhat to my surprise, Ben Ami's ideas did not wholly contradict mine. Nor did he make glib responses such as we had become used to from many Israelis, very few of whom, it must be said, had Ben Ami's breadth of vision or his conciliatory instinct. Ben Ami used to say that successive Israeli governments have always actually been perfectly well aware that the Palestinian issue was the core of the conflict, but have refused to acknowledge it. In place of recognising the centrality of the Palestinian issue, they have sought to make peace with neighbouring Arab states. Their assumption has been that no matter how heavy the price to Israel of peace with the Arab world might be, it would still be acceptable to the majority of Israelis, while the price of peace with the Palestinians would not. For Israel, he added, the price of peace with the

Arabs is lower than the price of peace with the Palestinians, because of what the Palestinians would insist on. Agreement with the Palestinians could come only with the resolution of such intractable issues as the frontiers of their territory, Jerusalem, the rights of refugees, and the future of Israeli settlements, all of which Israel would rather sweep under the carpet. Israel's hope, in Ben Ami's view, was that if peace could be made with the Arab states the possibility of new regional wars breaking out would recede, even if the Palestinian problem were to remain unresolved, or be only partly settled. According to Ben Ami, this was what Begin and Shamir thought and was also what Rabin had believed in the first year of his time as Prime Minister, before Oslo, when he concentrated on probing the possibility of making peace with Syria.

At that stage, prior to the launch of the 'Swedish track', it seemed as if Ben Ami's goal was to persuade me that there had been a real change in the prevailing political atmosphere in Israel under Barak. His view was that our talks were held in the spirit of Oslo, and that they were undertaken in the light of a clear recognition of the centrality of the Palestinian issue. Israel might consider waging war against Syria, he added, as such a war would soon be over, but the perpetuity of the conflict with the Palestinians was intolerable. Israel could not indefinitely bear the consequences of failure to make peace with the Palestinians, which was beginning to undermine the foundations of Israel's social structure and to discredit its presumption that it in some way occupied the 'moral high ground'. Meanwhile, the repercussions of the conflict with the Palestinians would serve only to complicate Israel's position in the international community. On more than one occasion, he said, 'We have no wish to be an occupying power, and in fact, we must not be one.'

On another occasion, Ben Ami said: 'The long years of confrontation have left their painful traces on both sides, but now you and I both represent governments, and that is why we must closely monitor the pulse of our peoples.' He went on, 'You might think we stand for Goliath and you play the part of David. We think quite the opposite. We are David, the Israeli Jew who lives amid a vast Arab and Muslim world that, to this day, refuses to recognise the legitimacy of the existence of the Israeli state in this part of the world.' He asked me a rhetorical question: 'Do you think that all the propaganda broadcasts by the Arab and Muslim media are prompted merely by our presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip? I do not mean just the immediately neighbouring Arab countries. Do not forget

that people in Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan all call for war against Israel. There is no guarantee that solving the Palestinian problem will make the Saddams and Ayatollahs of the region change their minds. Hence, I think that peace between us will have some effect, but it will be neither immediate nor comprehensive.'

Ben Ami had very definite opinions of the attitudes dominant in the Arab world. Typical of his utterances was this statement: 'It is true that the Arab world or part of it, at least, has taken a strategic decision to make peace with Israel. But, what is meant is a settlement that will cut Israel down to size, and not only in terms of its geographical extent. At the time of the 1996 parliamentary elections, the Israeli public rejected the ideas that Shimon Peres advocated in his book *The New Middle East*. Do not forget that this was at least in part because of the terror campaign that the Palestinians unleashed in the spring of that year. Israel would be prepared to abandon its dependence on nuclear weapons for its defence of last resort were it able to rely upon a relationship of trust with its neighbours. Our hope is that this may come to pass in the future but, sadly, our rational belief is that it will not. We therefore need security arrangements for the transitional period until peace is established and until a basic change within the Arab regimes takes place. The objective of the security arrangements we demand is not short-term protection from the Palestinians. They are meant as part of a long term confidence-building programme and are a counter measure to the threats that can be expected to arise in an unstable area. Peace with the Palestinians will not, unfortunately, be the last word. We shall continue to face a large number of enemies in the region.'

In these talks, as time passed, Ben Ami and I also began to touch on many vital and pressing issues of detail, such as frontier lines, the continued existence of settlements, the requirements of security, the rights of the refugees, the status of Jerusalem, and so on. We developed the philosophy that we were not concerned with transitional or partial solutions, and that we rejected the postponement of any topic to a later stage. In other words, we were in agreement that progress could be made only by tackling problems head on, with the goal of either reaching agreement on everything, or of walking away with agreement on nothing. However, our difficulty was that we were able to talk only in fits and starts at ad hoc meetings. Our negotiations badly needed a fixed framework within which we could hold talks on a frequent and regular basis and in greater

depth. All this meant an escape if possible from the spotlight of publicity, from the scrutiny of the media and the intelligence services, and from the baleful gaze of opponents of the peace process, especially on the Israeli side.

This was where Sweden played its part. When the Swedish invitation came, conveyed by the Swedish Cabinet Secretary Pär Nuder, Palestinian and Israeli delegations scheduled to go to Stockholm were formed in the utmost secrecy. With me were Hassan Asfour, a veteran of the Oslo talks, and the Palestinian lawyer Hibah Al-Hussaini, while the Israeli delegation included Shlomo Ben Ami, Elan Shapira, and Gilad Sher, a close adviser of Barak. On 12 May, when we landed in Stockholm at dawn, we were met without fuss by John Hagard, a former ambassador and head of Middle East affairs at the Swedish foreign ministry, accompanied by one of his staff. Both delegations were at once whisked off to Harpsund, a sumptuous mansion donated to the Swedish state in 1952 by Carl August Wicander, a wealthy industrialist, for the use of the Prime Minister. This was where our talks would be held. The house stands in an extensive estate in Södermanland county, a fine rural area two hours' drive by car from Stockholm. The Palestinian delegation stayed in one wing of the palatial house, just a few metres away from the opposite wing, which housed the Israeli delegation.

When we were well rested from our journey, both sides met in the central hall of the main building, which was encircled with discreet security men. Pär Nuder opened the session with a declaration that the Swedish Prime Minister and his representatives were committed to the establishment of peace in the Middle East and were prepared to make all necessary efforts to settle the Palestinian–Israeli dispute. He added: 'The decision is yours. Meanwhile, Sweden remains a friend of both sides and will help you in whatever way you ask. We greatly respect both parties, and appreciate the trouble you have taken to come here at our invitation. From this moment onwards, we shall be at your service.' Then the two delegations moved to the nearby conference room, where Ben Ami opened the talks with a short address. He concluded by stressing that the two parties had to make their best efforts, or live to regret wasting an opportunity. I replied: 'We are happy to have this selection of negotiators. This is our ninth session within this 'back channel', which may prove to be the most important session in the peace process. We must attempt to put on paper a definite formula covering all items on the agenda, whether

relating to frontiers, Jerusalem, refugees, or security. We must prepare our public opinion on both sides so that we can take hard decisions, if and when we arrive at an agreement.'

Soon afterwards, news of our secret channel was leaked, by either Israeli or Palestinian sources, or both. During the second day of negotiations, as we were listening to Gilad Sher's proposals on the issues, Swedish officials came in to tell us that Israeli Army Radio had broadcast a detailed news story about the supposedly secret encounter in Stockholm. Unfortunately, this leak changed the nature of our meeting. We were less able to accomplish what we had hoped for, namely the achievement of daring solutions to major controversial issues. What made the situation more uncomfortable was the outbreak of widespread demonstrations by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in solidarity with a hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. In the ensuing clashes, five Palestinians were killed and over 180 were injured. The situation that was developing in Israel and the Palestinian territories began to look like a campaign of civil disobedience that was escaping from Israel's control.

I was dismayed by the leak to the media. I could not help wondering if it had been made for trivial personal reasons by someone on our side who wished to wreck the effectiveness of this channel, jealous that the Palestinian leadership as a whole had confided in me the responsibility for its success. On the other hand, I did not rule out that it might have been an Israeli source. The following day, however, my initial suspicions were confirmed, when we heard that Yasser Abed Rabbo had resigned the leadership of the Palestinian delegation that was engaged in official talks with Oded Eran. He said his decision was taken in solidarity with the hunger-striking prisoners and in protest at the existence of a secret channel in Stockholm operating simultaneously with his open negotiations and allegedly undermining his efforts.

We carried on with our work, and there continued to be lively exchanges between us over the proposals the Israelis had brought with them, but the atmosphere in our luxury mansion was undeniably soured. Even the arrival of the American envoy, Dennis Ross, and his assistant, Aaron Miller, did not help. They urged us to press forward to reach an agreement that would prepare the ground for a full-scale Palestinian-Israeli summit, as suggested by President Clinton, who now agreed with Barak that such was the only way forward. So far, however, the auguries for a meeting at this level were not promising, as it was evident that disagreement between

the two sides over the basic issues covered by the draft framework agreement were still wide in every case. On 15 May, therefore, we sadly found ourselves back on board the Swedish royal airliner without having achieved any real progress, after just three days of faltering negotiations.

Stockholm again: a second round

The first round of Stockholm negotiations was brought to a halt by more than one factor. Technically, it was terminated by Ehud Barak, who instructed his delegation to leave Stockholm in protest at the deteriorating situation in the region following the prisoners' hunger strike and the widespread demonstrations of solidarity with them that the Palestinians called 'the Day of Anger'. It later transpired that by mid-May 2000 Barak was already preparing to pull his troops out of southern Lebanon in a few days time. When we learned this, we concluded that the increasing complications of the political situation in Israel may have been the actual reason for his premature suspension of the Stockholm negotiations. What we had been trying to do in the Swedish capital was to complete the preliminary discussion that would lead to the permanent status framework agreement that was now rescheduled for 23 June 2000. Ehud Barak's hope had been that we might have reached agreement on a number of complicated issues, thus clearing the way for the summit that he continued to advocate. But with political upheaval in Israel likely to ensue from Barak's unheralded and unforeseen action in Lebanon, he could not for the time being count on political endorsement in the Knesset of anything we might have decided.

After our return from Stockholm, Abu Ammar, Abu Mazen, and I immediately submerged ourselves in an intensive debriefing session, running over all the aspects of the suggested framework agreement. In retrospect, Abu Mazen expressed some irritation at the inclusion of Hassan Asfour in the Stockholm delegation. After some recrimination over the leakage of the 'Swedish track', we agreed on the need to put a stop to the internal rivalry between members of the Palestinian leadership that was rampant at the time and was having detrimental effects on our ability to negotiate. We also drew up an assessment of Barak's policies, concluding that his goal was in reality to postpone for as long as possible Israel's implementation of its commitments under the Interim Agreement, even possibly absorbing them completely into the final status agreement. We noticed

that Barak was now pressed for time, as the agreed third troop withdrawal was due in a few weeks time, on 23 June 2000. Simultaneously, the Israeli Prime Minister was also under increasing pressure from another direction, namely the ever faster unravelling of his party coalition. His government was near to collapse after the resignation of some members of his cabinet, and there was an ongoing dispute that was hard to resolve between two parties within the government, Meretz and the National Religious Party, over financial issues concerning the latter's religious education network. At the end of our discussions, we decide to respond positively to the repeated appeals emanating from the United States that we should return to Sweden, though the talks there would no longer have the advantage of secrecy.

On 18 May 2000, therefore, we once more boarded the Swedish aircraft and returned to Stockholm to resume the framework agreement negotiations at Harpsund. At the first session, I opened with a reference to the consultations I had held with Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen. I told the Israelis that we had reported to the Palestinian leadership, and that they had instructed us to continue our efforts to reach the desired agreement. I suggested we should press ahead, scheduling our work and allocating just one day for each topic in order to minimise the scope for disagreement. It seemed to me that a problem was that the aim of the Israeli delegation was different. We wanted to resolve issues, while they just wanted to smooth the way for the proposed summit in Washington. This meant the Israeli negotiators were unconcerned at unresolved conflicts between us, as they took the view that anything outstanding at Stockholm would simply be referred to the summit for leaders to sort out 'one way or another'. This struck me as a less than responsible attitude. We were after all meant to be preparing the way for our leaders to reach agreement by resolving problems in advance, not by leaving difficulties for them to resolve, and especially not details.

Instead of the kind of detailed and practical negotiation I wanted, the Israeli delegation, headed by Shlomo Ben Ami, raised many procedural questions at the resumed negotiations. This was presumably on the instruction of their government. They wanted to discuss whether a third party should be involved in the negotiations and what the consequences would be if the refugee issue could not be agreed before September. Other questions included what would happen if territorial issues could not be solved within the framework agreement and what would happen to the

third redeployment if the outstanding territorial issues had not all been resolved within the framework agreement. There were also some fundamental questions. What would be the legal relationship between Israel and the Palestinians until the establishment of a Palestinian state; when should the end of conflict be declared to have taken place; and what changes would there be in the status of the Palestine Liberation Organisation after Palestine had been liberated? I noted all these questions and said to the Israeli delegation, 'If we make real progress towards the framework agreement, get explicit answers to all our questions, and reach satisfactory solutions and full agreement over the major issues, not only in principle but also in detail, this would represent an end to the conflict between us.' However, I added, there was an issue that has to be clarified in advance, namely the inclusion in the framework agreement of a firm timetable for Israeli withdrawal and the transfer of all areas to the Palestinians. As for the future of the PLO, I observed, we were not making any changes to the organisation or to its charter, and it would be up to the Palestinian people and the PLO leadership to take whatever decisions will serve Palestinian interests.

Following this exchange, lengthy discussions on many of the basic issues of the framework agreement ensued. The evening session was devoted to the wording of a draft framework agreement, until the Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson, arrived to hear separate reports from the delegations about their assessment of progress, though he made no attempt to intervene to help resolve our obstinate inability to agree. Our negotiations began to run into deadlock as the news was brought to us of the spreading and angry demonstrations that continued to escalate in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The demonstrations began to overshadow the talks and placed a great responsibility on the shoulders of the Palestinian delegation. We felt we had to tread ever more carefully.

On 21 May 2000, we discussed a paper called 'The Framework Agreement of the Permanent Status' (FAPS) that set out the scope of the progress made by the negotiators in Stockholm on the main items in the agenda, as well as the points of difference. The FAPS (as opposed to the CAPS, which refers to the 'Comprehensive Agreement on Permanent Status') is an unofficial document reflecting the extent the accord reached towards the close of the Swedish negotiations. The introduction to the FAPS document contained a declaration as follows:

The Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, assert their commitment to the implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, acknowledge the unlawfulness of taking land by force, and commit themselves to the UN Charter and international law, while pledging to realise self-determination for the Palestinian people. Both parties confirm their determination to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, live together in peace, and achieve a historic reconciliation through the agreed political process. They each further pledge to recognise the other's right to live peacefully and securely on its land within frontiers that are secure and free from threats, and declare that the framework agreement is concluded within the context of the Middle East peace process started in Madrid and the Declaration of Principles agreement signed on 13 September 1993.

The two sides agreed that the FAPS would be modified to include later agreements and protocols on security matters, conservation of the environment, water, enforcement of law and order, and legal aid in criminal and civil cases. The final status agreement would in due course constitute the basis for decisions related to all issues emanating from the historical problem between the two parties.

Article II of the working paper declared that the State of Israel would recognise the State of Palestine when it is created, and the State of Palestine would recognise the State of Israel. The two were to establish full diplomatic relations, based on peaceful coexistence. Palestine and Israel would later conclude an agreement covering mutual and bilateral interests. The legislatures in Palestine and Israel would encourage cooperation between each other and the respective civil institutions of the two states and local government bodies. It was stipulated that neither state would enter into any union or military confederation directed against the other. They would also respect each other's international relations, pledge not to interfere in each other's internal affairs, create circumstances conducive to permanent peace through legislation that put an end to incitement to violence and terror, and work together in support of regional cooperation and bilateral coordination.

The article covering frontiers, settlements and arrangements on the ground stated that the demarcation of the permanent frontiers between

Israel and Palestine would be based on, and would lead to the implementation of, Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. There were differences between the positions of the two sides, however. Israel agreed that the demarcation of its permanent frontiers with Palestine would in principle be based on the 1948 Armistice Line (known in Israel as the Green Line) but added that adjustments would reflect demographic facts, religious necessities, and strategic considerations. The Palestinians insisted that adjustments must be based on qualitative and quantitative reciprocity. The two parties also accepted the necessity for the integrity and contiguity of both parts of Palestine, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, to be achieved by way of a land passage and air corridor between them.

In the article related to security arrangements under the final status, the two parties recognised each other's right to live in peace and free from the threat of war, with security for each on its land and for its people. They agreed to refrain directly and indirectly from acts of war or threatening to wage war against each other by any means at their disposal. The two states also agreed to fight violence and terrorism unilaterally and bilaterally through coordination and cooperation, and to establish suitable frontier security.

On the thorny question of the release of Palestinian prisoners, there was a sharp difference of view. The Palestinian position was that the Government of Israel should release all Palestinian prisoners jailed for security reasons, as well as other prisoners, as soon as the CAPS was signed. Israel, however, consented only to releasing Palestinian prisoners in stages, commencing after the conclusion of the FAPS, with the first group to include prisoners belonging to organisations supporting peace and the second to include all other prisoners, except those opposed to peace or threatening it. Israel pledged in addition to agree lists of releases through a joint committee to be established.

On refugees, division was deeper than on any other issue. While the Palestinian stance was that Israel had to acknowledge the suffering of Palestinian refugees, Israel agreed to acknowledge only the suffering caused by the 1948 war. The two sides agreed on the need for a just and humanitarian solution based on international law and leading to the implementation of the UN General Assembly's resolution 194, within the context of ending the Palestinian-Israeli problem. At the same time, Israel's view was that a realistic solution would be based on Security Council resolution 242. While the two sides disagreed on the number of returnees at

each stage and on whether the justification of their return should be political or humanitarian, they agreed to form an international committee to which these questions could be referred. This would be drawn from Israel, Palestine, as represented by the PLO, and the regional host countries of the refugees (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt), as well as the United Nations, the United States, Canada, the European Union, Japan, Russia, and Norway. We also agreed that that committee should develop a formula according to which each refugee should express one of the following wishes:

- a) To return to Israel with compensation;
- b) To return to Palestine with compensation;
- c) To settle in the country of his/her present residence with compensation;
- d) To migrate to a third country with compensation.

In the end, Ehud Barak once more suspended the Stockholm negotiations, in protest at the deteriorating security situation in Palestinian territories, and we returned home for a second time on 22 May. He also suspended the handover of the three much-discussed towns in the surroundings of Jerusalem, Abu Dis, Al-Izarieh, and Al-Sawahreh, in spite of prior approval of the transfer having been made by the Israeli cabinet and the Knesset. Barak's intention was to punish the Palestinians for their solidarity with prisoners and to put pressure on Yasser Arafat. Though the two delegations disagreed sharply over the details of many of the topics under discussion in Stockholm, there was a basic difference in philosophy between us that was yet more significant. It seemed that, now the summit was in the offing, the Israeli delegation had been instructed that the negotiations should focus on reaching agreement on the mechanisms of implementation and on procedural details, not on principles. These should be referred for solution to the proposed summit to be held by Yasser Arafat, Ehud Barak, and President Clinton. Such issues of principle would include the issue of the right of return, the question of sovereignty over East Jerusalem, the final demarcation of the frontiers of the State of Palestine, and other such key points. On the other hand, the Palestinian delegation stressed that agreement on technicalities and mechanisms would be meaningless in the absence of agreement on principles. Our view was that our task was to make it possible for the summit to be

able to bridge the gap between positions, which we could not do if questions of principle were left unresolved.

In any event, it also seemed increasingly likely to me that the Israeli delegation was unable, and probably had not been authorised, to take decisions on any of the central issues we discussed in the 'Swedish track'. Unlikely as it might seem, this would have been consistent with Barak's suspicions and his inability to delegate. Whenever I decided to show some tactical flexibility, especially in regard to security matters, to try to make progress on the major issues, such as the frontiers and Jerusalem, I was met with Israeli evasion on anything concrete relating to the final status. The achievement of final status, however, absolutely required decisions on such issues as the status of Jerusalem, the return to the 1967 frontiers, and the cessation of settlement activities. Ehud Barak had never come close to making up his mind about these issues, as was later confirmed at the tripartite negotiations at Camp David.

The demise of the Swedish track

Despite the more than adequate provision by our Swedish hosts of logistical services, facilities and hospitality, the Swedish formal presence at the two rounds of talks held at the Harpsund mansion in Stockholm was minimal, like the virtually invisible presence of Swedish security men around the buildings and the estate. The Swedes were very cautious, and perhaps felt insufficiently prepared to intervene in highly intricate situations. The Norwegians had been bolder – perhaps, paradoxically, through their relative lack of experience. For whatever reason, our Swedish benefactors refrained from playing a part comparable to the creative role taken by their Norwegian neighbours, who not only gave us excellent facilities but also intervened to amazingly good effect in the negotiations they hosted in 1993 that produced the historic Oslo Accord. We had approached Stockholm with high hopes, but these were not to be realised.

Though the 'Swedish track' was not to be another Oslo, we afterwards continued the discussions that had been opened there at other venues. On 1 June, we convened at the King David Intercontinental Hotel in Tel Aviv for sessions of talks that were held on 2 and 3 June. With me on the Palestinian side were Hassan Asfour and two legal advisors. On the Israeli side were Shlomo Ben Ami, Gilad Sher, General Shlomo Yanai, Israel's head

of military planning, and Gidi Grinstein, another military man from the Israeli navy, now the secretary and coordinator of the Israeli team. From the outset, this session was difficult, tense, and frustrating. Just a week earlier, Israel had completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and the American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, was about to arrive in the region to urge us to respond promptly to the call to a summit in Washington that was about to be made. Despite all we had discussed, the Israeli position remained unchanged, not only on major questions, but also on more minor issues such as the due withdrawals from the three Palestinian towns on the periphery of Jerusalem (Abu Dis, Al-Izarieh, and Al-Sawahreh) and the release of the prisoners. The atmosphere was negative, and was made worse by mutual suspicion and security problems, not to mention the underlying political uncertainty caused by the unravelling of Barak's ruling coalition. A complicating factor was Israel's objection to the presence of one of Abu Mazen's legal advisors on the grounds that he was by origin an Israeli Arab.

In the end, that session turned out to be the last real round of the negotiations that could be called the 'Swedish track', and I shall record it in more detail. I was the opening speaker and I referred in my remarks to the prevailing feeling of satisfaction on the part of the Palestinians at the unconditional Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, which raised Palestinian hopes. I also expressed my dismay at the apparently deliberate leakage to the Israeli media of alleged Palestinian concessions relating to such issues as the refugees, Jerusalem, and security arrangements. I asked, 'How can you expect us to carry on working in such a frustrating atmosphere? How can you expect us to discuss important issues such as Jerusalem, frontiers or prisoners on the basis of the proposals you gave us? It was demonstrated to us in Sweden that you were avoiding discussion of fundamental issues. This time, we will not allow you to avoid anything.' I also pointed out that the worst effect of that deliberate leak was the cruel criticism directed at the Palestinian negotiators, not only by our brethren, and various Palestinian factions, but also by the Arab world at large, which was drawing unfair comparisons between the Palestinian and the Lebanese situations. In Lebanon, a small Arab force had for the first time apparently driven the Israeli occupiers from an Arab land. To some Arabs, this made Hizbullah a model of resistance to be followed.

To Shlomo Ben Ami, I said, 'On the one hand, your withdrawal from

southern Lebanon pleased us. On the other hand, it has angered us.' I added that our frustration arose from our feeling that while Israel was apparently willing to withdraw entirely from Lebanon, without discussion, it was treating our reasonable demands in an unacceptable and unintelligible way. Israel was still talking about delaying the resolution of all the key issues that any final status agreement had to contain. Our position was unambiguous: either we agree on everything or nothing. Shlomo Ben Ami's reply seemed to me to be an unacceptable exercise in self-justification. He spoke about the difference between the Lebanese position and that of the Palestinians, and pointed out that the UN Security Council resolution 425 was mandatory in calling for withdrawal from Lebanon while claiming that resolution 242 calls only on the parties concerned to discuss all issues. He added that Israel had nothing to discuss with Lebanon other than the frontier line, while there was a wide range of issues to discuss with the Palestinians. He added, 'We can not talk about the final solution while we are pressurised to make "advance payments", because that destroys our ability to take crucial decisions on the final solution.' He made it clear that he was speaking on the instructions of Prime Minister Barak.

The Israeli delegation then diverted the discussion to other issues. General Shlomo Yanai brought out a map and returned once more to the Israeli idea of security zones, to which we had previously made it clear we objected. Other issues he addressed included the shaded areas that Israel wanted to retain for a period of many years after the signing of a peace agreement, and the areas it wanted to lease back from us along the River Jordan. We told the Israelis that in our view peace would lead to security, and not the other way round, as Israel seemed to envisage. We also stressed that sovereignty over the eastern frontiers had to be Palestinian. I asked them, rhetorically, 'why do you agree to the deployment of UN troops in Lebanon, Golan and Sinai, but not in our areas?' I added, 'Give sovereignty along the frontiers to us and we will not neglect our duty. When you speak about this issue as you do, it is an affront to our dignity.' However, I also conceded the following point: 'As we understand your security concerns, however, we shall accept the deployment of joint Palestinian-Israeli patrols with American participation. Otherwise, what you are proposing would be more like the annexation of our land than a security arrangement.'

Our conversation continued as follows:

General Yanai: If we can get what we want in the field of security, we shall be prepared to give concessions in other fields.

Abu Ala: When peace is established, we shall be partners not enemies. Why do you continue to argue about that? We are very sensitive about the presence of Israeli troops in our areas, because we have already had a bitter and bloody experience of them.

General Yanai: I understand that. But why don't we talk about reducing our military presence so that your dignity will not be hurt?

Abu Ala: General, we are not convinced by your views.

Hassan Asfour: To us, the presence in the Jordan Valley you demand will be tantamount to annexation. This is occupation. Why do you refuse to see our men in uniform but suggest to us that you keep your military presence in our areas? This way, you are humiliating us.

Abu Ala: Let us first agree that the River Jordan is the natural eastern frontier of the State of Palestine with Jordan. If you accept that, we will be more amenable to talking about security. We are proposing to accept joint patrols and a limited number of control posts, but not an Israeli military presence on the ground. Your presence on our frontier would violate our sovereignty.

Shlomo Ben Ami: Would you agree to a gradual withdrawal of our forces over a period of years?

Abu Ala: Let us leave that to the technical people. But let us first agree upon the frontiers and we shall be able to agree a time schedule for withdrawals.

General Yanai: Will you allow me to use your roads in times of emergency?

Abu Ala: No, because I cannot guarantee that you would use them for

a limited period of time only. We cannot accept that. We do not agree to the deployment of Israeli troops for your so-called emergencies. Nor do we accept that you yourselves alone will determine when an emergency has occurred, how long it may last, and what your requirements may be.

General Yanai: There will be a lack of reciprocity, then, as you will be using the safe passage that runs through our areas, as you know.

Abu Ala: As a starting point, let us first agree on sovereignty on the Jordan–Palestine frontier, which is the easiest of the final status issues. That will encourage us to move on to other questions.

Shlomo Ben Ami: Let us proceed with the discussion of the security arrangements by assuming that the sovereignty issue has been solved. That was the model Yitzhak Rabin tried to follow with the Syrians.

Abu Ala: I do not like to deal with hypothetical scenarios. You should first agree to the principle and then we shall talk about the detail.

Shlomo Ben Ami: But, what would happen if we agree on the principle and then fail to agree on the practical arrangements? You will, then, have obtained our agreement to the principle and we will have come out empty-handed.

Abu Ala: Your desire to control the River Jordan shows that you do not want to monitor what happens to the east of the river, as you say, but to dominate us.

General Yanai pointed out that the distance between Gaza and Haifa was no more than 120 kilometres and that some 85 per cent of Israelis live in that narrow coastal belt. The implication seemed to be that Israel might consider the annexation of some Palestinian territories for alleged security reasons, in order to broaden Israel's so-called narrow waist. At that point, I interrupted him furiously:

Abu Ala: With respect to you, General Yanai, there will be no foreign troops and there will be no areas that are not under our control within our own sovereign territory. Most especially, we have no wish to see Israeli

soldiers on any part of our land. We may, later, agree to minor territorial adjustments for security reasons, but it will not be you who will decide what we shall agree to. We may accept early warning posts, a United Nations force, American forces, or something of that sort, but we will not consent to lease any piece of land to you or let it be annexed by you; nor do we want in future to see a single Israeli soldier on our land, particularly along the River Jordan. Do you think that we are out of our minds to accept that? We are very sensitive towards your occupying forces. Do not surround us with your army from all directions and then try to tell us we have an independent state. When will you realise that we were enemies until Oslo, and now we have become partners? We are prepared to take your security interests into consideration so long as they do not prejudice our sovereignty or encroach on our land and its frontiers, territorial waters, and airspace.

It became clear to us at this fruitless session that Israel's ideas on frontiers and withdrawals were very different from those of the Palestinians. When we clashed sharply over troop withdrawals, for instance, the Israeli negotiators said to us: 'Would you consider a withdrawal on our part with the option of return, though we cannot discuss at the moment what would trigger such an event? You must accept that we may need to deploy Israeli troops in Palestinian territories at times of emergency, though we cannot now discuss the modalities of such a deployment, and since declaring an emergency is a matter of Israeli sovereignty, we shall not consult you over such a decision.' This confirmed to us that our interlocutors were trying to trick us into agreeing to authorise Israel to deploy forces in our territories whenever it wished, on the pretext of responding to emergencies that it had unilaterally declared.

Negotiations continued in this tense atmosphere until late at night. General Yanai used his all his powers of persuasion to try to get us to accept the Israeli concept of security. He talked about the use of roads within our territory that Israel would need in order to deploy its forces in emergency, and Israeli plans to control our airspace, as well as other proposals that would wholly undermine the concept of Palestinian sovereignty. Frankly, I felt like simply turning the conference table upside down. However, I contented myself with an ironic question: 'Yes, General, but how can we go to our people and say to them that we have sovereignty? What sort of sovereignty will be left for us?' I said to him, 'You do not

understand us, at all. We are an occupied people who wish to get rid of occupation, altogether. We no longer want to see a single soldier of the occupying army. But, when we have a sovereign state, we shall be prepared to discuss everything. At the moment, we shall accept only the early warning posts that President Arafat has already agreed to in principle, with the details to be discussed at a later stage. Apart from that we object to your proposed security plan in its entirety.'

It was by now 1 a.m. We ended the official session and I went into private session with Shlomo Ben Ami, sitting on a secluded balcony of the hotel. On this occasion, his voice resonated with a frustration that echoed what I felt myself. The disharmony at the talks had been manifest. As we were unable to make progress on any issue, both delegations were totally frustrated. At our private meeting, Ben Ami spoke to me as a friend, and tried to persuade me to cooperate with him. He said we two had a duty to act together to improve the atmosphere at the talks. He also promised to persuade the Israeli authorities to offer the Palestinian public additional concessions that would improve everyday conditions. However, he hastened to add that that he knew this would not satisfy us. Then, he suggested that we two should in future discuss the issues together, apart from the main talks, pursuing ideas that might be proposed as alternatives.

I wanted to reciprocate Ben Ami's amicable tone, so I agreed that we could be real partners in the peace process. In relation to the discussion on security that had taken place at the main talks, I said, 'Do not worry about security and public order. As and when peace is established between us we shall take care of this.' I also told him I had recently come back from Saudi Arabia, where the then Crown Prince Abdullah, who later became king, had said to me, 'If you reach a settlement with Israel, I shall attempt to persuade the whole Muslim world to support it.' However, I added that Prince Abdullah had laid great stress on one point, saying, 'Do not give any concessions on Jerusalem.'

I also reiterated to Ben Ami that an agreement with us would have major consequences for Israel. As I put it, 'I think that making peace with the Palestinians, above all others, will be a strategically decisive action for you. Look at your peace with Egypt. It has not led to any change in your relations with the wider Arab world.' We talked for hours, with our conversation wandering from one topic to another. I warned Ben Ami that if Israel did not carry out the third withdrawal due in a few days time, there

would be a crisis. I also talked again about the implications of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and its negative repercussions on our image as a negotiating team in the eyes of some Palestinians and many Arabs, who could not understand why the Palestinians seemed unable to negotiate an Israeli withdrawal.

I stressed to Ben Ami that, having opted to talk about the final status, we objected to finding ourselves in another transitional period, and that we would reject any partial solutions. I told him we would not accept a postponement of the Jerusalem issue, nor would we contemplate Barak's request for the deferment of discussion of certain crucial issues regarding Jerusalem, such as the question of control over and access to the holy places. I told him that the same applied to the refugees, and rejected as inadequate the proposal for the limited family reunion notion put forward by Israel. Instead, I called for the acceptance in principle by Israel of the right of return for the Palestinians, which would be followed by discussion of the details. I also asked for at least 10,000 refugees to be allowed back every year until the issue of principle was resolved.

On the issue of the frontiers, I re-emphasised to Ben Ami that Israel had to be realistic, and asked him, 'Why should the 1967 frontiers be good enough for others, but not for us?' I also rejected Israel's demand to be allowed to annex 13 per cent of the West Bank. I informed him that the idea of considering the town of Abu Dis as a capital for the Palestinians was not under consideration in Palestinian circles. On the same issue, I told him that Abu Mazen totally repudiated the content of what had become known as the 'Abu Mazen-Beilin Document', leaked by the Israelis, in which there was an alleged reference to Abu Dis as an alternative Palestinian capital. At the end of our conversation, I called for at least one agreement on a basic issue to be concluded at this meeting, as a symbol of our intentions, suggesting that this should be Jerusalem. I said to him, 'Jerusalem must be an open city within the 1967 frontiers, with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, rather than the villages and towns that lie in its vicinity as you are suggesting. We will not allow you to delay this issue. The same applies to refugees who must have the right to return. Everything will be dependent on granting them that right.'

At around 3 a.m., when dawn was breaking, Ben Ami asked jokingly: 'What has your visit to Saudi Arabia done to you? You have come back with hard-line positions.' He then asked, 'Whatever happened to the Abu

Mazen–Beilin Document?’ I had a copy with me, so I took it from my briefcase and said to him, ‘Look at it, and at the notes made by Abu Mazen in the margin. The notes are lengthier than the original text. These notes are handwritten by Abu Mazen. He did not agree to this document which carries his name.’ I also told Ben Ami that President Arafat wanted an agreement as soon as possible. I advised him: ‘Do not inflate your territorial demands. We will not allow you to annex any piece of our land, even if the area covered by settlements is less than 2 per cent, which we still regard as illegal. Be realistic. You have to accept the principle that land exchange on both sides of the Green Line must be minimal.’ The only result of my nocturnal session with Ben Ami, however, was that he suggested the postponement of discussion of the status of Jerusalem for three years. When I put this to the Palestinian leadership, they firmly rejected it.

The following morning, 3 June, when we resumed the main talks, following on from my conversation with Shlomo Ben Ami the previous night, I put on the table the proposal that we should have serious negotiations on the Jerusalem issue. This, I said, could be the key to a breakthrough in the talks. I made the same suggestion to the full meeting that I had made to Ben Ami the night before, that East Jerusalem be the capital of Palestine and West Jerusalem the capital of Israel. Both parts of the city should be open to all faiths, with Palestinian sovereignty extending over the Old City of Jerusalem. I reminded the Israeli team that the leaders of the Arab and Muslim worlds had urged us to secure the rights of the Palestinians in Jerusalem and had cautioned us against giving away the rights of the Arabs and of the Muslims as a whole.

Our main focus, however, was still on territory and frontiers, while technical subgroups held further meetings on security. I told Shlomo Ben Ami, on the basis of the discussion we had held the previous night, that if we agreed that the frontiers of the Palestinian state were those of 4 June 1967, then we could talk in detail about security arrangements. If not, however, we would never be able to agree anything. Hassan Asfour said to Ben Ami, ‘Your demand for the annexation of 13 per cent of the West Bank is exaggerated. This would be more than the whole area of the Gaza Strip. In other words, for the sake of 170,000 settlers you want to annex an area equivalent to that in which 1.2 million Palestinians live. Meanwhile, you know perfectly well that the whole area of the settlements amounts at present to no more than 2 per cent of the total area

of the West Bank.' He also emphasised that the Palestinian leadership would not even consider the Israeli concept of 'shaded' areas that would be provisionally controlled by Israel. As for Jerusalem, Hassan Asfour proposed an adjustment to the municipal boundaries, in such a way that would make it possible to annex the surrounding Arab suburbs such as Shufat, Beit Hanina, and Issawiyyah to Arab Jerusalem. He also proposed that two capitals be established in the city, with the Arab areas within the Old City under Palestinian sovereignty as well as the outer areas like Wadi Al-Jows and Al-Sheikh Jarrah.

Finally, we presented a proposal regarding the eastern frontier of the proposed Palestinian state which read: 'In order to continue the negotiations with the aim of reaching a framework accord, the two parties agreed on the following two points. First, the eastern frontier of Palestine with Jordan shall be that which prevailed on 4 June 1967 between the West Bank and Jordan. Second, without prejudice to the integrity of Palestinian sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, security experts from both sides shall discuss security arrangements.' In response, Shlomo Ben Ami proposed an alternative formula. This was as follows: 'In relation to the eastern frontier of the Palestinian state, the two parties agree to discuss security arrangements. When a mutually satisfactory resolution has been reached, they will resume discussions on the political status of the eastern frontier.' Ben Ami added, however, that if no agreement was possible on security arrangements, this would not necessarily terminate discussion of the issue of the eastern frontier. Agreement on other issues, such as settlement blocks and the western frontier of Palestine with Israel could also lay the foundation for a comprehensive deal as part of which agreement on the eastern frontier could be reached. Ben Ami appeared to be manoeuvring within the very limited space allowed to him by Ehud Barak.

This was the point at which we concluded this final round of talks, which we had regarded as a continuation of the 'Swedish track', since the negotiating teams were the same as in Stockholm, and the agenda was unchanged. The talks ended inconclusively, having laid no groundwork for the prospective summit. I had attempted to induce Israel to admit responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem and accept the right of return. I had also tried to persuade the Israeli team to concede that UN Security Council resolution 242 applied to the West Bank, including Jerusalem. With this guarantee of our sovereign rights, we could have

showed some flexibility over Israel's security concerns. In practice, however, nothing was agreed and nothing changed.

The next day, 4 June, the day before Madeleine Albright's arrival, at a final session before we dispersed, Shlomo Ben Ami urged us to make every effort to avoid frustrating Clinton, Barak, and Arafat at the summit. He also asked for a review of maps and drafts. Once more, it was clear to us that what the Israelis were proposing was far from our perception of what was possible. I stressed this to the Israelis, saying, 'The maps you are proposing are no different from what was proposed at Eilat. In fact, I detect backtracking even over ideas we long ago rejected. As regards security, we reject your proposals out of hand because we can see that you intend to keep control of everything in your hands. As for refugees, you have agreed to a mechanism but not to the essential right of return. Regarding Jerusalem, we cannot say that we are even close to agreement on anything. Therefore, if we fail to focus earnestly on these issues, on the basis of the mutual respect of each other's rights to which the international community has given its blessing, we shall not be able to reach agreement. I suggest that we begin by agreeing on the eastern frontiers of the Palestinian state in the Jordan Valley. Then we can go on to security arrangements, and continue until we reach the question of the western frontiers, which Israel calls the Green Line. If we cannot even agree on the frontiers, we shall not be able to make progress on any map or other issue. Nor shall we be able to discuss security, because that, inevitably, requires agreement on the extent of the territory for which security is needed.'

The Israeli delegation did not respond to any part of what I said, but instead opened a discussion on the difference between our respective ideas on the frontiers of a Palestinian state. They asserted that our demands regarding the eastern frontier would place the Jordan Valley entirely in our hands. Shlomo Ben Ami and Gilad Sher both spoke. While the former showed some flexibility over the idea of agreeing the eastern border of the West Bank as the frontier of the Palestinian state, the latter insisted on reverting to where we had set out, insisting that our task was basically nothing more than to lay good foundations for the summit. When the Israeli delegation attempted to present yet again the map that they had previously put on the table, showing their ideas on withdrawals and frontiers, I physically prevented one of my Palestinian colleagues from picking it up. I then walked out of the

conference room. My aim was to make it clear to the Israelis, with that dramatic gesture, that we were not even prepared to discuss proposals that would lead nowhere, or to entertain their ideas about security. The meeting then broke up.

I had by this time concluded from what I had seen of Shlomo Ben Ami's proposals that Ehud Barak was reluctant to enter into any practical commitments ahead of the planned summit. I told Ben Ami before I left that we needed to adjourn the talks in order to consult the Palestinian leadership. I warned him that there had to be progress on major issues if the summit was to have any chance of success. I told him yet again that if we could agree on the issue of the eastern frontier of the Palestinian state, it could be a step that might break the log jam. I also told him that though I had mentioned Jerusalem, we had now decided that an agreement on the eastern frontier was our priority, and that without it we were not prepared to proceed with other key topics. After the session of 4 June 2000 finally ended, I went back to my office to draft a summary report for the Palestinian leadership as follows:

At the beginning of the round, the Palestinian delegation raised the following points:

- 1) The issue of the prisoners must be resolved, with their release as a prerequisite to making progress in the political process.
- 2) The commitments already made in signed agreements, especially the parts related to withdrawal from territory, must be implemented.
- 3) The Palestinians reject further postponement of any of the final status issues which must be resolved now.
- 4) We stressed the importance of concentrating on the Jerusalem issue.

Issues discussed so far:

Security and frontiers:

The Israeli delegation insisted on a presentation (by Shlomo Yanai) on the Israeli concept of security. The Palestinian delegation made it clear that discussion of security arrangements must be set aside until after the definition of the frontiers. The basic point of difference was our insistence on a written recognition from Israel that the eastern frontier of the

State of Palestine should be the River Jordan as far as the southernmost point of the Dead Sea. The Israeli delegation refused to accept this. On the other hand, the Israelis had already given tentative recognition to this proposal, though without confirmation in writing. This issue has hitherto blocked progress in the negotiations.

The security arrangements requested by Israel were as follows:

- 1) Three early warning posts on the West Bank heights.
- 2) Dedicated roads reserved for use by the Israeli army in emergencies (they want three such roads, one road running north–south and two from west–east; Israel alone would decide what constitutes an emergency; the use of these roads would not need permission from the Palestinians, who need only to be notified).
- 3) The Israeli forces will have the right to deploy in emergencies along a security line in the Jordan Valley.
- 4) The allocation of areas in the Jordan Valley that will be under Israeli security control. No definition was made of the size of these areas or their nature. Nor was it clear whether they would run along the whole length of the frontier or just part of it.
- 5) Israeli patrols along the whole of the frontiers which may be either purely Israeli or jointly Israeli–Palestinian. The objective would be day-by-day control of the frontier to prevent infiltration by individuals and arms smuggling.
- 6) Complete Israeli security control of air space over the West Bank and Gaza Strip; alternatively, the Israeli air force shall have the right to full use of the air space over the whole of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israeli delegation requested a meeting of security experts from both sides to discuss security arrangements. The terms of reference would in principle be that the eastern frontier of the State of Palestine would be the line that separated the West Bank from Jordan up to 4 June 1967. However, it is clear that they do not regard themselves as committed to an unqualified and unambiguous recognition of this line, which has been specified by us as the eastern frontier of the State of Palestine. It also leaves the door open for arrangements that will render meaningless the concept of Palestinian sovereignty over the Jordan Valley. Therefore, the Palestinian

delegation refused to bring a Palestinian technical team to attend such a meeting on the basis proposed. The Palestinian delegation also rejected the security arrangements proposed by the Israeli delegation.

The position of the Palestinian delegation on the eastern frontier and security

- 1) The eastern frontier of the State of Palestine will be the line that separated the West Bank from Jordan on the eve of 4 June 1967.
- 2) A Palestinian technical team will only be allowed to discuss security arrangements after the frontier line as defined above is agreed and confirmed.
- 3) We reject any security arrangements that allow the continuation of Israeli control over any part of Palestinian territories or infringe on full Palestinian sovereignty over the Jordan Valley.
- 4) We reject Israeli security over the Palestinian frontier with Jordan.
- 5) We reject any deployment of Israeli patrols along Palestinian frontiers.
- 6) We refuse Israel the right to use Palestinian roads for military purposes.
- 7) We reject Israeli control over Palestinian air space.
- 8) The Palestinian delegation made an offer to discuss security arrangements in a manner that will calm Israel's fears and satisfy its real interests, after Israel has agreed that the frontier be defined in a way that encroaches neither on Palestinian sovereignty nor the integrity of Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian delegation offered, in principle, to discuss a number of proposals, including the following:

- 1) The deployment of international troops;
- 2) The deployment of American troops;
- 3) The installation of early warning posts;
- 4) Permission for joint patrols for a limited period of time at specified points along the frontier, while avoiding the infringement of Palestinian sovereignty.

Refugees

The topic of refugees was briefly discussed. The Palestinian delegation made it clear that any ideas or arrangements discussed in connection with the issue of refugees must be based on the acceptance of the right of return. Without the institution of the right of return, such ideas or arrangements would be meaningless.

The Israeli delegation rejected a Palestinian right of return. Shlomo Ben Ami contended that issue of the right of return should be left to the tripartite summit, though it was clear from what he said that the Israeli stance on that issue would remain inflexible.

The last lap of the Swedish track

On 5 June 2000, in the wake of our Tel Aviv negotiations, the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, arrived yet again in the region, accompanied by Dennis Ross and a team of aides. Her mission was to prepare the ground for the planned trilateral summit in Washington and to urge both sides to make concessions that would lead to its success. Albright asked the Israelis to offer some leeway on certain of the major issues such as Jerusalem and the definition of the frontiers. She also asked them to carry out the third withdrawal in the West Bank, as well as releasing Palestinian funds and freeing some Palestinian prisoners, as good will gestures in order to improve the chances of success for the summit. The Americans evidently wanted to see symbolic concessions from the Israelis, as evidence that Israel wanted the summit to succeed and was willing to make sacrifices for it.

The Secretary of State's tour began with a long meeting with Ehud Barak, during which, apparently, there was little change in Israel's position. American pressure therefore shifted on to the Palestinians. When she met the Palestinian leadership, Albright asked us to refrain from focusing too much on the implementation of commitments under the transitional agreement, such as the third troop withdrawal, the release of prisoners, and Israel's withdrawal from the three small towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Instead, she said we should concentrate on the major issues. This strengthened the suspicion we had that the Americans and the Israelis were coordinating their positions in advance ahead of the summit. Our view was reinforced by our observation that Americans had never appeared to exert pressure on Barak to be flexible.

Our encounter with Albright left us with the impression that if we attended the summit without obtaining prior assurances of the settlement of the outstanding transitional period issues and of an outcome favourable to us on the major issues, the result would certainly be failure – a failure that would be blamed on the Palestinians. President Clinton was increasingly anxious for a success in his Middle East policy before leaving office. We suspected that, hoping against hope for a good result, the Americans intended to agree to Barak's demand for the summit even though Israel had refused to offer sufficient prior assurances to guarantee its success. Barak refused to make the minor concessions the Americans asked for to create a favourable atmosphere for the summit, but the Americans seemed fatalistically determined to go ahead. In fact, the Americans themselves were clearly uneasy over the prospects for the summit, as they decided to call for further and more intensive negotiations, suggesting to the two sides that we hold a last round of negotiations beforehand. Once more, we deemed it best to fall in with the wishes of the American administration. I was asked to attend a meeting in the United States, at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington, which would pursue further discussions on the agenda that had occupied the 'Swedish track'.

Andrews Air Force Base

On 12 June 2000, I therefore flew to Washington DC for more talks to prepare the ground for the planned summit. The proposed date for the summit was approaching rapidly and the need for serious preparation becoming increasingly evident. The plan was to negotiate in private at Andrews Air Force Base, near the American capital. Just a week later, on 19 June, President Clinton would announce that he was prepared to host the summit at Camp David. This would take place after the 4 July holiday and well ahead of the annual Democratic and Republican conventions in August, when the two American political parties would select their candidates for the imminent presidential elections.

Our first meeting in Washington was held at the Willard Hotel, close to the White House and the scene of many historic encounters in American history. Shlomo Ben Ami once more headed the Israeli delegation. I told the Israelis and the Americans on this occasion that whatever the Palestinians

recommended to President Arafat after the Andrews talks were completed would be the deciding factor in whether he would respond positively to President Clinton's invitation to the summit. The final answer from the Palestinians would therefore depend on the success or otherwise of these preliminary meetings. I went on, 'We are not going to content ourselves with general statements on Jerusalem, for instance, without discussing the smallest details.' Shlomo Ben Ami replied by saying: 'We succeeded at the 'Swedish track' in proposing a number of ideas and explaining positions. No other Israeli government has offered as much as we have done in terms of security arrangements, going as far as the dismantling of some settlements. This is a thing which would cause uproar in Israel when it became known. So what are your fears?' He also suggested that we hold talks for a week or two and then go to the summit. At that point I said: 'You have to negotiate with us exactly as you did with the Egyptians, the Jordanians, and the Syrians, no more, no less; otherwise, the summit will be a disaster.' Following this, the Israeli delegation made what they described as a modified proposal with regard to territorial and security arrangements. However, their map turned out to be similar to the one shown to us before. My comment was, 'If this is the case, we will not be able to accept this map. We categorically reject your ideas on territorial arrangements. What is yours is yours and what is ours is ours. We do not need any other arrangements.'

From the first, I set out the full range of our concerns and asked Israel to agree, in principle, on the main items that would be on the agenda, in other words Jerusalem, frontiers, and refugees, before going into the details. I also said we would reject the idea of any local territorial arrangements, which we viewed as no more than an Israeli formula to retain control over parts of our land, particularly in the Jordan Valley. We told the Israelis that their idea of so-called 'shaded areas', which would make up 10 per cent of the area of the West Bank, was not acceptable to us, even if they promised to return these areas to Palestinian sovereignty after a defined number of years. I then reminded the Israelis that these negotiations should be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the situation as enshrined in international law, like all previous negotiations since Oslo.

Ben Ami responded, 'Abu Ala, we can not deceive ourselves. Our position at the beginning of the anticipated summit will not be the same as that at its end. The government of Ehud Barak is offering you today what

no other Israeli government has ever offered. We shall negotiate with you here for a week or two, after which we shall go together to the summit. You have reached this point, which is close to an agreement with us, by virtue of your political struggle and not by virtue of the United Nations resolutions, which were effectively sidelined over half a century ago. Make up your mind now. Do you want more UN resolutions or do you want an agreement?’

We then went from the Willard Hotel to Andrews Air Force Base, where we got down to business. At Andrews, we held our first sessions in an unusual venue, an immense and brightly lit assembly hall. We were also joined by Dennis Ross, at the head of an American team which held separate meetings with the Palestinian and Israeli delegations. As we were in the midst of our sessions at Andrews, we learned that Ehud Barak had unilaterally decided to reduce the size of the area that was to be handed to us in the districts of Abu Dis, Al-Izarieh, and Al-Sawahreh, close to Jerusalem, as provided for in Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. He also deferred the date of the handover, and announced, as a gesture of ‘good will’ towards the Palestinian people, the freeing of precisely three Palestinian prisoners, and no more. To say we were astonished would be a gross understatement. So far virtually nothing had come in practical terms from the Sharm Al-Sheikh Memorandum, a source of deep disappointment to us. However, it seemed that the situation could still get worse. This self-styled ‘good will’ gesture from Barak struck us like a bolt of lightning. It was also a huge embarrassment to the Americans. At that point, on 14 June 2000, President Arafat had just arrived in Washington for a meeting with President Clinton at the White House. As it turned out, instead of discussing the prospective summit, his meeting on 15 June was dominated by the implications of Barak’s so-called ‘good will’ gesture. At the end of a long session with Yasser Arafat, President Clinton, apparently depressed by the turn of events, said the time seemed not yet ripe for the summit.

Madeleine Albright stood out amongst all the American officials as the most embarrassed, the most anguished, and the most outspoken in the anger of her reaction to Ehud Barak’s provocative act. Despite her Jewish ancestry, she always seemed sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Indeed, some on the right wing in Israel regarded her as little better than a renegade. On this occasion, she said to the Israeli delegation: ‘It would have been better to release no prisoners at all than release only three.’ She told

Shlomo Ben Ami's delegation in no uncertain terms that Israel was under an obligation to continue to prepare for the third redeployment which was by then due in just a week's time, on 23 June 2000, as no delay would be tolerated. She also told him that Israel must be ready for the summit, the date of which would be decided after Dennis Ross's next visit to the region and a short trip by Albright herself. Secretary of State Albright did not content herself with this angry outburst. She also contacted Ehud Barak directly, apparently telling him that the American administration was disappointed by the release of only three prisoners, which it regarded as an insult to the Palestinians and a snub to the Americans. She added that President Clinton had only with difficulty succeeded in persuading President Arafat to stay calm and not to create a crisis over the issue.

Before President Arafat left Washington to return to the region after his lightning visit to the White House, the two delegations seized the opportunity to hold a joint meeting with him in the VIP lounge at Andrews. Shlomo Ben Ami, in his capacity as head of the Israeli delegation, began to speak, saying to Arafat, 'We need to lay the foundations needed for the summit.' Before Ben Ami could utter another sentence, Abu Ammar angrily interrupted him, saying: 'The release of only three prisoners is intended to harm me and to harm President Clinton. What is this? We can create a situation for you similar to the one in southern Lebanon. I have a copy of the letter sent by Shimon Peres to the Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst regarding Jerusalem. You must quickly implement what we have agreed in Oslo and Sharm Al-Sheikh, as well as what is contained in the American Letter of Guarantee given to us on the eve of the Madrid Conference in 1991.' In reply, Ben Ami said, 'Abu Ala has refused to talk to us about the issue of security, but I am convinced that we can reach an agreement if there is good will and if the two delegations have authority. I ask Abu Ala to discuss the security issues with us.' President Arafat made no comment on this attempt to undermine my authority, leaving it to me, as head of the Palestinian delegation, to take a decision on the topics for negotiation and their priorities.

After the departure of President Arafat, we met the Israelis informally in the room assigned to me as my personal quarters at Andrews Air Force Base. In the temporary absence of Shlomo Ben Ami, who had briefly left us to attend his son's graduation ceremony at the University of Florida's Faculty of Medicine, we decided to refer certain issues to the

official negotiations under way between Sa'eb Erekat and Oded Eran that were taking place simultaneously at Bolling Air Force Base, not far away. These would include water, the environment, law and order, the provision of safe passage, and frontier control. Thus, we ourselves would be free to tackle the more fundamental issues. We demanded that after a framework agreement was signed, the territory presently in Zone B be transferred to Zone A, and that the first phase of the third redeployment be carried out. We also called for a revision of terminology, insisting that we wanted to discuss the dates of what should be referred to as 'withdrawals', rather than 'redeployments', as the Israelis preferred to call it. I stressed to the Israeli delegation that the Palestinian people would take notice only of how the major issues were resolved, and that this was why no agreement would be tenable if occupying forces and settlements remained in our territory, under whatever pretext. At the end of a long session which stretched into the night, I suggested to the Israeli delegation that we move the venue of our negotiations back to the region, either to Taba or Sharm Al-Sheikh.

We were rejoined the following day by Shlomo Ben Ami, who immediately demanded to know what conditions we were setting for the holding of the summit. I replied, 'Before talking about conditions, you have to recognise that many deep divisions remain between us. On the question of Jerusalem for example, we are not even prepared to listen to your proposals. On the issue of security, the divisions are wide between us, particularly with reference to your concept of what security consists of. The fact is that we have made no progress since the talks we had in Sweden. You must put all your cards on the table and begin to show sufficient flexibility.' With this, we brought the Andrews Air Force Base negotiations to a halt, and on 17 June, we went back to the region. The atmosphere was still soured by the impact of Barak's preposterous 'gesture of good will'.

The Americans promptly followed us back to the Middle East, and an American peace team headed by Dennis Ross arrived in Israel on 22 June 2000. Over five days of talks, the Americans shuttled between the Israelis and ourselves, holding separate talks with each side. The Americans were extremely keen to hold the summit at the earliest possible date, but the shortness of time and the intractability of the issues involved were putting them under great pressure. On 26 June 2000 I met Dennis Ross at the Jerusalem Hilton for a meeting focusing on the clarification of our position

on the key issues. Dennis Ross grilled me over our concepts of sovereignty, control, and citizenship, as well as asking what were the issues where the Palestinian and Israeli positions differed most sharply. The Americans were taking stock of how wide the gap still was between the two sides, not only over final status issues but also over most of the transitional issues. Ross clearly feared it might still be too early to risk the summit. We gathered this from his request for further talks in the following days.

Minutes of my meeting with Dennis Ross (26 June 2000)

Members of the American Delegation:

Dennis Ross
Aaron Miller
Jonathan Schwartz
Robert Malley
Jamal Hilal

Members of the Palestinian Delegation:

Ahmed Qurie (Abu Ala)
Hassan Asfour
Hibah Al-Husseini
Jamal Abu Ali
Omar Dajani

Ross: This morning, I met representatives of some major American corporations, such as Hewlett Packard, who say they are interested in visiting Palestine.

Abu Ala: Why? (Laughing)

Ross: I know who not to invite to our next session! (Laughing) Because we do not have much time, I would like to discuss each issue separately and define each party's standpoint towards each issue. Shall we start with land?

Abu Ala: I shall start with frontiers. The Palestinian position is that they should be the 1967 frontiers, while the Israeli position is that adjustments should be made for settlement blocks and other matters which the Israelis have not yet clarified. On the 'indeterminate areas', our proposal is to establish joint ventures there, but the Israelis have not replied to this

suggestion. On territorial adjustment, we reject it, in principle. However, if there have to be adjustments, they should be very few and reciprocal. The Israelis say they will not accept territorial exchanges. Concerning sovereignty, we demand full sovereignty over our territory. The Israelis are seeking sovereignty over certain areas, control of others, and probably some so-called 'grey areas'.

Ross: What is your understanding of the 'grey areas'?

Abu Ala: Where there is Palestinian sovereignty with Israeli control. Regarding settlements, we reject in principle the idea of permitting them to remain within our territory. Individual Israeli settlers can stay and apply for Palestinian citizenship, but they will have to be subject to Palestinian law. The Israelis want to annex the settlement blocks close to the Green Line to Israel or have special arrangements for them. Regarding the presence of a third party security force, this is what we desire, whereas the Israelis want an Israeli presence only. We have not fully discussed security, but there are very wide differences concerning the underlying ideas. Israel's plan is in effect to control the Palestinians. However, we have agreed to the installation of early warning posts. On troop withdrawals, we demand that there should be a time scale for a real withdrawal and not 'redeployment', which implies the possibility of reversal. Regarding Jerusalem, the Israeli bottom line is that Jerusalem is Israeli. However, they are prepared to give us administrative control of part of it so that we can look after Palestinian citizens in East Jerusalem and the Haram Al-Sharif. Our starting point is that Jerusalem is Palestinian and is part of the territories occupied in 1967. We reject annexation. We believe the East and West parts of Jerusalem should be open to each other and that East Jerusalem should be under Palestinian sovereignty. The Israelis also believe that the city should be open, but entirely under Israeli sovereignty. As to the Old City, we believe that it should be under Palestinian sovereignty with special arrangements guaranteeing Jewish access to the Western Wall. Concerning Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, our position is that they should come under Palestinian sovereignty and that there could be special arrangements for them. Israel wants to annex them. On the question of the expansion of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries, Israel wants this, but we reject it. We want the boundaries to be as they were in 1967. In the field of municipal administration, we agree that there should be cooperation in security

matters in Jerusalem and we agree to have special arrangements. Regarding refugees, the Palestinian position is that there should be an acknowledgement of the right of return, and we have to develop a mechanism for that. The Israelis reject the right of return and propose, instead, a family reunion scheme. Regarding compensation for refugees, we are trying to obtain this for all refugees. The Israelis argue that it should come from an international body. To the idea of general compensation, the Israelis say 'never'. Shlomo Ben Ami said to me lately, 'You have not won a war.' Regarding antiquities, we say to the Israelis 'Return the antiquities to us', but they have not responded to this request.

Ross: We have questions for you. You mention sovereignty and control. Would you accept that they have control over land and you have sovereignty over it?

Abu Ala: Once agreement on all issues is reached, we would accept a gradual withdrawal, but we shall not agree to continued Israeli control.

Ross: Until they withdraw, the situation will stay as it is on the ground.

Abu Ala: Then it will continue to be an occupation.

Ross: The Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty includes special arrangements of this sort.

Abu Ala: That is true in relation to certain agricultural areas, but we shall not accept any special arrangements for territory until it is acknowledged that it is ours.

Schwartz: Are you seeking control over any part of Israeli territory? For instance, do you want control over the safe passage?

Abu Ala: These are two different circumstances.

Asfour: We made a historic compromise regarding territory when we accepted United Nations Security Council resolution 242. The safe passage should not be considered as a concession by Israel. The two parts that will constitute our state should be linked together. United Nations General

Assembly resolution 181 does not provide for such link. However, we need a route so that we can travel from one part to another.

Ross: What will be the fate of the Israelis who stay in Palestine? Barak asked me this question yesterday. Will they be Israeli citizens living in Palestine or what?

Abu Ala: It will be up to them and in accordance with the law. They will not receive special treatment.

Asfour: I do not think it will be a contribution to peace if any Israeli settlers stay. They are very different from investors and others who could be part of the state.

Ross: The Israelis presume that most settlers will leave, but they want them to have the opportunity to stay. If there are settlement blocks with Israelis living in the midst of the Palestinians, will there be special dispensations to grant them special treatment?

Abu Ala: We have never accepted the principle of the settlement blocks, so what is the purpose of continuing that line of discussion?

Ross: I am only trying to clarify something that came up in discussion with the Israelis. I am not trying to get to the Palestinian red lines. We are trying to look ahead and foresee the problems and possibilities.

Abu Ala: I understand that, but there is a big difference between our ideas and theirs. They want transit routes and so forth in our territory. This is not appropriate as part of the final status. Please be aware that our people in Tulkarm and Qalqilya have reacted strongly against the proposal of annexation that was put forward by the Israelis at the Eilat talks. They are threatening trouble.

Asfour: The Israelis are not only talking about settlements in this connection. They want to control large areas of territory.

Ross: Do you want the presence of a third party? If so, what sort of role do you imagine for that?

Abu Ala: Its role would be to confront external threats in the Jordan Valley, and to maintain a presence at the frontier crossings, to oversee withdrawal, and to follow up the implementation of the agreement.

Ross: Which is not just to monitor the situation, but also to ensure that the parties implement their respective commitments? I have taken this issue up with the Israelis and they did not reject the idea.

Hilal: Would there be a time limit to the role played by the third party?

Abu Ala: This needs to be discussed.

Miller: Your position on the Jerusalem settlements is that they should be under Palestinian sovereignty. Will you be able to tolerate the existence of multiple national identities in the new state, which you said would not be for settlers?

Abu Ala: There might be some special arrangements in Jerusalem. That could be a special case. I refer, here, to the settlements that are within the municipal perimeter of Jerusalem as it was in June 1967.

Ross: What does President Arafat have in mind when he talks about an arrangement similar to that of the Vatican?

Abu Ala: He is talking only about the Old City. It will be under Palestinian sovereignty. But there will be special arrangements.

Schwartz: Regarding the concept of the status quo, does this apply only to the administration of the holy places or could it have wider implications?

Abu Ala: What do you mean by wider implications?

Schwartz: Does it have implications for the political situation?

Asfour: Does the Vatican have political sovereignty over church property in other states?

Abu Ala: When we talk about the 'status quo', we mean in the context of religion. No church will be converted into a mosque. We shall not demolish the Western Wall, even though President Arafat's property there was confiscated!

Miller: Regarding the transitional periods, I cannot emphasise enough the importance of this issue. I know that your experience with transitional periods has not been fortunate. Instead of building confidence, they have eroded it. I attribute that to three shortcomings in the Oslo Agreement. These are that sovereignty was not defined; there was no timetable that has been kept to; and there was no involvement of outside parties. I think that it was unrealistic to believe you could move straight from the present situation to one where the two parties have been able to discard their fears and prejudices. If your concerns regarding these problems can be accommodated, will you be prepared to show more flexibility regarding the transitional periods?

Abu Ala: I would add something further. The details should be specified of how each separate issue should be dealt with during the transitional period.

Asfour: Can you guarantee to us that you can make the Israelis change their minds?

Abu Ala: Aaron has rightly raised this matter. But what sort of flexibility are they asking for, Aaron? Flexibility has, in the past, been used against us.

Miller: This is a change that cannot happen overnight.

Ross: Military redeployment does not take a long time. But where will the thousands of settlers go?

Abu Ala: I know that this cannot happen overnight. The transitional period will be shorter in some places and longer in others. We have to look at each case separately.

Schwartz: Regarding the timetable, are there issues that will be negotiated later, including special protocols, after the FAPS agreement comes into effect?

Abu Ala: Never mind that. We should go straight to the question of agreement on the final status so that we can complete it without delay.

Ross: We may try that. But can some issues be dealt with later, state to state?

Abu Ala: The FAPS agreement should cover economic relations, for example.

Schwartz: I think so too.

Abu Ala: However, there would be some issues.

Schwartz: I have not heard your proposals for the 'indeterminate areas' [Latrun]. I would like to know more.

Abu Ala: They could be the sites for Israeli–Palestinian economic projects, under Palestinian sovereignty.

Schwartz: Will you demand Palestinian sovereignty?

Abu Ala: No, not necessarily. We could divide the land between us, or we could make it joint possession; otherwise, we could leave it indeterminate.

Ross: You could leave it undecided. Maybe we have to stop now. We can continue later today or, preferably, tomorrow.

In Nablus

On 25 June 2000, Abu Ammar received an Israeli delegation headed by Shlomo Ben Ami in Nablus. The meeting was intended to be a follow-up to the confidential talks in which I had been engaged. At that time, consultations and diplomatic contacts between all parties concerned with the peace process were in full swing. Preparations were well under way for the summit that would bring together President Arafat, Ehud Barak, and President Clinton, which was now virtually certain to convene in

Washington in a few weeks time. Meanwhile, the end seemed in sight for Ehud Barak's government, which was fast losing political support. Dennis Ross was still in the region, preparing for the summit, and Shlomo Ben Ami wished to lose no time. In the evening of a hot West Bank day, the meeting took place at the residence of the Mayor, Ghassan Al-Shakaa. Ben Ami's team came in their own transport to the Israeli military check-point at the entrance to the town, whence they were discreetly transferred to the Mayor's residence in cars with Palestinian plates that would attract no attention.

In addition to Ben Ami, the Israeli team included Gilad Sher and Yossi Ginossar, while President Arafat was backed by Abu Mazen, Sa'eb Erekat, and myself, together with our host, Ghassan Al-Shakaa. After the formalities, Ben Ami came to the point. His intention was to explain to President Arafat what Barak's position was on the progress of the confidential negotiations we had been holding. Abu Ammar interrupted him, however, expressing his doubts over whether Barak was in fact serious in his commitment to negotiation at all. Arafat said that the Israeli Prime Minister was simply playing for time until President Clinton's term of office expired at the end of the year, after which either Al Gore or George W. Bush would take a year or more to settle down at the White House. Only then would a new American President be in a position to reopen the Middle East dossier.

Ben Ami replied, 'Ehud Barak cannot afford to waste time. You know what condition the governing coalition is in at the moment. Barak is not alone in his concern. His ministers will not let him waste precious time, nor will they allow the National Religious Party cabinet member, Yitzhak Levi, to dictate the government's policy.' In conclusion, Ben Ami said, 'The summit is the only place to settle controversial matters. Therefore, we must all make every possible effort to achieve success at the summit.'

Abu Ammar: But we must prepare ourselves well for this summit. You must continue to prepare for it with our negotiating team.

Ben Ami: I think the United States will not allow itself another failure, since this summit comes after the total debacle of the meeting between President Clinton and Syria's President Hafez Al-Assad in Geneva. In addition, we shall not, for our part, permit the peace process to end in failure.

Abu Ammar: The date of 23 June 2000 has just passed. Everybody brought pressure to bear on me to allow the withdrawal to be postponed until this date. I was pressurised by President Clinton, by President Mubarak, by Miguel Angel Moratinos of the European Union, and by Madeleine Albright. Barak has been issuing one promise after another without fulfilling any of them. What about the forty-three unauthorised settlement outposts that Barak has not removed, though he has promised to do so? Why did he refer the issue of the three Jerusalem towns to the Knesset?

Yossi Ginossar: Barak can not reach a historic accord with anyone other than you.

Ben Ami: We have opened negotiations with your delegation about a 50 per cent withdrawal. We have agreed on 87 per cent, with 76 per cent carried out immediately and you will get a further 10 per cent within the context of a gradual withdrawal. We shall negotiate about the 13 per cent we want from you at the Washington summit, and this figure is not, in any event, final.

Abu Ammar: Why did you withdraw from the whole of southern Lebanon?

Ben Ami: In the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, territory is only one of many key elements, whereas in the conflict between Lebanon and Israel it was the only element. In any case, if you negotiate with us on security issues, you will see that they are Israel’s weak point, particularly in the Jordan Valley.

Ben Ami then went on to talk about the refugee issue, on which he and I had reached a certain level of understanding. Ben Ami said he was aware that the situation of the refugees was a catastrophic problem as seen from the Palestinian point of view, and that he was aware how much the Palestinians had suffered. However, he added, the two positions were not fatally different from each other.

Ben Ami: We have succeeded in agreeing with Abu Ala a minimum position that would mobilise the whole world, including Israel, to expend

great efforts in order to rehabilitate the refugees. I am aware that if we can not reach an agreement on this issue, it will be difficult for you to swing Palestinian public opinion behind the agreement. We shall, acting together, set up an international fund and a special reparations commission. We will do all we can. We are at loggerheads with each other only on one issue, namely the right of return, on which Abu Ala insists, and with which he opens every discussion of the refugee issue. Mr President, you have to know that Israel is a very fragile society which is demographically prone to all sorts of dangers. Arabs make up 20 per cent of the Israeli population already. I am not denying the morality of your demand for the right of return. However, we must together seek a formula whereby the right of return becomes symbolic. This is a solution that Abu Ala refuses even to contemplate. We are all hostages to our prejudices and legends, and we play roles within the myths we have ourselves created.

Abu Ammar: Do you think that the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who live in Chile will want to return to Bethlehem or Ramallah, or that Palestinians settled in Jordan will return? Do you think that Palestinians in Syria who enjoy all the privileges of citizenship, except for the right of political participation, will also return?

Shlomo Ben Ami went on to raise the question of Jerusalem. He said to Abu Ammar: 'You are aware, Mr President, of the extent of the authority which Muslims enjoy in the area of Al-Aqsa Mosque. That is the situation that was established by Moshe Dayan at the end of the 1967 war, and no accord we conclude with you will alter this situation. You will have full authority guaranteed for all the worshippers.'

Abu Ammar: Jerusalem is not only mine. It belongs to all Arabs and Muslims, as well as to the Vatican. I remind you of Johan Jørgen Holst's letter to Shimon Peres in 1993. Do you think that there is a single Arab or Muslim who will accept your proposal? If the problem of Jerusalem is not solved, then everything is over. It is not possible that I, as President, should have no foothold in Jerusalem.

Ben Ami: But, Mr President, you will have the population, and the holy places as well. These holy places will always have a special status. We shall

discuss this issue at the summit. We shall, at least, agree on the status of the holy places, and then we can negotiate the rest of the Jerusalem issue over the following two years. As for now, and after we have reached an agreement, you will have the symbols of sovereignty in the Old City, and you will have a municipal presence in the city and other Arab areas on its periphery. I would like, here, to remind you that the people of East Jerusalem already enjoy, in practice, quasi-autonomy in the fields of health, education, and other services.

Abu Ammar: What you are offering us is more like a guillotine hanging over our necks.

Ben Ami: We did not discuss the Jerusalem issue fully with you in the 'back channel' talks. However, our position rests on a number of principles. We want mutual recognition of Jerusalem as a capital for both parties and the status quo to remain frozen in Jerusalem for a period of time to be agreed on. We also want a moratorium on demands for sovereignty over the city by both sides, and we lay stress on the need to solve this problem in a way that is acceptable to both sides, without prematurely closing the door to future options. Above all, you will not negotiate this issue with Ehud Barak at the anticipated summit. We and your delegation will negotiate it beforehand, and you will endorse the decisions at the meeting in Washington.

Abu Ammar: Did you know that Menachem Begin was the first to offer us a Palestinian state? But, we could not accept his offer because of the constraints of the Arab situation at the time.

Ben Ami: Then you must try your best now and do what you have to do for the future of your people.

Abu Ammar: In any case, we have hard work ahead of us to finish before the summit.

At that point, at 1 a.m., the discussion ended. The Israelis took their leave, and we stayed at Ghassan Al-Shakaa's house to hold a post-mortem. These are my personal notes about this meeting, which I followed closely while keeping my own participation to a minimum.

- 1) The Nablus meeting followed the same lines as the series of meetings I had held with Ben Ami within the framework of the 'Swedish track', which had in fact never been officially brought to a close.
- 2) The Israeli delegation was better prepared than we were for a lengthy meeting like that just held in Nablus. Ben Ami and his team were very well briefed on their proposals. They moved from one topic to the next with precision and professionalism and conveyed to us the essence of the Israeli position on each topic. The Palestinian team, on the other hand, gave the impression that we were being dragged into discussing topics that were initiated by the other side. This impression increased as time passed. Our lack of preparation was evident in the number of queries we raised about various issues. One member of our team even asked the Israelis whether a particular road on the outskirts of Jerusalem led to one place or another. I was embarrassed by the naivety of such queries.
- 3) Shlomo Ben Ami, whom I had come to know well through many meetings, particularly in the course of the 'Swedish track', seemed to me to be attempting to revitalise Ehud Barak's negotiating position. He gave the impression he understood what he needed to do to be in a position to reach agreement with the Palestinians and was conscious of our needs and red lines to a much greater extent than the majority of Barak's ministers and advisers would have been. Ben Ami frequently gave the impression that he was working under difficulties generated by his own side. I have the feeling he is dragging Barak forward, one small step at a time. He gives the impression he has much experience of explaining the Palestinian position to his Prime Minister and knows how to urge him to understand and respond positively to Palestinian demands. This was the impression most of us had of Ben Ami.
- 4) I was very much surprised, indeed I might say even dismayed, after the Israeli delegation had left, when Abu Ammar, backed by Abu Mazen, said that he felt there had been 'progress' on all the issues, including Jerusalem. At that moment, I felt that all the minutes I had written and the oral and written reports that I had given at internal meetings of the Palestinian leadership were simply not being listened to, read, or understood; nor was any attention paid to them.

A rejected resignation

At this point, therefore, I tendered my resignation from the leadership of the delegation I had headed, which had assiduously performed its duties in the 'back channel' talks, which had, though I say it myself, been serious, efficient, responsible, patriotic, and resolute in the face of Israel's continuing presumption and obstinacy. I took my decision even though at last we had begun to make some small beginnings of progress. No other recent negotiating channel had ever made much progress, whether in discussing the issues or in terms of tangible results. I was also convinced that Barak wanted these negotiations to end in the same deadlock as had all other negotiations that took place during his tenure of office, for no other reason than his innate stubbornness and arrogance and his predilection towards dishonest dealing. I had also become certain that the Americans, who had, relatively speaking, inclined towards us in Binyamin Netanyahu's time, had swung back to supporting Israel. I felt they were backing Barak, especially over the merging of the various phases of negotiation and his pressure to hold the planned tripartite summit at any price.

After eighteen rounds of the 'Swedish track', therefore, and the additional round held in Washington early June 2000, I explained in my letter of resignation to Abu Ammar the reasons for my decision, and offered him my advice not to attend the tripartite summit. President Arafat, however, refused my resignation, and the summit in due course took place. The text of my letter of resignation was as follows:

I am offering my resignation because the final status negotiations have been exhausted of every potential for progress now that it has become absolutely clear that the attention of the Israeli government is entirely focused on a summit in Washington. The hope of the Israeli government is that the major issues can be swiftly settled at such a summit as a way of putting an end to the Israeli-Palestinian question and thus of closing its files on the grievances of the Palestinians.

At the meetings we have held in the region, the talks in Stockholm, the Washington talks, and the subsequent meetings in Jerusalem, we have attempted to explain to the Israeli delegation the futility of holding such a summit unless the gap between the two sides can

be narrowed in advance. The issues and the elements of an agreement should be discussed before the leaders meet, and a draft agreement should be prepared, in order to simplify controversial issues in such a way that would enable the leaderships to take the necessary decisions.

The Israeli government, however, continues to regard holding the summit as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. They have failed to develop positions that could lead to an agreement. This was what Shlomo Ben Ami clearly meant to tell you when you and he met at Nablus. It has also become clear that the American administration has been persuaded to support Israel's demand for a summit.

A further reason for my resignation is that I do not wish to be associated with an enterprise that will be in vain because of the wide gaps that continue to separate the two sides on major issues and the deep divisions that exist on security. I do not wish us to fail because of Israel's failure to negotiate seriously, based on the international legal framework and the call for a just and lasting peace. I am not convinced that a summit should be held in these circumstances.

Added to this is the fact that the final status negotiations have in my view come to a dead end. Though I offer my resignation, I give you my word that I shall stay with you, under your leadership, and offer you my support in every way conducive to the achievement of our people's legitimate and just aims of return, their desire for self-determination, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with Holy Jerusalem as its capital.

I also appended a summary of my notes on Israel's positions on various issues, as expressed by its delegation to the eighteen rounds of negotiations that preceded and succeeded Stockholm, in which I took part. I give these notes here, in the somewhat abbreviated form in which I passed them on to Abu Ammar. 'P' refers to the Palestinian position, 'I' to the Israeli position.

Territorial issues

1) Frontiers

P: 1967 frontiers

I: Adjustments for settlements & military sites.

2) Indeterminate areas (Latrun)

P: Development of joint ventures.

I: No position taken.

3) Frontier Adjustments

P: We reject them, in principle. However, if they are inevitable, they must be minor and reciprocal.

I: No reciprocity.

4) Sovereignty

P: Unambiguously and totally Palestinian, with no grey areas, territorial arrangements or military outposts.

I: Control of some Palestinian areas and annexation of some others (settlement blocks) and adjustments required at certain locations.

5) Territorial readjustments

P: Totally rejected.

I: Required at certain locations.

6) Settlements

P: We reject them. Any settlers that wish to be subject to Palestinian law and order could be accommodated.

I: Settlement blocks on the Green Line and arrangements under Palestinian sovereignty for other settlements.

7) International presence

P: International presence is accepted but Israeli presence is rejected.

I: They demand Israeli presence at certain locations in the Jordan Valley.

8) Security

P: International presence. No objection to early warning posts; no to any Israeli presence.

I: Israeli presence at certain locations, particularly in the Jordan Valley, early warning posts and roads.

9) Withdrawal

P: Withdrawal according to a definite and transparent time schedule (terminology of redeployment to be dropped completely).

I: No objection but no written commitment either.

Jerusalem

1) Sovereignty and Frontiers

P: Palestinian sovereignty. East Jerusalem with 1967 frontiers is part of Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, and total rejection of annexation.

I: Israeli sovereignty. With Palestinian control over Arab areas, security arrangements around the Aqsa Mosque, and responsibility for some functional tasks.

2) Status of the City

P: Our position: Open. East and West Jerusalem should be open to each other under special arrangements for the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter.

I: United under Israeli sovereignty, with Arab control over Arab quarter.

3) Holy Sites

P: Palestinian sovereignty over the Old City, and special arrangements for the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter.

I: Special status for Islamic and Christian holy places.

4) Settlements

P: Palestinian sovereignty over all lands, villages, and suburbs of East Jerusalem.

I: Annexed to Israel under Israeli sovereignty.

5) Expanding the Area of the City

P: Total rejection of the annexation of Ma'ale Adumim/Giv'at Ze'ev to the city. Abu Dis, Al-Izarieh and Al-Sawahreh should be included in the municipality of Jerusalem, to be ratified later.

I: Expansion of the city by inclusion of Ma'ale Adumim/Giv'at Ze'ev, and some Arab villages to Jerusalem.

6) Municipal Services

P: Cooperation.

I: Cooperation.

7) Security

P: International presence, and cooperation.

I: Israeli security.

Refugees

1) Right of return, plus UN resolution 194

P: Right of return must be recognised and approved and a mechanism of application must be agreed.

I: Rejection of the right of return. Talk of family reunion.

2) Compensation

P: Compensation should be the right of every refugee.

I: Agreed to this and to setting up an international fund for it.

General Compensation

1) Compensation for years of occupation

P: Must be acknowledged and estimated.

I: No chance of discussing it. Rejection.

2) Compensation for property and recovery of antiquities and other items

P: Estimation and recovery.

I: No answer.

Termination of the conflict

P: The problem is resolved after reaching a comprehensive agreement covering all issues.

I: The problem is resolved as soon as the framework agreement is signed.

In all, seventeen meetings were held within the 'back channel' proposed at Oslo in November 1999, fourteen of which were in the region, two

in Stockholm, and one in Washington. Seven of these were exploratory meetings between myself and Shlomo Ben Ami, while four were also attended by Abu Mazen and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak. Hassan Asfour accompanied me at three meetings I held with Shlomo Ben Ami and Gilad Sher. At the three meetings in Stockholm and Washington, we took with us a qualified legal team. All in all, looking back at the episode, I feel the talks had their positive side. They were at least businesslike. We explained our perceptions of a lasting peace and of international legitimacy as applied to the occupied Palestinian territories. We also looked at the general principles by which any agreement had to be bound, and explained our position on the key issues: Jerusalem, the refugees, territory, frontiers, prisoners, water, and bilateral relations. In addition, we took the opportunity to remind the Israelis of the centrality of the Palestinian question in the broader conflict between Israel and the Arabs. Meanwhile, we also heard their view on these issues. I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that we succeeded in modifying the position of the Israelis on some issues, though in the end they had to stay within the terms of reference and the remit that Barak had laid down for them.

My summing of up of the general principles on which we were able to agree was as follows:

- 1) All negotiations should be on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and the objective should be to implement these two resolutions.
- 2) The key to a solution lies in agreement on the major issues: territory, Jerusalem, the refugees, frontiers, release of prisoners, and water. To these, Israel added the issue of security.
- 3) No issue can be deferred. All issues should be agreed, or there can be no agreement on anything.
- 4) Whether what is under discussion is a final agreement (according to us) or a framework agreement (according to the Israelis), any agreement reached should include in addition to the principle, a definite mechanism for its application and a timetable.
- 5) Israel should 'withdraw' from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, rather than 'redeploy'. This should be done according to an agreed timetable.
- 6) The agreement must be explicit and without ambiguity.

- 7) The present negotiations are to be seen as complementary to the implementation of the commitments of the transitional phase and do not replace those commitments.

On the other hand, taking the pessimistic view, it must be conceded that in the end the 'back channel' produced nothing new or different. The basic principle on which we continued to disagree lay in Israel's insistence that the conclusion of a framework agreement should be regarded as formally ending the conflict between us. This, we refused to agree to, seeing it as offering a hostage to fortune. We insisted instead on the conclusion of a final status agreement, as originally envisaged at Oslo. The positions taken by the Israelis at the 'back channel' negotiations were identical to those adopted by Ehud Barak at the official negotiating table. The talks were frustrating and led me to despair on many occasions. My long negotiating experience with the Israelis, however, especially at Oslo and during the Interim Agreement negotiations, had left me, though I say it myself, with a degree of fortitude.

My experience gave me sufficient confidence in myself to cope in a professional manner with the constant and sometimes baffling flow of Israeli proposals I faced in the 'back channel' negotiations, even though these took place at a time of ceaseless challenges and provocations on Israel's part. These provocations included the intensification of settlement activity, the demolition of Palestinian homes, and the proliferation of arrests of alleged activists. At the same time, I was also able to face with equanimity the occasional outbreaks of internal rivalry and jealousy that took place on the Palestinian side. There was also a degree of scepticism on the part of certain of my colleagues, who had concluded that what we were doing was pointless and perhaps even perilous. I confess, however, that the desire to be free of the constant challenges and criticisms of my many Palestinian rivals played some part in my decision to ask my colleagues in the leadership to relieve me of my duties. In the end, it fell to me to go with Abu Ammar to the tripartite summit, when it was eventually convened at Camp David, and to play a leading role in that difficult, misconceived and misrepresented encounter.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON THE THRESHOLD OF CAMP DAVID

Some of those who helped prepare for the summit at Camp David were quick to claim with hindsight, in the wake of the disaster it proved to be, that they had known all along it would fail. Others said they were not surprised by the result. Many of these failed to make their views known in advance of the summit. However, I dare to make the claim that, among all those involved in the preparations for Camp David, I was the most outspoken ahead of time in raising the alarm about a venture that had no chance of success. It went ahead because, for their different reasons, both Ehud Barak and President Clinton of the United States needed a political success at home, and neither would accept the summit was destined for certain failure. Clinton was nearing the end of his troubled second term in office and desperately needed an achievement to set the seal on a presidency that he feared might otherwise be remembered in a dubious light. Ehud Barak was also racing against time, as he fought a fierce political battle within Israel to reverse his inexorable political decline.

Shortly before the summit, Yasser Arafat visited Washington for his final preparatory session. On 15 June 2000, I was at his side as he met President Clinton. Clinton had in the first instance been persuaded by Barak to endorse the idea of holding a summit, though he had taken up the idea with enthusiasm of his own. Arafat was reluctant, and said to Clinton, 'I would not wish to attend a summit that has not been prepared well enough to succeed. You will blame me for its failure.' Clinton pointed at Abu Ammar and said to him, 'Come over, and if it fails, we will not blame you.' This was a promise I was to remember after the failure of Camp David, when President Clinton broke it, repeatedly placing the blame on the shoulders of the Palestinians. At the time, Abu Ammar gave a robust reply to President Clinton. 'Yes to the summit,' he said, 'but after

serious and proper negotiations not limited by a deadline. Our cause has waited fifty years, and can afford to wait a few more months. Hence, we would welcome a summit, but it must be well prepared.'

Meanwhile, Barak also began to prepare his ground. On 10 July 2000, in a speech to the Knesset, he made clear what he was not prepared to give up, saying, 'We shall not go back to the 1967 lines; Jerusalem will remain united under our sovereignty; no foreign army shall deploy west of the River Jordan. Meanwhile, the great majority of settlers in the West Bank will regroup in settlement blocks under our sovereignty, and Israel will acknowledge no moral or judicial liability for the refugee problem.' This had something of the air of wishful thinking. Despite his lack of realism, he also gave as his reason for seeking peace that it would fundamentally change the circumstances in which Israel had its existence. 'I have a mandate from the country, and I say to the Israeli people that peace does not consist only of giving away precious parts of our country; it is also the key to a profound change in all aspects of our lives.' By the time he went to Camp David, however, Barak had begun to represent no one but himself. He was a Prime Minister without a secure parliamentary base and without even a coherent and stable cabinet. He was a leader beginning to be abandoned by his own party, who had already lost the support of many of his colleagues within the Labour leadership.

Before President Clinton invited the Palestinians and the Israelis to the summit at Camp David, he telephoned President Arafat to inform him that his decision to hold the summit was final, and to remind Arafat that he had already in principle accepted the American invitation. In that telephone call, President Arafat reiterated his advice to President Clinton that he should not hold the summit without adequate preparation. This was also my position. I feared that failure would serve only to frustrate yet further our hopes for peace in the Middle East, and my fervent wish was that President Clinton would find some other way to keep those hopes alive, to the best of his ability. Clinton spoke once more to Arafat on 4 July 2000, to say that Ehud Barak had new proposals that he wanted to present at the summit itself and would therefore not agree to further preliminary talks ahead of the summit. President Clinton said he was about to send out official invitations to a summit conference to be held at Camp David, starting on 11 July 2000.

On the eve of the summit, President Arafat sent President Clinton a

letter, indicating what the Palestinian position would be. Abu Ammar personally chaired the team that drafted these guidelines, which should have served as an indication that the Palestinians were likely to be inflexible in the face of Israel's demands. Arafat began by reaffirming that he accepted the terms of UN Security Council resolution 242, which meant that he was already agreeing on behalf of the Palestinians to accept territories that amounted to only 22 per cent of historical Palestine. This was the historical compromise that the Palestinians had already made, and should have been sufficient to open the door to a final settlement with Israel. The letter set out the Palestinian view of what a final settlement of the various issues making up the core of the historical conflict would consist of. Such a settlement needed to be made on the basis of the principles of international legitimacy and the United Nations resolutions, and should provide for a sovereign independent state for the Palestinians as well as giving security to Israel. It should also be capable of leading to peaceful cooperation between the Palestinians and Israel, not only over security but also in the economic and social fields.

There follows the text of the letter from President Arafat, which was to provide guidelines and principles for the Palestinian negotiators at Camp David:

Introduction

You will be aware, Mr President, that I have taken the responsibility for historic decisions, which were the most difficult decisions of my life. I accepted the Oslo Declaration of Principles, which I signed together with your Excellency and with my partner, the late Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin.

With the help of God, I was able to persuade my people to accept that agreement. Meanwhile, you helped me to create the international and regional atmosphere necessary to consolidate it and implement it. In it, I accepted for the first time in the history of our people UN Security Council resolution 242. This resolution provides for Israel's withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in 1967, for the just settlement of the refugee problem, and also embodies the principle of the illegality of the occupation by force of the territory of others.

By taking this decision, I agreed to take only 22 per cent of the historical territory of Palestine. Thus, I made the major concession

that was necessary for a final settlement between Israel and the Palestinians to be achieved by way of the Oslo Agreement of 1993.

With the acceptance of the Oslo Accord, my Israeli partners and I evidently agreed to accept the following:

1) The principle that UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 should be implemented as provided for in the Oslo Agreement.

2) The application of this agreement gradually and in stages, to which I have adhered, in spite of the difficulties encountered and the dilatory way in which Israel has implemented the agreed stages of its commitments. Were it not for Your Excellency's intervention, the Oslo Agreement would not have been applied as far as it has been, albeit that implementation has taken place at a very slow pace and with constant efforts by Israel to evade its obligations to apply its provisions.

At the present date, however, the only key issue of the transitional agreement that has not so far been implemented is the third redeployment, with which I trust Your Excellency will assist us.

My view of the final settlement of the conflict is extremely simple. At the same time, however, it must be said that there may be many complications.

It will be simple if the Israelis acknowledge the legitimacy of the requirements of the Palestinians, which are embodied in the agreements we have signed with them. It will be extremely difficult, however, if Israel has further territorial ambitions, or if it rejects the human rights of the refugees.

My vision of the solution:

My vision of the solution rests on the following principles:

- 1) Security for the Israelis, in accordance with reasonable arrangements we shall agree with them. At the same time, we shall welcome an American presence in our areas for this purpose.
- 2) A peaceful and sovereign independent Palestinian state based on peaceful coexistence and the recognition of Israel with, the frontiers of 4 June 1967 as permanent frontiers.
- 3) The Palestinian state shall coexist and cooperate with the State of Israel in the fields of economics, social affairs, and security. The two parties shall set up joint ventures with

the United States and other countries, including industrial projects, free trade zones, tourist zones, and scientific research establishments on our mutual frontiers, in order to consolidate and establish cooperation and coexistence between the two peoples.

- 4) The final status issues shall be settled through the implementation of the principles that have been asserted in international agreements valid in international law. These agreements shall be applied with flexibility in such a way that they will be final and beyond dispute, and will be guaranteed by the United States and the United Nations Security Council.

What follows, Mr President, is my view of the issues to be negotiated, and I hope to hear your advice on it, especially those parts that cover the issues of territory, refugees, and Jerusalem. If agreement on these issues is reached, all the other issues will be easy to settle:

1) The Issue of Refugees

In my view, and in that of every Palestinian, the refugee issue is an issue of human rights. It is a matter of right and conscience. I will sign no agreement that fails to resolve it. I believe the Israelis take the same view. It has become an international issue taken up by the United Nations. Your Excellency has taken a position that we respect, and the United States declares its support every year for UNRWA and for the implementation of UN General Assembly resolution 194.

Hence, resolution 194 is the principle, the basis, and the key for a just solution. The mechanism, the timetable, the implementation, and the will to put them into practice are what will bring about a solution of the problem.

I place before you my proposal in this matter because, though this issue is of great importance to me, I entirely lack the power to resolve it without help from you, from the world community, parties concerned, and the countries hosting the refugees. It is my hope that both you and Israel will accept it.

The way in which this proposal is applied will require a high deal of flexibility. It will pave the way for a permanent agreement within a framework of the participation of international and regional efforts joined in the responsibility of finding a solution (proposal enclosed).

2) Frontiers and Settlements

After 1967, Israel embarked on a policy of the confiscation of land and the building of settlements. Successive US administrations have rejected this policy and the United Nations Security Council has issued a number of resolutions declaring the process of settlement to be illegal and demanding that existing settlements be dismantled.

After the major and historic concession I made at Oslo with my acceptance of the 1967 frontier, as provided for in Security Council resolution 242, I can agree to nothing less than those frontiers, and neither can my people accept anything less.

If the Israeli government has committed itself to settlements established on other people's land, the problem is not mine to resolve. I cannot accept the argument that Israel's coalition government will not agree. This is their responsibility. I also head a coalition, which will accept nothing less than the 1967 frontiers.

However, I am fully prepared to agree with them on objectives limited security arrangements and measures on the frontiers. I am also prepared for the establishment of certain joint economic projects in other locations, and I welcome the presence of an American observation force to assist us in the maintenance of order.

I therefore put before you how I envisage the frontiers. I am prepared to look positively at any objective and reasonable proposal relating to points of weakness. Such ideas should lie within the framework of exchange in the same area rather than in other areas (proposal attached).

3) Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the capital city of the three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. It is possible that it could be the capital for the two states of Palestine and Israel. But, if that proves to be impossible, it could be an international city, as envisaged under the terms of the partition resolution of 1947.

We regard the American position as set out in the American Letter of Guarantee as of crucial importance. It is supportive of a just resolution of the issue of Jerusalem, as it rejects both the principle of unilateral annexation and the alteration of the characteristics of the city, as well as stipulating that the city should remain open and undivided.

We are open to a settlement based on the UN 1947 partition resolution, or to a settlement that will make East Jerusalem a capital for Palestine, with West Jerusalem as a capital for Israel, along the June 1967 frontier.

For the second option, with Jerusalem as a capital for two states, we confirm our acceptance of it, on condition that:

- Jerusalem must be an open city.
- There should be a guarantee of freedom of worship and freedom of access to the religious sites.
- There should be an agreement on security arrangements, in particular at the religious sites.
- There should be an agreement on the principles of economic cooperation in the city, as well as cooperation in security and the mutual provision of municipal services.

As Your Excellency is aware, Jerusalem is an issue that concerns all the Muslims in the world, and not just the Arabs, as well as all of the world's Christians and Jews.

Therefore, principles must be agreed upon that will put in place robust mechanisms on which we can agree (proposals attached).

Annexes

The refugee issue

On the basis of the UN Security Council resolution 242, the refugee problem shall be equitably settled through the implementation of United Nations General Assembly resolution 194, in accordance with the following measures:

- 1) An International Committee shall be formed. In addition to Palestine and Israel, the members shall include the United States, the European Union, and Japan, as well as the countries

hosting the refugees (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt) and UNRWA. The Committee shall:

- a) Verify the lists of refugees registered with the UNRWA and any other related files.
 - b) Prepare a questionnaire to be completed by every Palestinian registered with the UNRWA. This shall include such data as the committee may require. Refugees should specify whether they wish to return to Israel, return to the territory of the Palestinian state, remain in their host country and receive compensation, move to a third country and receive compensation.
 - c) Examine the content of the returned questionnaires.
 - d) Assess the compensation due to each refugee for his/her prolonged suffering, loss of property and dispossession, in order to enable him/her to reconstruct his/her livelihood and those of the members of his/her family.
 - e) Specify the number of refugees wishing to return to Israel, draw up a timetable for their return, and organise their return.
 - f) Specify the number of refugees wishing to return to the Palestinian state and help the state to absorb them.
 - g) Reach agreement with host and third other countries to absorb refugees wishing to remain in or move to such countries and create the conditions for them to be assimilated in those societies.
- 2) All these measures shall be completed within three months of signing this agreement, and before the conclusion of the final status agreement, so that the former becomes an integral part of the latter.
 - 3) A compensation fund to be run by the said committee shall be set up. The basis of this fund shall be taken the fund run by the administrator of the property of absentees in Israel.
 - 4) The right of return to the territories of the Palestinian state shall be a sovereign Palestinian issue, and decisions relating to it shall be taken by the Palestinian state, in accordance with its plans, programmes, and ability to absorb, with no interference by any other party.

- 5) When the measures specified in this article are carried out, the Palestinian refugee problem will be deemed to be finally and irrevocably resolved.

The frontiers

- 1) The frontiers referred to in this agreement are those of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state.
- 2) The frontiers of the Palestinian state shall be those of all territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as they were on 4 June 1967 (the 1949 ceasefire lines).
- 3) The two parties shall agree on security points of control in accordance with the security schedule attached to this agreement.
- 4) The two parties shall reach agreement on bilateral projects or joint projects together with other parties at frontier locations, as specified in the economic relations schedule attached to this agreement.
- 5) The West Bank shall be linked to the Gaza Strip by a permanent secure corridor run and controlled by Palestinians under Palestinian sovereignty. Freedom of passage between the two parts of the state shall be absolute.
- 6) Without prejudice to this agreement, the Palestinian state's sovereignty over its territory, air space, water, natural resources, international crossing points, roads, and frontiers shall be absolute.
- 7) A joint Palestinian–Israeli joint committee including United Nations representatives shall be established to demarcate and verify the land frontiers between the two states.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the spiritual capital for the three religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, the adherents of which shall have free access to the city in order to worship there freely.

Jerusalem may either be the secular capital of both the State of Palestine in East Jerusalem and the State of Israel, within the frontiers, of 4 June 1967; or it could be placed under international administration in accordance with 1947 partition.

If the preferred option is that of a capital for the two States, we

consider that the following principles should prevail.

- 1) East and West Jerusalem shall be open to the citizens of the two states, as well as to the faithful and to visitors from all over the world.
- 2) Free access to the places of worship as well as free passage shall be guaranteed for all.
- 3) The two parties shall agree the necessary security arrangements, particularly at the religious sites.
- 4) The two parties shall agree on economic cooperation in the city.
- 5) The two parties shall agree on administrative cooperation in the city.

The preliminary talks

As preparations were in full swing for the summit at Camp David, the American administration arranged to hold a final preparatory round of negotiations in Washington just before the summit was due to begin. At these talks I kept my own records of what took place, as had been my habit at other times. I made notes at the end of each day and was sometimes able to take notes during the talks, simply writing down what other negotiators said. It was difficult to make notes when it was my turn to talk! The practical difficulties were such that I cannot claim that my records contain a comprehensive summary of the positions adopted by the participants. In particular, as my main contribution was in the committee charged with territory, frontiers, and security, I necessarily neglected to some extent the work of the other committees. Although I was well aware of what went on in the other two principal committees, on refugees and Jerusalem, I was not an eyewitness to negotiations on those issues. Nonetheless, the diaries I kept at Camp David at least provide a sample of what took place during those fateful weeks of July when President Clinton brought the Palestinians and Israelis face to face. They illustrate the deep divisions between the two sides, and also the extent to which the American mediators were influenced by the position adopted by Israel.

We agreed that, at the preparatory talks, a Palestinian delegation should hold talks with Shlomo Ben Ami, in the presence of Madeleine Albright.

On the evening of 9 July, the Secretary of State welcomed us to the State Department headquarters on Washington DC's C Street, little more than twenty-four hours before the planned opening of the summit, after preliminary talks with the Israelis at the Madison Hotel, where both delegations were staying. This hastily arranged meeting before the summit looked to me like a measure of desperation. In my view, the short time left to us gave no opportunity to settle any of the outstanding controversial issues. Thus, when the Israeli delegation began to talk about security, which was one of the issues heading the Israeli agenda, I objected to substantive discussion of a major issue that was going to be negotiated at the summit. In fact, I had repeatedly told Shlomo Ben Ami that security could only be discussed after agreement had been reached on the question of the frontiers, and not before.

At the State Department, the three delegations sat formally at a large table. Our talks were mainly procedural. Opening the meeting, Madeleine Albright said, 'The people who are sitting here have worked harder than anybody in the world to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Today, we are here to face a difficult historic moment. You know that we intend to stay at Camp David, which is a peaceful, secluded, and secure place, until we reach a conclusion to all issues. President Clinton and the United States government will do their best to achieve this goal.' She added, 'This is an historic hour. We are talking about a single make-or-break summit and not a succession of summits. Everybody knows the alternative. It is the downward spiral of violence.' Like a school principal, Albright went on to explain to us the rules of the game at Camp David. She said that there would be a total press blackout and cautioned us against any leakage of news. She also stressed the need to create an atmosphere of trust among the delegates, to facilitate the open discussion of sensitive issues. She informed us that each head of delegation would be allocated just one phone line. She stressed the rules of conduct, saying: 'We, the Americans, are the ones who will, from tonight, decide what happens. Informality will prevail. You must wear whatever clothes you choose and feel free to relax.'

When it was my turn to speak, I thanked the Secretary of State for the sincere efforts made by the United States and President Clinton to prepare for the Camp David summit. I then reminded the delegates that the agreement before us must be based on existing international agreements and must therefore be based on UN Security Council resolutions

242 and 338, as well as the Madrid principle of the exchange of land for peace, and that it must cover all the major issues. Once more, I reminded the delegates that there were still substantial differences between us and the Israelis. However, I concluded with a promise that we would make our best efforts to overcome the differences. I hinted at the obstacles we might face as a result of Ehud Barak's political difficulties at home, and the potential disintegration of his coalition government. I also issued a warning regarding the complications that would ensue for us all from failure. Shlomo Ben Ami responded to my concern over the Israeli political situation:

Ben Ami: Israeli politics should not divert us from the effort to reach agreement. If we do not have a majority at the Knesset, we will hold a referendum. Ehud Barak comes here with a feeling that he is carrying a message and he does not intend to avoid any issue. The problem we are both facing is how to reconcile our respective historical beliefs with the need to make the concessions required for an agreement to be reached. In any event, we have to work together to achieve our common goal.

Ross: We are all well aware of the extent and depth of the difficulties we face. The effort President Clinton will make at this conference will be like no effort he has ever made in his life before, as success offers the possibility of historic change. We will work with you in the context of bilateral and trilateral meetings. This is how the President will relate to the two leaders. So, what papers have you prepared for the conference?

Ben Ami: We may have a joint statement of Palestinian and Israeli positions on all issues ready by tomorrow.

Abu Ala: How long is the summit planned to last?

Albright: In eight days time, the President will be attending the G8 summit in Okinawa, Japan. We have to finish by then so that the President can bid for the funds needed to implement whatever agreement we may reach. This is the timetable.

Abu Ala: We are committed to reaching settlements on major issues, such

as Jerusalem, refugees, and frontiers. There are still very complex problems concerning these issues and I am concerned to know if they are all capable of being resolved by the three leaders.

Albright: Certainly, we will have to discuss many issues all at once. However, I must repeat that you have to be aware that the conference cannot go on for more than one week, as the President has to be in Japan on 18 July.

Abu Ala: Is this an ultimatum to the delegations?

Sa'eb Erekat:

I am very disturbed by the prospect of failure, because this will at once create anxiety in the Palestinian street. More importantly, we have been unable hitherto to build trust between Prime Minister Barak and President Arafat. Trust between them, at the moment, is below zero.

Albright: (interrupting)

The President knows that, and he is aware that relations between Arafat and Barak are not as we hoped they would be at the beginning of the conference, but we have a timetable and we cannot wait until 13 September 2000. So please give us a chance.

Attempting to keep the conversation focused on the summit, I said, 'The way the summit is conducted will determine its success or failure. Do not forget that the date currently laid down by the PLO's responsible institutions for the declaration of an independent Palestinian state is 13 September 2000, the date the transitional period is due to expire. The Palestinian state is our right, and preparations for it are actually under way.' What I was referring to here was the declaration issued by the Palestinian Central Council just before we left for Camp David that the establishment of an independent state would take place on 13 September 2000. This was the date to which the transitional period had been extended, by agreement with Ehud Barak, instead of 4 May 1999, as provided for in the transitional agreement.

The truth was that I had a nagging suspicion that some issues had been agreed in advance by the Americans and the Israelis. I feared they might surprise us at the summit with pre-arranged positions on certain

issues, in an attempt to oblige us either to accept particular positions or be held responsible for rejecting them. Thus, I was very wary of any proposals the Israelis or Americans might make, fearing they might be part of an ambush. Shlomo Ben Ami became aware of this when I made efforts to divert the conversation from the issues scheduled for discussion. He tried to reassure me, saying, 'We are all in the same boat.' I asked, 'Are you optimistic about this summit that you and the Americans have colluded in holding prematurely?' He replied, 'I admire Barak's perseverance', adding that he was optimistic about the summit and that the Americans would be most unwilling to let it fail as they wanted no repetition of the debacle they had experienced at the Geneva summit with President Hafez Assad of Syria a few months earlier. At that point, we ended the preliminary session, with little useful accomplished, and returned to the Madison Hotel. Here, the Israelis and Palestinians separated, and we spent the rest of the day talking amongst ourselves. It was our last chance to seize what relaxation we could ahead of what we felt might be gruelling days to come.

On the morning of the next day, 10 July 2000, a day ahead of the official opening of the summit, while our two leaders were yet again crossing the Atlantic to Washington, we all set off for Camp David in a fleet of cars provided by the State Department. In an amusing diversion, the State Department's driver got lost in the Maryland countryside on his way up into the range of hills where Camp David is situated. So, amid pleasantries at the unfortunate driver's expense, the members of our delegation also exchanged jokes between each other about the possibility that this could be a bad omen for the conference. We had lost our way even before the talks began! However, after a lengthy involuntary detour, the driver at last found the correct road. As we approached Camp David, it looked to us not so much like a country retreat as a well-guarded citadel. At the entrance, squads of formidable armed marines were on guard. Officials and protocol personnel welcomed us in, gave us our identity badges, then shepherded us to our allocated accommodation.

The residential accommodation at Camp David is a selection of wooden houses scattered about in the forest and interspersed with green lawns and sports grounds. When Abu Ammar arrived, he was allocated the same chalet close to the presidential residence where Menachem Begin had stayed during the first Camp David summit. I was placed in a larger house with a room for myself and others for Mohammed Dahlan and

Mohamed Rashid. We were unable to divine any logic behind how we were housed. Abu Mazen was put in a chalet all on his own. Nabil Shaath, Yasser Abed Rabbo, Sa'eb Erekat, and Akram Haniyyeh were all housed in one sizeable chalet, while Hassan Asfour and Nabil Abu Rudeineh were placed in another rather far removed from the rest. Having taken up residence early, before the arrival of Abu Ammar, Prime Minister Barak, and President Clinton, we had the opportunity to explore. Of course, we had none of us seen Camp David before, but it was naturally linked in our minds to the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. We had all fiercely opposed this, as we believed it would weaken the position of the Palestinians and indeed the position of the entire Arab world, since it would remove the largest Arab country from the conflict.

The trappings of the luxury that surrounds American presidents were everywhere to be seen. Nothing was neglected. Among the chalets and the groves of mature trees, there was a network of winding roads and footpaths linking one building to another so that it was easy to go about on foot. The management also provided us with golf cars and bicycles for use if we wished. The houses were named after woodland trees, such as Laurel, Cedar, and Sycamore. Abu Ammar's temporary residence was known as Birch, while Ehud Barak's house was named Dogwood. President Clinton, of course, had the use of the presidential lodge, the largest and most luxurious house, called Aspen. In each chalet was a vast huge TV with all the American cable channels. There was also a cinema and shops, as well as a medical centre and a restaurant. Separate facilities and accommodation were laid on for all the staff and the marines who served and guarded Camp David round the clock. I was particularly struck by the sporting amenities. One could play golf or tennis; there were courts for basketball and indoor halls for badminton and snooker; and American sports unknown to us. The largest area was occupied by the golf course, adjacent to the helipad. Isolated from the media, we welcomed the injunction to dress informally and were able to relax without fear of photographers. In short, every possible care was taken to ensure the atmosphere was relaxed, so that we could concentrate on the job we had come to do.

CHAPTER SIX

CAMP DAVID DIARIES

Week one

Day one: Tuesday, 11 July

At noon on 11 July 2000, President Clinton opened the first session of the Camp David talks with a brief address to the participants. In one of the largest of the timber buildings of the presidential retreat, a facility for meetings known as 'Holly', we sat at a vast oak conference table some 15 metres long. President Clinton sat flanked by his senior aides on one side of the table. President Arafat, accompanied by the Palestinian delegation, faced Clinton on the President's right hand. On Clinton's left sat Ehud Barak with members of the Israeli delegation.

President Clinton: I welcome you all, both the Israelis and the Palestinians, and I thank you for coming. These are historic moments. We are looking forward to the future we hope to build in the region.

I am pleased to be here with you. I have spent many days and nights reading the briefing papers for this conference, and I am sure that you will judge for yourselves in the coming days how far I have been able to acquaint myself with all the documents, maps and other materials.

We have come to the point where we have to make a choice. I believe that this is an opportunity from which both parties can benefit. However, it is your responsibility to make the decisions, and the role of the United States to make this conference successful. We will determine the agenda and set up the committees. But the issues themselves have to be decided by you, not in the light of short-term gains but of the long-term future you are seeking to build. I know that both President Arafat and Prime Minister Barak have initiatives they will brief you on. The question is whether we are ready to take the historic decisions that lie before us. These decisions must be yours and not mine.

I want to talk about the time available to us. In a few days time, I shall be leaving to attend the G8 summit in Okinawa. If you are able reach an agreement before then it will be excellent, as I will be able to present it to the leaders of the major powers, in order to gain their support for your efforts. In any case, we do not have much time. We have to move as fast as possible. We are aware that the time factor puts pressure on both of you. But we are trying to create a new future. Once more, I call on you to seize this historic opportunity. We will remain here until we accomplish our mission.

But what is important is for us to make a start without talking to anyone outside about the topics that are discussed here. If you together decide to announce something useful, we will have no objection. If, for instance, you were able to say something about water, that could be declared. I would like in due course to know your opinion. I am happy with whatever you decide. In any event, no substantive information about the functioning of this conference will be passed on to the media. However, at the same time we do have to keep in touch with the media. Everything here will remain confidential until you both decide when to brief people. Even if there is no agreement, I want neither of you to brief the media about the other party's position.

One question is, what are we going to do about the people who have come to Emmitsburg? [Palestinian groups from the DFLP and other organisations had come independently to Emmitsburg, Maryland, close to Camp David, hoping to speak to Yasser Arafat, but had been refused admission to Camp David itself.]

Abu Ammar: We have two requests, one relating to Russia, and one for the EU and the Arab countries concerned. We would like to put them in the picture as to what is going on here, because that will benefit us.

Clinton: But what do you want to do about the delegation in Emmitsburg?

Barak: We come here bearing a heavy responsibility and with great expectations. We come seven years after Oslo, nine years after Madrid, sixteen years after the Intifada, and half a century after the start of the conflict. I think this is a historic opportunity that may not arise again in the foreseeable future. Therefore, we will rise to the challenge. This is a key moment, at which we can end the conflict and achieve peace. Our intention at this

time is to explore the potential for agreement on major issues. We believe that the auguries have never been better than they are today. I am confident that both sides are keen to achieve a peace agreement that will put an end to the conflict between us, so that we can live side by side. I am also aware that the Europeans and the Russians are supporting the Palestinians. Nevertheless, no country is better equipped and more able to help us both than the United States.

Abu Ammar: I think that what Prime Minister Barak has said is significant. Mr President, we hope this conference will succeed, under your auspices. With the good offices of the United States, President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin succeeded in resolving their problems at Camp David. We hope, with your help, that we can reach a satisfactory solution.

Clinton: I would like to say to both parties that if we do not succeed now, we shall never achieve success at any time in the future. At the present time, I can persuade the American people, both the Democrats and the Republicans, to stand behind you. But after the coming elections in the United States that will no longer be possible.

Abu Ammar: We want to finalise all the issues while you continue to be the President.

Clinton: I will tell you why I wanted to meet you early in the day and not later. I need enough time to be able to meet the two leaders, both separately and together. I want to get an idea from them how I shall be dealing with the fundamental issues. I do not want to waste any time. At 3 p.m. I shall meet Prime Minister Barak, and then I shall meet President Arafat at 5 p.m. After this, I shall decide how to proceed.

When Clinton held his meeting with Arafat, Abu Ammar had to interrupt Clinton's exposition of various proposals about Jerusalem and the refugees to remind him of the basic position from which we did not intend to depart. As he put it, 'Our position on Jerusalem is very simple: East Jerusalem is ours, and West Jerusalem is theirs. As for refugees we demand recognition of the right of return, after which we shall discuss the practical details.' At 8 p.m. that evening, President Clinton, flanked by

Madeleine Albright, Sandy Berger, and Denis Ross, received Ehud Barak and Abu Ammar together. Abu Mazen and I were among the Palestinian group at this meeting.

Clinton: My talks with Prime Minister Barak have been encouraging. I suggest that today's agenda should include the definition of the issues to be negotiated, and then we shall take it from there. We are now talking about parameters. After this, we shall go for dinner, Palestinians, Israelis, and Americans all together. Afterwards, if you want to start to talk about Jerusalem, I will begin on that topic with President Arafat first, then with Prime Minister Barak. Let us first agree today's agenda and then we shall meet. I have tried with Barak to define the negotiating parameters. I will not try to suggest any compromises at the moment. I want to separate the basic issues, which as I understand them are territory, refugees, Jerusalem, frontiers, settlements, and security. I am attempting at the moment to assess the situation and discover where the differences lie.

I would like first to go over each of the positions as I have understood them, then I will listen to your feedback.

Territory

The aim is to define the extent of the territory each will hold. The Palestinians want the West Bank and Gaza Strip within the 1967 frontiers, while the Israelis want to keep 80 per cent of settlers in their settlements there. The Palestinians will accept minor reciprocal adjustments of frontiers with sovereignty over territory, while the Israelis are concerned over frontier security. Neither the Palestinians nor Israelis will relinquish their existing facilities.

Refugees

The Palestinians demand the right of return, while Israelis are concerned over the numbers. Both parties are agreed there should be an international mechanism to implement any resolution. They also agree that the refugee issue is a profound problem that needs to be tackled. Israel is prepared to contribute to the costs of a solution but is not prepared to take any legal or political responsibility for the refugee problem.

Jerusalem

The city is to stay undivided with access to the holy places guaranteed

for all faiths. However, there is disagreement over the issue of guardianship and other arrangements. Jerusalem is to include the two capitals, which necessitates the expansion of its boundaries so it can cope with the responsibilities of sovereignty. I am trying here to define both positions in a way that does not minimise the fact there are difficult questions to answer.

We could carry on talking about this after dinner. My idea is to present a framework and put forward some proposals that could be helpful.

Abu Ammar: We are trying to reach a peace agreement acceptable to both parties, taking into consideration, at the same time, the parameters that are crucial to both sides. In future, we want to be able to claim that we reached a just and comprehensive peace in the region, otherwise peace will not be lasting. In Madrid, we called for a just, permanent, and comprehensive peace based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, as well as other resolutions bearing on the position in international law regarding Jerusalem and other issues. This convention has recently been applied to the Lebanese front. It has previously been applied to Israel's relations with Egypt, and then with Jordan. Were it not for the hesitancy of my friend President Hafez al-Assad, the same would have applied to Syria as well.

Clinton: I understand your position. But let me look at it from Barak's point of view. In terms of his internal situation, he has to deal with people like Natan Sharanski, who became a hero in the eyes of the world after his imprisonment in Russia. Barak is in dispute with the religious extremists, and he is negotiating with you in order to reach an agreement against all the odds. He fears that the Israeli people will lose interest in reaching a solution with you.

Abu Ammar: I agree with you. However, one of his problems is that he appears not to be patient. The Palestinians and Israelis are accustomed to meeting each other. We know everything about them and they know everything about us.

Abu Ala: There are still wide gaps between the Palestinian and Israeli positions over most elements of the permanent solution, be it Jerusalem, territory, frontiers, or other issues. Yet we went a long way in the Stockholm

'back channel' talks and achieved some initial understandings concerning the eastern frontiers of Palestine. We also entered into the Jerusalem issue, which is one of the more important issues in the conflict that has to be solved, since it is the key to the resolution of the other issues.

Abu Mazen: There is a disagreement about the number of the 1948 refugees. We talk about the return of four million refugees. This is too many for Israel, which says this figure is unacceptable. We demand the right of return, however, and also that substantial numbers of refugees of all kinds should be able to return, and that return should be implemented systematically. Without that, we will not be able to resolve this issue. All those that do not return should have the right to compensation. We are sure that the refugees in Syria and Jordan will not want to return. However, we would like them to enjoy the right of return in principle and we ask for the application of definite regulations and mechanisms concerning return.

Dennis Ross: The President supports the right of return.

Clinton: The Israelis do not object to the principle but they object to the mechanism. There are some issues for which you need principles. But you also need to be clear about the facts of the situation. Before we make any proposals from the American side, I would like you to continue to talk together to define the necessary principles and mechanisms, and what is symbolically important to each of you.

Abu Mazen:

Regarding the refugees, I repeat that what the Israelis want is merely a limited number who will be able to return as 'family reunion' or 'humanitarian cases', that is, without acknowledging the right of return, or a definition of it.

Clinton: I suggest that you start talking, and we will present our proposals later.

Abu Ammar: I must stress that we want our meetings to take place in the presence of the Americans.

Day two: Wednesday, 12 July

The second day of Camp David was, in fact, the first day that negotiations took place between the members of the delegations in the absence of their leaders. Most of these deliberations were focused on the issue of frontiers. In our meeting with the Americans, Madeleine Albright headed the American delegation, while I led the Palestinians, backed up by Hassan Asfour, Sa'eb Erekat, and Mohammed Dahlan.

Albright: Today is Wednesday, and time is slipping by fast. This summit is due to end before 18 July, in other words in five days time. Yesterday went well. President Clinton will present a working paper tomorrow. First we will present our paper, then we shall hear your comments and anything else you wish to say.

I respect President Arafat and understand all that he said to President Clinton yesterday. But this is where seeing diplomacy as a game has to end. The talks today will be between you and us, and we want to listen to you. We are not here to negotiate but to listen to you and exchange questions with you.

Let us assume that the 1967 frontiers are your frontiers, which will also be the frontiers with Jordan. How far would you be prepared to meet the security requirements of the Israelis? We would like to hear a full exposition of your proposals on that. I will also listen to the Israeli delegation's view on the frontier issue today.

Abu Ala: Our position on this issue is that the UN Security Council resolution 242 applies to the Palestinian frontier with Israel in exactly the same way as it has done to Israel's other frontiers. We are holding fast to the idea of the 1967 frontiers. However, and in the light of the lengthy talks recently held between us, we are prepared to talk about minor and reciprocal frontier adjustments that are equivalent in value and size. We are also prepared to take reasonable Israeli security requirements into consideration. However, these should be defined in advance and with due transparency and precision.

Ross: I understand the Israeli position here. They have security needs for early warning posts and the right to a temporary military presence, with

a definition of their right of entry and departure from such military locations.

Abu Ala: Have they told you where they want their security sensitive locations to be? The Israelis talked about 'grey areas', and we rejected that because we want only black and white areas. However, we can talk about specific areas within the context of a phased military withdrawal. We would accept an American presence at early warning posts as well as a Palestinian and Israeli presence.

Ross: We see the need for early warning posts and for some kind of monitor of external threats. As for an American, or a Palestinian presence, we have not yet discussed that with them, but we will do this and get back to you.

Albright: How are you going to move the Israelis out of the Jordan Valley? What is your proposed solution for the settlement blocks there? How are you going to deal with this problem? What about Israelis who will live outside the settlement blocks?

Just as we were at last reaching these important questions, our bilateral session with the Americans came to an end. On the evening of the same day we were joined by the Israelis for trilateral talks, with the same American and Palestinian delegations. Shlomo Ben Ami headed an Israeli group consisting of Gilad Sher and General Shlomo Yanai. We started the evening session from where our bilateral morning meeting left off, with the frontier issue.

Albright: Thank you for coming to this meeting. I would like to take the opportunity to specify two things. First, there is the time limit available to us. The President is definitely attending the G8 meeting in a few days time, and that is the deadline. Second, with the consent of the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships, we will present our paper tomorrow. We could have presented it today, but it would not have been sufficiently definite before we have heard your views on the subjects it covers. On the frontier issue, we have moved beyond the stage where we could have begun by talking simply about the extent of the territory to be exchanged. I think that it would be useful for us now to hear what you both want to

say about this topic, so that we can be of assistance to both sides, each of whom accuses us of being biased towards the other!

My question is how flexible each side can be on the frontier issue. If you ask the Palestinians what they want, they say they want the 1967 frontiers, and when you ask the Israelis about what they want, they say they want to have 80 per cent of settlers in settlement blocks that have geographical contiguity with their frontier. So, what are the margins? What are the parameters?

Shlomo Ben Ami: The Palestinians have already made a response to some of our security requirements. I worked with Abu Ala in Sweden on the refugee issue, on the assumption that the solution would lie in the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 194, and on the basis that the solution to the frontier issue is the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 242.

I think that what we can do is to provide you with a framework whereby we start with the recognition of the 1967 frontiers in a first stage, and then in a second stage make such amendments as may be necessary for our security needs. We shall present this proposal to you later.

Gilad Sher: The Americans can tell us the parameters and we will propose a formula.

Albright: How can we do that with the frontier issue, since some Palestinians will remain within the settlement blocks? Therefore, we are asking the Palestinians if we can work together on the maps. If we work on the principles and the mechanisms, we can define the position on the maps.

Shlomo Yanai: The principle we want to follow on the Israeli side is to annex the minimum of territory with the maximum number of settlers.

Ross: We have to try to reconcile principles with necessities on the ground. What we need is to know what both parties can live with. We have to reach an understanding on how to apply the principles. President Clinton heard from Abu Mazen yesterday evening about the refugee problem.

Abu Ala: (addressing Shlomo Ben Ami) There are things you can't accept, and there are things we can't accept. Therefore, we must understand each other well over how we are going to apply whatever parameters we agree on.

Albright: It comes down to language, and to whether we can formulate a principle that complies with Palestinian needs using the basis of the principle of reciprocity.

Shlomo Ben Ami: Reciprocity is not our policy and was not our position in Stockholm. I have said this to Abu Ala, and this is the position adopted by Prime Minister Barak.

Albright: You have none of you yet defined your parameters. We want to know precisely what you want.

Ross: As negotiators you are exemplary, and we know where you stand on the issues. The challenge you are facing is how to reach solutions that you can both accept, justify, and live with. The fact is that you must not expect from us a paper that fulfils the conditions of both sides. None of what we heard today was new to us. I think that the most important thing that needs doing now is to define some principles and the mechanisms for their application. We don't want to take any action that might turn out to be inequitable, and we want to be fair.

Albright: I am calling on both parties to move forward on this. We shall produce a paper that we can discuss together at the President's quarters tomorrow.

At the end of that evening, after a long day of talks, President Clinton personally took the chair at the Palestinian team's second bilateral session with the Americans, which continued late into the night. At this session, we found we were expected to listen to Clinton's proposals. Apparently his intention was to coach the members of our delegation for the following day's session, where the American paper that Secretary of State Albright had been talking about would be presented. I give here a summary of President Clinton's contribution:

Clinton: We would like to put the American paper on the conference table, but we are concerned that you may afterwards come to us to say you want an amendment here or an amendment there. I have told President Arafat that I received an encouraging response from Prime Minister Barak. Before we present our paper, it is essential that we hear from you about the extent to which you can live with it.

When we came to Camp David, the impression you had, as we had also, was that the Israelis were extremists. However, after our initial talks with them, the American delegation and I have gained entirely the opposite impression.

It is clear to me that Barak wants an agreement, but there are still certain outstanding differences. There are still differences between you over Jerusalem but not to the extent I had previously thought. As regards territory, I think the position you have adopted is fair and acceptable. However, we need certain clarifications over basic issues. I would like to hear what you have to say, because the agreement we seek is, at the end of the day, your agreement. Other issues, such as water, the economy, and environmental concerns, will be part of that agreement, though in fact we do not know what your precise position is regarding these questions and would like to hear from you before we present our paper.

I have come to know many Israelis over the years. I know Barak, and I understand where he has gone wrong and where he has got it right. He wants to reach an agreement with you, because he will lose his political position if he fails to come to an agreement. We will not blame you if we fail to reach an agreement. Before we wrote our paper, I read a lot of documents including the Abu Mazen–Beilin paper. I believe that you are serving your cause and your people's cause, and if there is to be an agreement, you will have to decide that you want it, and what you want it to contain.

The feasibility of an agreement will depend on the principles, while its robustness will come from the details. I believe we have a major opportunity to agree on all the issues, except for Jerusalem because this issue carries such emotional, historical, and political baggage that it is more intractable than the other issues. However, we are prepared if you want to discuss Jerusalem, which you can do either with myself or with any member of the American delegation.

I would like us to put our heads together and to ask ourselves some questions, such as, do the Israelis accept Security Council resolution

242? We would like to understand the principles on the basis of which resolution 242 was formulated. What steps do we need to take here? Over what percentage or what amount of territory can you be flexible?

Sandy Berger: I don't think we have much time, and we are not playing games. Yesterday, the prospects looked good. If you want us to put forward a useful paper, you have to deal with us the same way you deal with the Israelis. We know that there are many proposals, but the real question is, what is the possibility of success?

Clinton: Our time is limited, and I want an agreement as soon as possible. I need to attend the G8 summit. I want an agreement to take to the Congress and the American people, to get their backing for it. On Gaza, the questions have already been answered. On Jerusalem, a solution there would solve the whole problem.

At a later session between President Clinton and President Arafat, Arafat sensed that the Americans were already preparing their position in case of failure and that they would, as we had suspected all along, blame the Palestinians. Abu Ammar turned to Clinton and said, 'Have you invited us to Camp David in order to hold us responsible for failure? Let me remind your Excellency that Barak voted against Oslo, and now he intends to bring the Likud into his coalition government.'

Day three: Thursday, 13 July

This was the day when the Americans were to present their promised paper. We were apprehensive about what proposals would be in the paper. We suspected its contents had been discussed with the Israelis before being presented to us as a purely American document. Our fears had been aroused during the meetings that had been held the previous day. President Clinton had returned to Washington for the day. Against this backdrop of tension, expectation, and suspicion, Madeleine Albright led the American delegation into the third day of bilateral negotiations with us. She said, 'The aim of this meeting is to pave the way for what is going to happen today. The President will return to Camp David at five this evening to present the American paper, which is intended to push these negotiations forward on all fronts. We know there are major issues that are controversial, particularly Jerusalem. The three leaders have not so far

made enough effort to narrow the gaps between positions on this matter. In the paper the President is presenting, we focus on basic issues. We have heard your views, and we are trying to be balanced. We have held bilateral and trilateral meetings with you and with the Israelis. We have a historic opportunity before us.'

The Secretary of State then spoke in general terms about what would be in the paper. She also discussed how to approach the final status agreement, and the timetable for this. She pointed out that, thereafter, relations between the Palestinians and Israel would be on the basis of state to state. She said also that the American paper would cover the key issues of territory, Jerusalem, the refugees, and the release of prisoners, and that its proposals would hopefully lead to mutual recognition between two states. At midnight, the Palestinian and American delegations led by President Clinton and President Arafat met for the presentation of the American paper.

Clinton: In the paper we are going to present to you, we have repackaged the Palestinian and Israeli positions as we understood them, without inserting our own views. I would like to give you this paper now, for you to read tonight. We will meet again tomorrow before noon to talk about it. I suggest that you open direct negotiations with the Israelis on the basis of this paper. Either party can tell the other it is not bound by the proposals the paper puts forward until agreement on everything has been achieved.

Tomorrow, I would like to hold a series of meetings on the separate issues of Jerusalem, territory, refugees, and security. I would like President Arafat to appoint a member of his delegation to act as rapporteur and to shuttle between the committees to convey whatever proposals are made on each issue. Before we hold our meeting tomorrow, I will personally acquaint myself with the way the committees have conducted their sessions and what results they may have reached.

I am aware the gaps are still wide. For our part, we have no wish to impose any decision on either party. We will leave the decision-making to you. We need to know how we may be able to go forward on the basis of this paper.

Arafat: Will Barak give his negotiators the necessary powers? As your Excellency knows, we agreed in your presence to open a confidential

channel, but though the negotiators met on many occasions they got nowhere because the Israelis had insufficient authorisation.

Clinton: I have been assured by the Israelis that they want to achieve an agreement. If we can't do that, we will decide tomorrow what to do. Tonight we shall stay up until late in the night to assist both parties. I would like you to let me know who will be your negotiators in this process.

Arafat: I shall not send negotiators without powers.

Clinton: I know that. But it seems to me now that each of you is committed to various positions of his own. You know that Barak is here at a time when an acute crisis faces his government. Anyway, this is where we are today. I ask you to give it your best try and I do not want any leakage to the news media. We shall gather at dinner and continue our efforts.

Arafat: For our part we shall make very effort. We are willing to do anything you need or want.

Clinton: I would simply like you to negotiate with the Israelis over each of the four main issues.

At 2 a.m., after this meeting with President Clinton, Abu Ammar, Sa'eb Erekat, and I began to read through the American paper. Abu Ammar asked Sa'eb Erekat to translate into Arabic the section on Jerusalem. By the time Sa'eb finished reading, Abu Ammar was in a furious temper. He said to us, 'It is finished. This is manipulation and time wasting. These negotiations are worthless, and they are at an end.' When I completed my own reading of the paper, my assessment of it was that it was an unhelpful document in that it had four objectives, as follows:

- 1) To promote as far as possible the Israeli position, presented as a package of American proposals. The objective appeared to be to persuade the Palestinians to lower their expectations;
- 2) To impair and undermine the Palestinian position;
- 3) To return the negotiations to their original starting point in an attempt to destroy the Palestinian negotiating principle of

rejecting the discussion of secondary issues before the completion of the principal issues such as the frontiers;

- 4) To confine the talks to separate negotiating committees on the separate issues, in an attempt to set aside the comprehensive procedure we initiated in the 'Swedish track'.

When Abu Ammar heard this assessment, he asked us to return the paper at once to President Clinton. As it was now approaching 3 a.m., we suggested to Abu Ammar that we return it instead to the Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. At about 4 a.m., we went to Madeleine Albright's quarters to convey to her that we were rejecting the American paper. We told her that we took the view that it had been prepared in cooperation with the Israelis. Albright denied this. She said, 'This is not true. We did not write this paper to anger President Arafat, but to move matters forward. However, the Israelis have made some proposals, while you have not.'

Sa'eb and I told her, 'We refuse to deal with this paper. In this paper, which you have put forward as an American paper, there appear Israeli positions that we have previously refused to accept. What it contains about Jerusalem is totally unacceptable to us and we reject it entirely. We want from you an American position that will set the negotiations on an appropriate track, on the basis of international law, the United Nations resolutions, and the American Letter of Guarantee that preceded the Madrid Conference in 1991.' Madeleine Albright stubbornly attempted to defend the paper, insisting that it did not represent an Israeli point of view. Then, Dennis Ross, who had by now joined us, intervened and said to us, 'What do you want?' We answered, 'We want an American position based on the principles of international law, otherwise why are we here?' By this time Albright had lost her temper and concluded by saying angrily, 'In that case, the paper is null and void, and tomorrow you can start talks at the bilateral level, without the paper.'

Day four: Friday, 14 July

On the fourth day, as the Secretary of State had said the previous night, and following our rejection of the American paper, negotiations began within a framework of bilateral working groups. The Palestinian and Israeli negotiators arranged themselves into three committees: one for territory, frontiers and security; a second for refugees, and a third for Jerusalem. Each committee consisted of four members, two from either side, except

for the first in which I was joined by Hassan Asfour and Mohammed Dahlan, while the Israelis were represented by Shlomo Ben Ami, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, and General Shlomo Yanai. After lunch, at about 2.30, the territory, security and frontiers committee convened. The atmosphere was such that a major confrontation appeared to be impending. I opened the session with an overview of the Palestinian position, demanding recognition of the frontiers of 4 June 1967 as the frontiers between Palestine and Israel, with the possibility of making minor reciprocal adjustments in the West Bank. No adjustments would be acceptable in the Gaza Strip.

Shlomo Ben Ami: We are here to negotiate and we do not want to leave Camp David without reaching an agreement. In my view, the problem is like the chicken and egg situation. Which comes first? I am not authorised to notify you here that I accept the 1967 frontiers. Let us talk about the frontiers, though they are actually to be defined by technical working parties, with residual issues referred to the leaders, who will in the last stage meet to decide these issues on their own account, which are not within the remit of our talks. In any event, I can say we want to reach an agreement on frontiers that will include 80 per cent of the settlers within areas transferred to us. We also want an agreement on Jerusalem that will not leave the city divided. In addition, we want an agreement on the refugee issue, but without a right of return. As for the frontiers with Jordan, the line along the river belongs to Israel. In the West Bank, we want to keep military zones. So, the frontiers of 4 June are not the starting point in the West Bank.

Abu Ala: It is quite obvious to me that you are going backwards. Therefore, I see no possibility of reaching any agreement on the basis of the positions and attitudes you are expressing.

Shlomo Yanai: On the Gaza Strip, I would like to point out that we have security concerns over the frontier with Egypt.

This session was adjourned without either side having budged from their basic positions, which were well known and long established. There had been no hint of any negotiation that might lead to a change of position on the issue of the frontiers, which was the necessary starting point for everything else. After dinner, just before 8 p.m., the same negotiating

teams sat down to a further session, except that this time, somewhat to our surprise, President Clinton decided to sit in. I began with a review of the talks that we had held over several months in Stockholm, at Andrews Air Base, and various venues in the Middle East. I reminded President Clinton, that we had reached a number of understandings, as follows:

- 1) The frontiers of the Gaza Strip, and the settlements in it, represented no problem as it had been assumed from the start that the settlements would be evacuated and frontiers would be those of 4 June 1967.
- 2) On the issue of the eastern frontier of the West Bank with Jordan, we had reached an understanding, though not a formal agreement, that the line from the south of Beit She'an to the southernmost point of the Dead Sea would be the frontier of the State of Palestine. Israel had demanded security arrangements in the Jordan Valley, to which the Palestinians had not agreed.
- 3) On the western frontier between the West Bank and Israel, the issue of local adjustments had arisen, but had not been fully discussed. The Israelis demanded substantial changes while we stipulated limited and reciprocal adjustments.

I also told him that the so-called 'Swedish track' negotiations eventually stalled because the Israelis never confirmed to us their recognition of the 1967 frontiers, and I expressed surprise that we yet again found ourselves facing new proposals from the Israelis that were going all the way back to where we had started. 'Israel's new approach has really been a big surprise to us,' I said, 'as it represents a complete reversal and a return to the starting point.'

I then reaffirmed to President Clinton that the position we had expressed at the afternoon session represented a minimum from which we were not prepared to budge. I summarised this as follows:

- 1) The frontiers of the Gaza Strip are to be those of 4 June 1967, and all settlements are to be evacuated.
- 2) The frontiers of the West Bank are also to be those of 4 June 1967, and any agreed adjustments are to be minor and reciprocal.

- 3) The frontiers of 4 June 1967 must first be recognised in principle, after which reciprocal adjustments can be discussed.
- 4) All settlements are rejected as illegal.
- 5) Any security arrangement or coordination between the two sides that does not compromise Palestinian territory, sovereignty or dignity can be considered on the basis that it will include an international or American presence.
- 6) The Palestinian side does not accept any 'grey areas' or Israeli military zones; nor shall we lease back any territory to Israel.

The Israelis then took the floor:

Shlomo Ben Ami: (addressing President Clinton) Over the months that have passed, we have discussed proposals that have embodied two main elements. These have been, first, full Palestinian sovereignty over 77 per cent of the territory, and second, a 'grey area' representing 10 per cent of the territory of the West Bank which will be transferred to Palestinian control in stages. We have attempted to initiate discussions on this basis. However, the Palestinians have always wanted to go back to the fundamentals. On the issue of frontiers, we reach the point of a chicken and egg situation. We said, let us agree that the frontiers are those of 1967, and with that assumption, we can then talk about security. But they dismissed our idea of talking about security. So let us suppose that we accept the 1967 frontier line, and the 1967 frontier to the east. Well, supposition is no bad thing, but the security problem still remains. Anyway, I am not surprised by the lack of progress today.

President Clinton: (addressing the Israelis) If you do not make progress by tomorrow, time will have run out. Israel agreed to come to the conference table here on the basis of Security Council resolution 242 and the principle of exchange of territory does not take precedence over that. However, the eastern frontier is a security issue, and Israel has a need for security in the future. An international or American presence is something that could be put in place. I must say to the Palestinians that if they do not agree on something by tomorrow, there will be no agreement. Let us try to resolve questions other than the Jordan River question. On the issue of settlements, regardless of the amount of territory involved or the percentage, what would be the alternative? As far as we are concerned,

you are now in possession of territory that is the subject of Security Council resolution 242. The objective is first of all to get something on the table. Then we can look into your concerns so that you can accept it.

Day five: Saturday, 15 July

On the fifth day of talks, negotiations continued between ourselves and the Israelis within the bilateral working groups. In the committee on territory, frontiers and security, Shlomo Ben Ami began by attempting to draw us into a discussion of the issue of frontier adjustments. The exchanges soon became angry, and amidst shouts of abuse President Clinton brought the meeting to a halt, rebuking both delegations and holding me personally responsible for failure to make progress. This was how Shlomo Ben Ami initiated the exchange:

Shlomo Ben Ami: We are mandated to put everything on the table, especially territory, security, and frontier adjustments. We want to hear your view on frontier adjustments. We want to hear your observations and to be told your demands. Without agreement on the frontier adjustments, we shall not be able to make progress. When we have reviewed our positions on this issue, we shall be in a position to define the differences outstanding between us on the frontier adjustments, after which we should have a workable position.

Abu Ala: We won't proceed to discuss anything to do with this matter of adjustments until a decision has been taken on the Israeli side on the principle of reciprocity, on the two sides of the frontier.

Amnon Lipkin-Shahak: I understand that your position is that without a decision on the principle of reciprocity, of like for like, you will not agree to discuss frontier adjustments. I shall put the following question which I regard as forming the basis for bargaining. Hypothetically, suppose we decide to remove the settlers, and you want a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Tell us what your requirements would then be?

It was soon clear to us that our differences were profound and our positions were strongly opposed. The only way to halt the mounting hostility was to end the meeting. President Clinton sent Rob Malley after us to

listen again to our position, which was to refuse to discuss frontier adjustments until Israel accepted the principle of reciprocity. Afterwards, I went to Abu Ammar's quarters where I explained to him what had happened. He was angry and retorted, 'If they do not accept our position, we must conclude they are not serious. We want to discuss everything, and that must include the settlements.' However, the American intervention reopened the road once more for the resumption of negotiations after tempers had cooled.

Shlomo Ben Ami: I understand your position on the principle of reciprocity and adjustments. Let us look at the adjustment of the western frontier (the Green Line). This is a matter relating to the security of our population and the stability of our state. However, we have people in Israel with different viewpoints. There are extremists and there are realists. This is why we have some freedom of action. We want to look together at what we can do with the three settlement blocks around Jerusalem, Etzion, and Ariel. After that, we shall look at your position and we hope to hear from you what you require from us. In the end, there will be no agreement unless the requirements of both sides are taken into account.

Shlomo Ben Ami then embarked on a detailed exposition of the areas Israel wanted to annex. On the map, he displayed orange areas (Palestinian areas), and brown areas (those to have special arrangements for a defined period), which included the West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley. He listed the names of the settlements within the three blocks of Jerusalem, Etzion, and Ariel. He also proposed the annexation of territories all along the Jordan River, with three international frontier crossings over the river, including the Allenby Bridge, that would remain under Israeli control. He further suggested the annexation of settlements around Jerusalem and in the Latrun region. The area covered by the proposed annexation represented some 14 per cent of the area of the West Bank.

We categorically rejected these proposals. We said to the Israelis, 'If you can make a more reasonable offer, different from that we have just heard, we would be prepared to listen to it.' We also repeated our commitment to absolute reciprocity, with mutual adjustments of like for like, one hectare of land for one hectare, equivalent in terms of size and significance of location. We also rejected the exclusion of Jerusalem from the 1967 frontiers, as it was shown on the Israeli map that was presented

to us, explaining that we rejected both the map and the Israeli proposal that went with it. In the face of this deadlock, President Clinton personally stepped in once more. He came to us with the US delegation and chaired the session. I gave a full account of the Palestinian position, and made it clear to President Clinton that Israel was turning its back on its apparent commitment to the principle of the 1967 frontiers, proposing adjustments instead that would be entirely to its own advantage. I pointed out that this would leave the West Bank as little more than an enclave within Israel. I also pointed out that when they talked about 'brown' areas, they never specified the timetable for the eventual handover, and that this vagueness would inevitably give rise to further complications.

Shlomo Ben Ami then once more outlined the Israeli position. One more, the session was punctuated with insults and shouts of anger. This led President Clinton to step in to try to calm the situation. He said, 'Over the space of twenty-eight years that I have been engaged in politics, my principle in negotiation has been to try to identify differences of opinion in order to reconcile them, and always to push matters forward in a positive direction that would serve the interests of both parties. Now, roll up your sleeves, because you have a lot to do, and I will meet with you again after you have completed this phase of the talks.'

Shlomo Ben Ami: The map on offer is an old one that we showed in Stockholm. This is not something we have developed specifically for this summit. We have no illusion that it will be acceptable as it stands. Abu Ala has rejected this map but has refused to offer an alternative that specifies frontier adjustments he would find acceptable.

Clinton: How are you going to change the 'brown' areas to 'yellow'? I propose you should be open to a discussion of the issue of security.

Ross: I suggest that we work on a map that would enable us to define the extent of the territory to be annexed to Israel.

Abu Ala: If we were to accept this proposal, what it would entail would be legal recognition for settlements and the annexation of Palestinian territory to Israel, as well as the dismemberment of the Palestinian territories and the annexation of Jerusalem. This is something that is not acceptable, whatever the justifications or the circumstances. This is out of the

question. It would appear that we face a real and serious difficulty, one that we cannot overcome if Israel insists on this line of argument.

Once President Clinton had listened to our views and those of the Israelis, his suggestion to us was that we should discuss the issue of security on the basis of the familiar Israeli map, whose clear intention was ultimately to annex significant and important areas of Palestinian territory. This plan involved the pushing forward of their frontier line in the central West Bank, moving eastwards the western Palestinian frontier line from Nablus, Tulkarem, and Qalqilya in the north, to Ramallah, Bethlehem and areas in and around Jerusalem, down to the Israeli settlements of Kfar Etzion and Efrat. The President had listened to our position, in which we categorically dismissed this Israeli plan. Nevertheless, he still seemed to want us to engage in a debate that would have culminated in the imposition upon us of virtually the entire Israeli plan, though he reassured us there would be adjustments in it here and there. After this, we were dumbstruck when the American leader turned angrily on us, directing at us, and at me in particular, a long and hostile diatribe about our lack of willingness to engage with the other side.

Clinton: I am here to hold a summit meeting, not to waste time. The Israelis have presented their plan, and I agreed with Arafat yesterday that all issues were open to discussion. Now you (pointing his finger at me) want them to change their positions and maps. If you want to give lectures and deliver speeches on Security Council resolutions, you can go to the United Nations, where you can say whatever you like, but you should not waste my time here. I will pack up here and leave, holding you personally responsible for the failure of this summit. This is not the way to seek an agreement. Thanks to you, your people will miss the chance to solve your problems and enjoy freedom within a state of your own.

With his strong criticism of our team and the position we were taking, President Clinton effectively displayed extreme bias in favour of Israel's position and the demands made by the Israeli negotiating team. Once he had delivered himself of this outburst, Clinton strode out of the conference room. With him went Madeleine Albright, and his National Security Adviser, Sandy Berger, as well as Dennis Ross, and the rest of the Americans present. This behaviour on the part of the American leadership hit me like a thunderbolt. I was astonished and totally shocked that Clinton should apparently seek to blame me personally for the failure of the

summit, especially as he did so in public and in front of the Israeli delegation. However, I offered no reaction at the time, and remained impassive. Within myself I was in turmoil. The delegates dispersed, but I remained for a while in the hall, pondering what my course of action should be as the citizen of a land under occupation, virtually powerless, faced by a furious personal onslaught from the leader of the world's greatest power. It was not totally absent from my mind that I should leave, never to return.

Moments later, the State Department's interpreter, Jamal Hilal, came back with Dennis Ross, followed by Martin Indyk and Rob Malley. They tried their best to contain the explosive situation, attempting to get me to accept that President Clinton's anger was to do with my style of negotiation rather than the content. I still found this unacceptable and I returned to my quarters, deciding not to join President Clinton and the other delegates at the formal dinner the Americans had arranged. When my colleagues realised where I was, Abu Ammar came to my rooms with Abu Mazen and Yasser Abed Rabbo to try to persuade me to attend, but I vehemently refused. I said to Abu Ammar, 'I wouldn't come at the moment even if I had in my possession a complete and fair resolution of everything we are here to talk about.' Abu Ammar persisted, and I continued to refuse. Eventually, Abu Mazen said to Arafat, 'Abu Ammar, don't try, I know how obstinate he can be.'

While the committee on territory was holding its meetings, the committees dedicated to Jerusalem and to the issue of the refugees were separately in session. After lengthy and difficult exchanges in the Jerusalem committee meetings, it became clear to Yasser Abed Rabbo and Sa'eb Erekat that it would be difficult to reach a solution to what the Americans described as such a 'delicate' issue. This led President Clinton at one point to bring up once more the old idea of deferring the Jerusalem issue. He suggested that we agree to cooperate in certain fields related to Jerusalem whilst allowing ten years to elapse before the final determination of the future of the city. At the meetings of the refugee committee, the outcome was no better. Abu Mazen and Nabil Sha'ath presented the Palestinian position, which was predicated on the right of return. Despite the weakness of the Israeli arguments, which constantly harped on the idea of financial reparations as the basis for a resolution, the Americans continued to lean towards their view. President Clinton said at one point that while he was at the G8 summit in Japan he would

ask for international funds to compensate the refugees. He also said he would ask the US Congress to allocate additional funds for the same purpose. The financial inducements mooted by the Americans were also reflected in the statements made by the Israeli delegation, who attempted to give the impression they were responding to a Palestinian request for financial aid and compensation.

President Clinton asked for a face-to-face meeting with President Arafat on the evening of 15 July, after the dinner that I boycotted. Abu Ammar took with him Sa'eb Erakat and Mohammed Dahlan. Abu Ammar told me the next day what happened. The American President used the same tactics that he tried with me. He apparently said to Abu Ammar, 'If you do not want to reach an agreement, let us make an announcement to that effect and then I can return to the White House. I cannot live with your method of negotiation. Your delegation spent the time at yesterday's meeting making speeches while the Israelis were defining their position with clarity and detail.' In other words, he was accusing us of not being serious. I was told that Abu Ammar rejected all such claims made by the Israelis, explaining to President Clinton in some detail that it was the Israeli delegation which was evading serious discussion, and that it was returning to Israel's old and well-worn positions. These were what we had already rejected in Stockholm because, in our eyes, they were no different from the positions of Likud.

In addition, Abu Ammar issued a stern warning to President Clinton not to countenance Israel's new demand to allow Jews to pray in the Aqsa Mosque's courtyard. He reminded him that Moshe Dayan, when the Israeli forces took East Jerusalem in 1967, had personally issued an edict barring Jews from praying either at the Aqsa Mosque or anywhere else on the Haram al-Sharif. Dayan, who knew the Arabs well, was aware this would have dire consequences. Abu Ammar said he warned Clinton that if such an Israeli demand were satisfied today, there would be disturbances on a serious scale, potentially leading to widespread loss of life.

Abu Ammar said he also talked to Clinton about other issues, including the demarcation of the eastern frontier and the percentage of territory Israel wanted to keep in the West Bank, which was currently between 8 and 10 per cent. President Clinton also stressed the importance of Jerusalem, so that Abu Ammar got the impression he was anxious to find some way of reaching a swift agreement. Abu Ammar kept drawing the conversation back to the Aqsa Mosque and the Old City, insisting that both must

continue as part of Palestine. Abu Ammar said Clinton became impatient and annoyed, pressing the Palestinians for answers to such questions as, 'Have you anything to offer in return for what Barak is offering? If you have not, we shall leave here empty-handed.'

After the meeting between Clinton and President Arafat was ended, and when I had spent sufficient time on my own to cool down from my state of righteous indignation, I went to Abu Ammar's quarters to explain my actions to him, and apologise for my absence at dinner. I found President Arafat sleeping, so I went to the quarters shared by Nabeel Sha'ath, Sa'eb Erekat, Yasser Abed Rabbo, and Akram Haniyyeh, to find that Abu Mazen was also there. All present gave me a warm welcome, showering me with praise for the stand I had taken. I was gratified to receive some sympathy and appreciation from my colleagues after Clinton's scathing attack.

Meanwhile, as I was later to learn to my annoyance, President Clinton had gone behind my back to initiate a 'back channel' meeting away from the main talks, to see if an all-night brainstorming session could find any way of making a breakthrough. At his evening meeting with President Clinton, Abu Ammar had named Sa'eb Erekat and Mohammed Dahlan to take part in this session, in which they would face Shlomo Ben Ami and Gilad Sher. The session took place in Aspen, President Clinton's private quarters at Camp David, and was kept secret from the rest of us. The meeting began at midnight and went on for twelve hours. When I discovered this the next day, I was irritated. However, though the group conferred through the night as President Clinton had suggested, plied with coffee and sandwiches to keep them going, the two sides apparently went their separate ways in the morning with their positions unaltered. It became clear to me that President Clinton had deliberately attempted to see what would happen if someone other than myself was in charge of a session of talks and that this was part of a strategy to exclude me from the negotiating process because of my determination not to compromise with the Israelis when they approached our 'red lines'.

Our delegation was beginning to realise that the Israelis were escalating their demands to a level where no agreement was possible and no purpose would be served by continuing. As far as I could see, it could be said that the gap between us was actually getting wider. For example, the resuscitation by the Israelis of the bizarre demand that Jews should be

allowed to pray within the courtyard of the Aqsa Mosque outraged us all. Abu Ammar, in particular, was extremely angry about this.

Day six: Sunday, 16 July

The following day, after Sa'eb Erekat and Mohammed Dahlan had emerged from their gruelling private session with the Israelis, President Arafat called a plenary meeting of the Palestinian delegation. All of us, myself, Abu Mazen, Nabil Shaath, Yasser Abed Rabbo, Akram Haniyyeh, Hassan Asfour, Khaled Salem, and Nabil Abu Rudeineh, as well as Sa'eb Erekat and Mohammed Dahlan, gathered to hear what Abu Ammar had to say. Their reaction to the personal attack on me was an issue my colleagues wanted to air. Abu Ammar said he took it as more than merely a personal attack on me, viewing it as an expression of an attitude taken by the Americans to the entire Palestinian delegation. I was showered with questions about what precisely had happened, and about my decision to boycott the dinner.

I was still inwardly furious, which earned me support and sympathy from my colleagues for the way I had responded to Clinton's public attack. Everybody agreed that my response was justified. My colleagues told me that when I was first seen to be absent before the dinner, apparently spurning President Clinton's invitation, they had telephoned me repeatedly and then deputed Nabil Sha'ath to look for me. Some thought I had left Camp David, others that I was somewhere in the compound but outside my residence. I had actually gone back to my room and was not taking calls, either from my own colleagues or President Clinton's team. Nevertheless, all were alarmed when the time for dinner came and my seat remained vacant. When we had all talked enough about all this for the excitement to die down, we embarked on a comprehensive assessment of the latest negotiating situation for President Arafat's benefit. We also examined closely what we knew so far the position the Americans were taking and its potential implications.

As we discussed our tactics, opinions varied around the table over what percentage of territory we should agree would remain in Israeli hands. I suggested that it should not exceed 1.5 per cent, the figure I had already given President Clinton. Yasser Abed Rabbo and Hassan Asfour, proposed 2.5 per cent. Nabil Sha'ath suggested a maximum of 3 per cent. We were surprised to learn Abu Ammar was not happy with any of this, and to discover that he had apparently promised President Clinton during their one-to-one meeting a figure of the order of 8 to 10 per

cent, larger than anything we had discussed. Abu Ammar said we could describe this as an exchange, and should ask for an area of land in exchange for the area that would be ceded to the Israelis in the agreement. He was somewhat annoyed with us for wanting to take a tougher line than he had with President Clinton. Meanwhile, many of us were surprised that he had apparently been persuaded to make such a concession. Once we had found a form of words to smooth this over, we agreed to send President Clinton a letter signed by Abu Ammar summing up the Palestinian position on all the issues on the table. Abu Ammar asked Sa'eb Erekat and Nabil Abu Rudeineh to take the letter to Clinton, refusing to take it himself, although his residence was no more than a few metres from that of the US President.

The text of the letter, dated 16 July 2000, was as follows:

Our goal is the same as that of Your Excellency [President Clinton], namely to reach a comprehensive peace agreement on all issues. Regarding the three issues that we have discussed, I am prepared to go to the furthest limit, if this will guarantee Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, taking into consideration Israeli interests in the Jewish quarter and the Western Wall, and guaranteeing an open city within the framework of mutual cooperation. I also seek a just solution to the refugee issue on the basis of international law, and in particular UN resolution 194.

On this basis I make the following points:

1) The eastern frontiers:

The eastern frontiers shall be the 1967 frontiers running precisely along the River Jordan and the Dead Sea. However, I understand what you have proposed in connection with security. I am prepared to see an international presence on the eastern frontier (the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley) under American command.

2) The reciprocal Exchange of Territory:

We agree to reciprocal territory exchange. However, that should not include any of our water resources. Nor should it compromise the integrity of the West Bank territory or include any Palestinian urban centres. With understanding on our part of

the need to make adjustments in the frontiers and desirous of the success of the peace process, I agree to an exchange of territory of a reasonable size on a reciprocal basis (the exchange should be equivalent to the area of settlements to be agreed upon).

- 3) As concerns the termination of the conflict, this should be deemed to have taken place when a final agreement has been implemented that safeguards our interests. However, I am prepared to work with any proposals you may have to preserve our interests.

Other than that, the State of Palestine should have full sovereignty, with no areas within the 1967 frontiers falling under Israeli control.

Yasser Arafat

Sa'eb Erekat and Mohammed Dahlan took this letter to President Clinton's quarters, where they were met by Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger, who listened to the text of the letter and appeared to be happy with it, though Berger asked some questions. Just an hour later, Albright came to Yasser Arafat to convey a verbal message from President Clinton which said, 'The President has received your letter and he thanks you for it. He considers it positive and encouraging, and that it could be a new beginning. The President himself will shuttle tomorrow between you and Barak to discuss all the issues on the agendas of the three committees.' Albright also expressed what resembled an apology to Abu Ammar for Clinton's apparent impatience with him the previous day, maintaining that the President respected him and that he wanted the process of negotiation to continue and succeed.

At noon, Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk came over to see me. They said they welcomed Abu Ammar's letter and emphasised that President Clinton would begin his mediation between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak the following day, starting with a meeting with Arafat, and then with Barak, with the objective of initiating a serious discussion of Jerusalem. After apologising to me again for what had happened the previous day between myself and President Clinton, Ross and Indyk asked me to do what I could to help make a success of this new initiative. I assured them of my complete readiness to make whatever input I could towards a

successful outcome, on the condition of the recognition of Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem.

At 2.30 in the afternoon, Clinton convened a meeting with the two small teams that had met privately overnight, together with Arafat and Barak. He seemed again to be putting forward points suggested by the Israelis, asking for an answer from Arafat to Israel's demand for 10.5 per cent of the West Bank, and also wanting to know how we would react to a limited Israeli presence along the River Jordan. He also wanted us to say if we would consider an agreement reached between us at Camp David as equivalent to the end of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, even if some issues remained unresolved.

Day seven: Monday, 17 July

This could be described as the day of Jerusalem. President Clinton had indicated that the nocturnal discussion that had continued until noon on 16 July should focus on trying to come up with proposals on this key issue. As soon as he received President Arafat's letter on 16 July, President Clinton seems to have decided to prioritise the possibility of reaching an agreement on Jerusalem that would enable him to proclaim the success of the Camp David summit. Throughout the day, he met Barak and Arafat alternately, every three hours. Meanwhile, members of the American delegation were holding separate and joint meetings with members of the Israeli and Palestinian delegations. I met separately with Albright, Ross, Indyk, and Miller, each of whom exhorted the Palestinians to reach an agreement, but without making any concrete proposals themselves. All asked me to stand by Arafat and give him my support. Later, Albright asked me to see her again. She urged us to come up with positive proposals on Jerusalem as alternatives to those proposed by the Israelis. Then, at 3 p.m., she asked for a meeting with the Palestinian delegation to go deeper into the Jerusalem issue.

We took with us to this meeting all the documentation and maps at our disposal, as the topic of Jerusalem was a minefield and the smallest detail might prove crucial. We also drafted a summary of our key demands. These were:

1) Sovereignty

The recovery of Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem as it was constituted prior to its occupation in 1967. This demand is supported by UN

Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, as well as a number of other resolutions issued by the Security Council, including resolutions 252, 267, 298, 476, and 478.

2) Frontiers

These should be the frontiers of 4 June 1967.

3) Israel's proposal on enlarged municipal boundaries

We need to know the details of the proposal.

4) The 'Open City' concept

What will be meant by the concept of an 'Open City' in Jerusalem?

Will this apply only to the Old City? Or to both East and West Jerusalem?

Or only to East Jerusalem?

5) Settlements

Which settlements are included in Israel's idea of an expanded Jerusalem?

6) Arab areas

What are the Arab neighbourhoods, villages, and suburbs that will be deemed to belong to Jerusalem?

7) Municipal services

How does Israel propose to organise Jerusalem's municipal services?

8) Security

What does Israel understand by security in Jerusalem?

In the context of these and these and other questions, we developed two alternative possibilities for the resolution of the Jerusalem issue:

a) The unambiguous and full recognition of Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, and the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, thus annulling the annexation of East Jerusalem proclaimed by Israel in 1967.

b) The internationalisation of the City of Jerusalem, and the implementation of United Nations resolution 181 declaring Jerusalem to be a 'corpus separatum'.

At 3 p.m., we met Madeleine Albright, as invited, at the Holly meeting room. The Secretary of State welcomed us and apologised to the Palestinians in general and to myself in particular for what had happened during my stormy encounter with President Clinton, and the way he had singled me out to be blamed for the impending failure of the summit. It seemed the event had become the gossip of all three delegations.

Albright: You know that the President likes you, respects you, and values your contribution. He understood that you were valiantly upholding your people's cause and is aware of the depth of your concern for your people's interests. He does not confuse such personal issues with responsibility for the success or failure of these negotiations. However, he feels frustrated by the lack of progress when there are only three days left before the date set for the end of this summit and has observed that you dig in your heels at all times.

Abu Ala: We also have warm feelings towards President Clinton, and respect him. We also respect you and welcome your efforts, and the efforts of the US Administration in general, and we thank you for all you have done. However, President Clinton unfairly blamed me for wrecking the talks, an accusation which is untrue. If we are to restart the talks and reinvigorate them, each of us must do what he can and what he should. President Clinton singled me out for blame and has appeared to show a bias towards the Israelis. My exchange with the President took place in the open conference room, where I was entirely within my rights to set out the Palestinian position clearly and unambiguously, holding nothing back. In that same conference room, the President had a duty to listen to my point of view without irritation or anger. It was my impression that we were in the presence of President Clinton acting as a mediator, rather than as the President of the United States. In the presence of the President of the United States, speaking in his official capacity, I would take care over every word I uttered. At the conference table, however, he is the mediator and it is we who have the right to speak freely. Having sat with us and listened to our positions, both the Palestinians and the Israelis, he should in fact have laid the blame on Israel, not us. It is Israel that has begun to drag the negotiations back to their starting point. In any event, we stand by our position, and please convey my utmost respect to the President. As far as I am concerned, the matter is at an end.

Our conversation then moved on to the issue of Jerusalem. I explained to the Secretary of State that we intended to hold fast to the principle of our sovereignty over East Jerusalem and insist on its recognition as the capital of the Palestinian state. We also wanted Jerusalem to be an open city, on the basis of Palestinian sovereignty in the east of the city and Israeli sovereignty in the west. I added that we were well aware of Israel's concern over the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter, and that this would be expressed through special arrangements for Jews in East Jerusalem. Then, during a break in the meeting, apart from the others, the Secretary of State suddenly put to me an astonishing question, which truly surprised me.

Albright: Are you prepared to continue to support Mr Arafat?

Abu Ala: Naturally, President Arafat is the leader of Palestinian people. He is our leader and leader of the Palestinian delegation here, and we will support him always.

Albright: And over difficult decisions, are you prepared to support him?

Abu Ala: Yes, so long as those decisions are within the limits of our agreed positions. If we were to do anything other, we have children and grandchildren to whom we are answerable and who we want to be proud of us, and we also wish to be proud of what we achieve for them and for our people.

I later learned that she had also asked Abu Mazen the same question about his support for Abu Ammar's policies. At that point, our meeting with Madeleine Albright was brought to an end. I then went at once to see President Arafat who was on his way to meet President Clinton. I briefed him on our meeting and told him frankly about the question the Secretary of State had asked me. He replied, 'It seems that the situation has become difficult and that they have less than reassuring intentions.' I gave Abu Ammar the data and statistics on Jerusalem I had with me, together with our map of the city, for him to consult during his meeting with President Clinton.

I later learned that, at that meeting, Clinton had said, 'Hard decisions are awaiting us. I have met Barak and have told him that President Arafat has explained to me his domestic constraints. I told Barak that Arafat

believes that if he were to go away with an inadequate agreement on Jerusalem, he would lose his people's trust as well as that of all the Arabs and Muslims round the world, and I believe him. Therefore, I would like you to find a solution that will serve you well.' Then, Abu Ammar gave Clinton a lengthy exposition about the status of Jerusalem and its significance to the Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, referring to the map that I had already showed the Secretary of State. Abu Ammar felt this meeting had been satisfactory. There were no meetings in the afternoon. The Israelis had been closeted all day, as we later learned, discussing their own stance on Jerusalem. Between 2 and 4 p.m., we all stayed with Abu Ammar, taking him for half an hour's walk in the gardens of Camp David and strolling between the giant trees. We also relaxed a little ourselves, going for rides in the golf carts, which we played with like toys as we rode them around the grounds to various destinations.

At 8 p.m., I went with Nabeel Sha'ath, Yasser Abed Rabbo, and Mohammed Dahlan for a casual dinner at the restaurant that was available to all the negotiators. Hardly had we sat down when the chief of the President's protocol staff rushed in to say that President Clinton was coming to have dinner with us. Sandy Berger, Dennis Ross, and Aaron Miller, the White House Chief of Staff, arrived and sat at a side table. Minutes later, President Clinton arrived with his daughter, Chelsea, and sat down with us. The President placed himself next to me, which I took as something of an apology for what had happened between me and him. It was a gracious gesture by the President of the United States towards an individual Palestinian citizen, for which I was grateful. During the conversation, Chelsea asked me about my son, whom she had heard had recently been married. I replied, 'Yes, he was married a short time ago.' President Clinton asked me about my son's age. I said, 'He is thirty-four. And by the way, he is an American citizen.'

Clinton: Where does he work?

Abu Ala: In New York.

Clinton: What does he do?

Abu Ala: He is with a financial company.

Chelsea: Please give him our congratulations.

After this courteous exchange, President Clinton went on to talk generally about international affairs. He spoke about his experiences with the Russians under Yeltsin and Putin, and the changes Russia was undergoing. Then he spoke about Russia's experience with its neighbours, and especially Ukraine, where he presciently said the relationship would prove sensitive in the future. He also talked about China, as the coming world power. He mentioned the current dispute between Turkey and Greece over an almost unpopulated island off the coast of Turkey, claimed by Greece, inhabited by only one shepherd and twenty sheep. When the Turkish army attacked the island, Clinton phoned the then Turkish premier, Tansu Ciller, and asked: 'How can you attack an island with only twenty sheep?' President Clinton laughed and we all laughed with him. My overall feeling was that Clinton was intelligent, cultured, observant, shrewd, and that he had a good sense of humour.

The US President went back to social talk and asked me how many children and grandchildren I had. I said I had five children and eight grandchildren. He asked if I was close to my family and I replied that I was. He asked what my children did. I replied, 'One is an architect, the second holds a degree in communications studies and an MBA, the third has an MA in economics, and one of my girls is a qualified interior designer.' 'A large and good family', he commented. At that point I told him that my father had had twelve children and his grandchildren numbered 168. President Clinton asked whether all the children had the same mother? I said, 'No, they were by three mothers, and I have a sister who is now eight years old.' 'What do you say? Eight years old?' he exclaimed. 'Yes,' I said. He threw his head back and laughed until his cheeks turned red. He turned to his daughter and said, 'Chelsea, you could still have a brother, but your mother is not interested.' She smiled but said nothing. Clinton said to me jokingly, 'Is this why you want more territory?'

Week two

To sum up, at the end of the first week at Camp David, I would say that the way the Americans worked unsettled us, and I should admit we were in disarray regarding some essential issues. We had stuck to the principle of not discussing security before an agreement on the frontiers had been reached, and particularly the eastern frontier in the Jordan Valley, and we refused to discuss the principle of settlements ahead of agreeing on the western frontier, known as the Green Line. We were also adamant that we were not going to separate the principal issues from each other, insisting on the connection between the three principal issues of Jerusalem, the rights of the refugees, and the linked issues of frontiers, security, and settlements. We refused to discuss maps before agreeing principles and concepts. We had also decided not to put anything in writing before we had been able to establish the size of the gap that separated us from the Israelis. On the other hand, there were matters within our delegation that caused me some anxiety. We seemed to have split into three factions that looked like three separate delegations in terms of their positions. As for President Arafat, he was in a realm of his own, with his own private calculations that had dimensions of which we were unaware.

Day eight: Tuesday, 18 July

According to the timetable originally laid down by the Americans, this was supposed to have been the last day. However, a whole week had passed with nothing accomplished. Our positions remained as far apart as ever. In fact, it could be said that, if anything, the gap widened. The Israelis had attempted to renege on previous agreements, especially the understandings we had reached at Stockholm and afterwards, whether on frontiers, territory and security, on Jerusalem, or on refugees. Although our differences were sharp on all the issues, those on Jerusalem were by far the most acute and sensitive. President Clinton was about to leave for Tokyo. The American officials all seemed to be in a great hurry, and, as we noticed, visibly exhausted and somewhat unhappy. We observed this

when Madeleine Albright met us in the morning. Abu Mazen, Yasser Abed Rabbo, and I represented the Palestinian side.

Albright: The Israelis have put forward proposals and have taken the initiative to propose solutions. You have contented yourselves with declaring principles, such as the principle that East Jerusalem is yours. I do not consider this a proper way to negotiate.

Indyk: The Israelis cannot go as far as you want them to. In fact, no one in Israel could do that.

Albright: We are at a dead end, and if we leave Camp David without a solution, chaos could erupt.

Abu Ala: We will not accept any deals that do not give us full sovereignty over East Jerusalem. Do the Israelis think it is within their power to continue to exercise sovereignty over the city while they grant us mere administrative power? Do they think we would accept that?

Indyk: Ben Gurion established the State of Israel without Jerusalem, and it would be possible for you to establish a Palestinian state tomorrow on the same basis.

Abed Rabbo: There will be no deal without Jerusalem. I would put my money on that.

At midday, Clinton met a group of members of the Palestinian delegation, headed by President Arafat. He started by addressing Abu Ammar as follows:

Clinton: Consider everything you have heard so far today null and void. I shall be staying at Camp David for a little while longer to try to reach an overall solution to the Jerusalem issue. This remains an important opportunity, despite the frustration you have caused us. What I am telling you now is my personal idea. This is as follows. You [President Arafat] will be the custodian of all the holy places, under the joint auspices of the United Nations and the Kingdom of Morocco. This will include the right to raise the Palestinian flag over the Haram al-Sharif. If you accept

this, then I am prepared to bring pressure to bear on Barak so that he agrees to full Palestinian sovereignty over the Muslim and Christian quarters in the Old City. Barak may even agree to Palestinian sovereignty over Arab areas outside the Old City and suburbs like Qalandia, Kufur Aqab, Samiramis, and the Postal Colony, together with a link between these suburbs and the West Bank. Barak wants a corridor connecting West Jerusalem with the existing Israeli settlements to the east of Jerusalem. Palestinian areas inside the city will be under full Palestinian sovereignty and will be accorded a large measure of autonomy in the fields of planning, security, and law and order. They may agree to give you a corridor between the West Bank and the Old City under Palestinian sovereignty. As to the frontiers, 80 to 85 per cent of the eastern frontier with Jordan will be yours, and Israeli troops will be stationed in the Jordan Valley for twelve years. On refugees, a satisfactory agreement will be devised acceptable to both parties that will form part of the final agreement that puts an end to the conflict. On the issue of territory, 8 per cent of the West Bank will be annexed for the settlements and a further 2 per cent in the southern part of the West Bank with 1 per cent ceded by them to Gaza. The Israelis will not accept that anything remains undecided regarding the settlements.

This was the conclusion President Clinton had come to after a week of negotiations at Camp David. From what he said about guardianship, my analysis was that the Haram al-Sharif would have a status similar to that of diplomatic missions: that is, that the residual sovereignty would be Israeli, with Israel granting some form of trusteeship to the Palestinian state. The act of raising the Palestinian flag over the Haram al-Sharif would not revoke Israeli sovereignty. The status of the Christian religious sites lying outside the Islamic quarter would be the same as the Islamic sites. The Armenian quarter would be fully annexed to Israel, as would the Jewish quarter. Under the American proposal, Arab neighbourhoods outside the walled town such as Sheikh Jarrah, Wadi Al-Jawz, Shufat, and Beit Hanina would stay under Israeli sovereignty. Regarding territory, the American plan proposed the effective annexation of 10 per cent of our territory in the West Bank in exchange for the equivalent of 1 per cent of the West Bank to be annexed to the Gaza Strip.

Abu Ammar's reply to the American plan was unequivocal. He said

to President Clinton: 'I cannot go back to my people without Holy Jerusalem. I prefer to die under occupation rather than give concessions or accept servility.' So, the essence of the Palestinian view of the proposal was: 'We shall not exchange occupation for permanent Israeli sovereignty.' During the evening, we held a follow-up meeting with Albright, where she warned against the dire consequences of failure. She urged the negotiators to mobilise all their abilities during Clinton's absence in Tokyo. Abu Ammar drew attention to what had happened at the Stockholm talks and emphasised to Albright that we had made more progress there than had been made at Camp David. He asked me to be a witness to that. He then suggested to her that we should review all the issues, one by one.

Abu Ammar: We are ready to discuss all issues.

Albright: I suggest we begin with security.

Abu Ammar: The issue of security is linked to frontiers.

Albright: I suggest that you nominate a particular individual to deal with that.

Abu Ammar: I trust that territory, frontiers, and security will all fall under the remit of one committee, as has been the case so far, and I nominate Abu Ala.

Albright: On the subject of refugees, Nabil Sha'ath and his colleagues say you have proposals on this issue and I suggest that you confer with them.

Abu Ammar: Very well, and I suggest that Jerusalem should be dealt with by a committee on its own.

By the time President Clinton came back to meet us again at ten in the evening, he seemed somewhat to have amended the plan he had put forward at midday. Nevertheless he presented it as his best suggestion. He introduced the subject, saying, 'This is my proposal and I think it is the best possible deal.' Abu Ammar responded to President Clinton: 'This

proposal is the brainchild of Dennis Ross. I suspect that Albright and Ross coordinate their views with the Israelis. They promote Israel's interests, not yours.'

The American proposal we had received before had spoken of the concept of 'trusteeship'. There would be Palestinian sovereignty over Muslim and Christian areas in the Old City. Israel would have sovereignty over the Jewish area and the Armenian quarter. There would be Palestinian custody and control of Christian and Muslim holy sites, mosques, and churches elsewhere, over which there would be residual Israeli sovereignty. As regards the Arab areas lying outside the wall, they would be under Palestinian sovereignty. The principal elements of the revised American proposal were as follows:

- 1) The 'Framework Agreement' shall be considered as putting an end to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict over all issues, except for that of Jerusalem, about which discussions and negotiations should continue for a further period of two years, while taking into account during that time the requirements of both parties.
- 2) The present status of the Haram Al-Sharif shall be maintained, i.e. there will be Israeli sovereignty with Palestinian custody.
- 3) The Embassy of the United States should be moved to West Jerusalem.
- 4) There should be established in East Jerusalem, possibly in the Old City, a personal headquarters for Yasser Arafat at which he will be able to receive guests.
- 5) There should be freedom of access to holy places and a guarantee of freedom of worship for the followers of the three faiths.
- 6) Eight per cent of the West Bank is to be annexed to Israel, with 80 per cent of settlers remaining in these areas. In exchange, the Palestinians will be given the equivalent of 2 per cent of the area of the West Bank in the context of an exchange of territory. This shall be in the Negev area of Halutsa.
- 7) No refugees will be given the right to return to locations inside Israel.

As soon as this meeting with President Clinton was over, we in the Palestinian delegation held a meeting to coordinate our position. After exhaustive discussion, we agreed to sum up our position in a letter to

President Clinton to be given to him before his departure for Tokyo. By 1.30 a.m as the dawn of 19 July approached, we sent Clinton the following memorandum:

Memorandum for His Excellency President Clinton

As a result of the negotiations that have been held under Your Excellency's auspices, with the discussions that have been held on all topics, we believe that significant progress has been achieved in the scrutiny of the positions of both Israel and the Palestinians. However, as these matters must now be the object of thorough consultation within the Palestinian leadership, and there should be also the broadest consultation over the various aspects of the issues under discussion brought up by Israel, we make the following proposal:

- 1) We should give ourselves the opportunity of more time by adjourning the summit for the space of two weeks, after which time your Excellency may wish to reschedule the talks.
- 2) In the meantime, intensive talks between representatives of the two sides can continue with the participation of American representatives to bridge the gap between the two sides and pave the way for the next summit.

On 16 July 2000, we emphasised to Your Excellency our intention to reach a comprehensive and coherent settlement of all issues, including those of the final status.

Owing to the importance and gravity of the issues under discussion, particularly the future of Jerusalem, together with the contents of your last letter to us, we need to carry out wide consultations within the Palestinian institutions. This is especially so in view of the particular circumstances of the Palestinians, of which you are undoubtedly aware.

I would like to draw your attention to our readiness to continue these negotiations at any time and at any venue you deem appropriate. However, we feel we must point out that the proposals you have so far put forward do not constitute a basis for a comprehensive, final, and just settlement on the basis of international legitimacy.

We wish to reiterate our desire, however, to reach a comprehensive and overall settlement on all issues and subjects that form part of the final status, as we have conveyed in our letter to your Excellency of 16 July 2000.

With appreciation and respect,

Yasser Arafat

Day nine: Wednesday, 19 July

This was the day President Clinton was actually due to leave for the G8 summit in Tokyo. Throughout the day, therefore, the talks had the feeling of a race against time. This brought a level of tension that infected the members of all the delegations, including the Americans and President Clinton himself. As soon as the Israelis heard the proposal for the suspension of the talks contained in Abu Ammar's letter to President Clinton, Barak told the Israeli delegation to pack their bags. He refused to accept any such extension of the negotiations, which he saw as potentially highly damaging to his internal political position. We decided to make no immediate preparations to leave Camp David.

President Clinton held an urgent meeting with President Arafat. Abu Ammar said, 'A billion Muslims will never forgive me if I do not succeed in obtaining full sovereignty over East Jerusalem. I have no authority to make any concession in this respect. This issue is not for me personally to decide, rather it relates to the whole Muslim world.' 'You are pushing your people and the whole region to a catastrophe,' retorted President Clinton angrily. Here, Abu Ammar repeated his suggestion to Clinton that the negotiations be suspended for a fortnight.

Arafat: I propose to you that we adjourn the work of this conference for two weeks, after which we can resume.

Clinton: I feel my hopes have been dashed. You are on the verge of losing my friendship. You are losing the chance of reaching a settlement, and that will be the case for many years to come.

Arafat: I will not sign any agreement that does not include Jerusalem.

You are coordinating your proposals with the Israelis. If need be, I shall wait twenty more years. I must consult the entire Arab world, not just my own Palestinian people.

Clinton: Why don't you talk this over directly with Barak and try to reach a solution together?

Arafat: All that Barak has to offer is just talk upon talk. He has proposed nothing, save the annexation of Jerusalem to Israel.

Apparently, President Clinton concluded after this exchange that he ought to be able to use his position in the world to resolve the problem raised by Abu Ammar. If any change in the status of Jerusalem would, as Arafat said, need the authorisation of all the Arab states and the Muslim world in general, then surely the President of the United States should be able to obtain that authorisation. He decided to begin with the Arab leaders, and telephoned the leaders of certain Arab states, including President Mubarak of Egypt, King Abdullah of Jordan, and the then Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, to explain the problem. He asked Abu Ammar to come to another urgent meeting at his quarters and told him, 'I have proposed to President Mubarak and King Abdullah that the negotiations about Jerusalem should be postponed to allow us to continue here with the other issues. I hope to receive your agreement to the proposals I made last night. If you have any conditions, you can attach your reservations to your consent.' Arafat replied: 'I cannot accept Barak's proposals, and I invite your Excellency to attend my funeral if you stick to this position on Jerusalem.'

After this, Clinton went immediately to Barak, who had already told the captain of the Israeli delegation's plane to be ready to depart. He persuaded him to agree that the Israelis would not leave Camp David while he was away in Tokyo. Then Clinton abruptly returned to Arafat's quarters and said to him, 'I have decided to ask you all to stay here until my return from Tokyo. Madeleine Albright will be responsible for the continuation of the talks until I come back. It is up to you to think about a radical solution to the issue of the Haram al-Sharif.' 'Your word is my command. I will stay,' replied Arafat.

In fact, to show our willingness to continue, we had already that morning taken the initiative to convene a meeting of the committee on frontiers,

territory, and security. Mohammed Dahlan and I represented the Palestinians, and on the Israeli side were Shlomo Ben Ami and Israel Hassoun. Hassoun opened with a reminder that the meeting was not official and that anything we said would not be binding on Barak. He said he wanted to bring in General Yanai to explain the security implications of our proposal, given that we would be neighbours in equal states. A detailed account of this exchange will convey the kind of thinking we faced on the Israeli side, at this stage, with a continued attempt to specify highly detailed security arrangements while leaving the fundamental definition of the frontiers essentially vague.

Yanai: As we envisage it, two problems threaten Israel's security. One of these is the external threat, and the second is terrorism, which could originate anywhere. Some 85 five per cent of Israel's population lives on the coastal line, from Al-Khudeirah to the northern edge of the Gaza Strip. Most of our industry, as well as our water and power, are in the same area. We regard this area as the strategic heart of Israel. In order for us to be able to defend so narrow an area, we need strategic depth. The distance between Tulkarem and the coast is no more than 15 kilometres. The average is only 50 kilometres. A range of high mountains faces on to this vital Israeli area. The mountain range must be demilitarised with three early warning posts installed on it, from which it will be possible to monitor hundreds of kilometres to the east, enabling external threats to be detected. These posts would be erected within small, fortified enclosures, within which their operation will be confined.

General Yanai went on to propose that these posts should be positioned as follows: at Nablus on Mount Eibal; at the village of Al-Tayibeh in the Ramallah area; and in the south of the region of Hebron.

Yanai: What we need is technical equipment and a number of experts and specialists with permission to enter and leave these positions to perform their duties. If an external threat arises, like the presence of a foreign army in Jordan, we would then deploy at five locations on the frontier with Jordan. The first location would lie to the east of Ma'ale Adumim extending eastwards and southwards towards the Jordan Valley. To get to that location, we would need a number of roads. The first of these would be from the settlement of Ariel to the Jordan Valley, the second

would be the Jericho road, the third runs between the town of Al-Tayibeh to the Jordan Valley, and the fourth would be in the south. In any event, we would give advance notification of any mobilisation.

On control in the air, General Yanai acknowledged that air space was indivisible, and as the Palestinians would have their own civil air traffic control, sovereignty over air space would be Palestinian. Sovereign permission would have to be obtained from the Palestinians for the use of their air space. Owing to the narrowness of this air space, however, there should be a unitary administration, where the Palestinian side would remain under Palestinian sovereignty but with Israeli control. On this basis, control and coordination would be under Israel administration, while air traffic would be subject to Palestinian clearance. This would apply to Israeli aircraft, which would enter this air space only after clearance from the Palestinian Authority. Such flights would take care to avoid causing noise pollution that would disturb the population. On the issue of disarmament, he explained that Israel would require a guarantee that the Palestinian state would be de-militarised, together with an undertaking that no Palestinian armed forces would be created. There would be no foreign forces within the territory of the Palestinian state, no alliance with any foreign forces, and no military treaty with any other state. None of this should prevent the Palestinian Authority from establishing Palestinian security forces for internal matters. On the question of control of the international frontiers and the prevention of arms smuggling, from Jordan for example, there would need to be an agreement that would extend over a number of years. Control over these frontiers would have to be the responsibility of Israel, with no third party involvement. This would require a permanent Israeli presence on the River Jordan to undertake control operations in the areas at present patrolled by Israel. Israeli patrols would prevent infiltration by any elements opposed to the agreement. This would necessitate a band of territory three to 4 kilometres deep, under full Israeli control, with permission for pursuit operations. The arrangements for the Jordan River would apply also to the Dead Sea coast.

General Yanai talked about the three types of frontier crossings into the territory of the Palestinian Authority, by land, air, and sea. He said that sovereignty over frontier crossings should be Palestinian, though a third party, with representation of Israel, should carry out security control in

practice. Regarding the monitoring of demilitarisation, he said this should also be carried out through a mixed institution, with representatives from one or several parties. On action against terrorism, he asked for the continuation of the existing bilateral coordination, with agreement on a *modus operandi* and guarantees that any agreements would be implemented.

After this long presentation by General Yanai, Mohammed Dahlan opened the Palestinian response. He said he was well aware of Israel's security concerns and needs but went on to say that he would not reply immediately to the proposal point by point as further detailed consideration was required on our part. He said that the implied reduction of Israel's presence in the Jordan Valley would be a positive step, as it would reduce friction.

Dahlan: It is obvious that having multiple transitional security systems would be a source of trouble. Regarding external threats, this could be a real problem and I would make a number of points:

- 1) The presence of Jordan will act as a reassurance, particularly when the international situation is tending towards peace rather than war.
- 2) The existence of a Palestinian state would in fact be a security guarantee for Israel.
- 3) We understand the Israelis' request for early warning posts on the mountain range, and we want to come to an agreement on that, including the number of posts.
- 4) It would be best to have a non-Israeli presence at the posts, which could be Palestinian.
- 5) On the question of demilitarisation and the demilitarised state, we do not intend to have full-scale armed forces, like other states in the region. However, we have to agree on what our force will be called. Will it be a 'police force' or an 'army'? What will its nature be, and of what will it consist? I don't think Abu Ammar wants to buy tanks and military aircraft!
- 6) We do want a state, however, that is sufficiently armed to be able to defend itself and withstand external threats, and which can stand up to internal threats and maintain its integrity. It should inspire sufficient respect so that opposition forces will not challenge its authority by force.

- 7) We suggest that five locations be defined in the Jordan Valley where Israeli equipment including early warning installations could be placed for use in emergencies.

We shall study all these issues in a positive spirit, but we would like it to be defined who will decide what constitutes an emergency and what will be the mechanism for such a decision to be taken. We must also agree to the area of the locations you wish to use and to what use they will be put, and over what period of time. Additionally, we shall scrutinise the proposed system for the control of air space that will accompany Palestinian sovereignty in this respect. I do not possess the technical knowledge to discuss this issue. The frontier with Jordan is the greatest problem, which extends from Beit She'an to the Dead Sea. You raise two considerations: first, the prevention of smuggling and second the prevention of the Palestinian state from acquiring arms.

I do not see the need for you to be stationed on the frontier. That would undermine the Palestinian state and make it subordinate to Israel. It would also prevent the development of the frontier areas. We accept the deployment on the frontier of international forces, which should include Palestinian personnel. Such forces would man international control points, in conjunction with the Palestinian police and with American forces, for example, or through an agreement between ourselves and a third country such as Britain, for example, to prevent arms smuggling across the frontier. Regarding the declaration of emergencies by either party, we would like to review this in depth and consult further on the issue. On frontier crossings, no state worthy of respect accepts the control of the movement of individuals and goods at its frontier crossings by non-nationals. It is therefore vital that frontier crossings must be under Palestinian control and sovereignty. This is a key message that we need to be able to give the Palestinian people, and we have a great interest in controlling such frontier crossing points.

For my own part, I pointed out that General Yanai had apparently not moved away from Israel's basic concept of security. This had been amply demonstrated to consist of little more than the reorganisation of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, giving Israel legalised control over Palestine in the interests of reaching agreement and of the absence of conflict. 'Therefore,' I said, 'I have been of the opinion that we should

not talk about security, settlements, and Jerusalem before we have been able to reach agreement on frontiers and territory. Security should be the culmination of an overall agreement between two independent entities, and not the formalisation of your occupation of our land on the pretext of security.'

General Yanai's response was as follows:

Yanai: We seek to guarantee our security, not just to repackage the occupation. There are no doubt issues that we need to resolve. We shall study the points you have raised. Your proposals here are relevant and useful. I hope we can pool our thoughts on the completion of this dialogue. I would like to review the points that will need further discussion, such as demilitarisation, a demilitarised state, and the international frontiers. We have to discuss the nomenclature of the forces of the Palestinian state, and examine how the Palestinian military force can be a force that will deter external threats and maintain internal security. We shall need to discuss the issue of the control points. I would like to stress that these control points will bear no political significance, and are entirely concerned with security.

Day ten: Thursday, 20 July

During the night, President Clinton had flown at last to Tokyo, leaving the talks in the hands of Madeleine Albright. Her task was to maintain their momentum until his return. We gathered informally in the morning, and Nabeel Sha'ath, Mohammed Dahlan, Hassan Asfour and I strolled in the grounds with members of the Israeli delegation. I raised the issue of the form of the negotiations, and suggested that what could save them would be reorganisation into two committees, instead of three, one adding Jerusalem to its existing remit of frontiers, territory, and security, and the other dealing solely with refugees. I also suggested that the negotiations should be resumed with no preconditions and that there should be a face-to-face meeting between Arafat and Barak. During these unofficial talks, we put a number of requests for clarification to the Israelis, such as what would be the precise status of Christian holy places? What would the concept of 'satisfactory agreement' signify in practice in relation to the refugee issue? What would be the link between security arrangements and subterranean water resources, especially in the Bethlehem district and in the north of the West Bank?

The Israelis showed a clear preference for leaving the situation as it was until the return of President Clinton, avoiding committing themselves to any expression of opinion. Madeleine Albright did not accept this attitude, and held a series of separate meetings with each delegation to review and assess the situation. She also called for a direct meeting between Arafat and Barak. Barak refused to agree unless Arafat definitely accepted one of the proposals that President Clinton had put forward. This took Madeleine Albright aback. She reminded Barak that it was he who had initially asked for such a face-to-face meeting. Dennis Ross joined his voice to that of Madeleine Albright in calling on both sides to keep the negotiations going until President Clinton's return, a wait of three days that in the end turned out to be long drawn out, unproductive, and therefore, rather surprisingly, boring.

Tension was high that day: this was evident on the faces and in the behaviour of the delegations, especially the Israelis. It was at its most obvious in the evening when the negotiators were entering the dining hall. As Barak approached the entrance, Arafat arrived simultaneously and went forward to shake hands with him. Barak suddenly stopped short to avoid having to shake hands. Arafat then went in and sat next to Albright, while Barak sat on her other side. However, Barak would not speak to Arafat. There was not even an exchange of courtesies, which embarrassed the Americans as well as some members of the Israeli delegation, who found it hard to explain away Barak's uncouth performance.

Barak's irrational behaviour embarrassed Albright yet further when he decided to lock himself up in his quarters, refusing even to take telephone calls. He put his quarters off limits and banned everyone from attempting to contact him, including members of his own delegation. Meanwhile, the rest of us spent the time going through the motions of committee meetings, exchanging questions and making responses to various suggestions. Late at night, I chaired a meeting of the frontiers, security, and territory committee, including Mohammed Dahlan and our cartographer Samih Al-Abed. The Israeli team included Gilad Sher, Shlomo Yanai, and Israel Hassoun. The Israelis wanted to see the map we had drawn up but we refused to let them do so, restricting ourselves to giving an outline of the general principles behind it. We explained that it was based on the 1967 frontiers and reciprocity of adjustments. We also explained that it was based on the principle that our interests must not

be compromised, whether in relation to population, territory, or underground water.

Dahlan: We would like to know the reasons behind the military redeployment you have asked for, and the implications of your request for control over emergency zones within our territories. Concerning the early warning posts, we think two posts should be enough. We need to know, in advance, how you would define an emergency, and what equipment you would use in such emergencies.

Abu Ala: We plan to operate an air traffic control system of our own. Although I understand in principle the significance of what you have put forward relating to the use of our air space, we need to discuss the specific conditions under which this is to be done, in the light of what normally constitutes international relations between two neighbouring states. We also need our experts and yours to talk about this subject in order to devise solutions to technical issues that might arise. No doubt, the most difficult problem relates to the frontier with Jordan, on which we reached an understanding in Stockholm. What I observe today is that you are returning to the point from which we both started out.

Hassoun: The need to monitor demilitarisation and prevent arms smuggling across the frontiers is an existential issue for Israel.

Dahlan: This would infringe on our sovereignty and leave you as the arbiter of Palestinian security activities in the frontier zone. Your mere presence there would tempt terrorist groups to challenge you. Why don't you, instead, agree to an international force along the frontier. We are also well aware of Israel's interest in the western frontier zone of Palestine, namely the annexation to Israel of much of the territory presently occupied by settlements. We must discuss this issue amongst ourselves, taking into consideration Palestinian imperatives over territory and water.

Sher: We shall need 650 square kilometres to accommodate 80 per cent of our settlers in blocks with territorial continuity with each other and with Israel, arranged in such a way as will create logical and reasonable frontiers for the foreseeable future. Jerusalem is not included in these total proportions of territory and population. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel

and includes the new suburbs of the city, which we do not regard as settlements. It would also be appropriate to refer to the proposal we made some time ago, long before this conference, at the negotiations between Yasser Abed Rabbo and Oded Eran last April, when Israel offered a map that gave the Palestinians 66 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The advantage of that map was that it answered questions, prevented further humiliation, and opened the way for bargaining over Israel's tactical positions, though neither side at the time was close to a reasonable solution. However, I would like to see your other map, rather than this one which I know was tactically drawn up as a starting point for bargaining over land and settlements.

Abu Ala: This is in fact our map. You know that it is difficult for me even to look at the other map. The other map carries our view of the areas that are to be exchanged along the frontier. We have first and second preference areas. Most of the exchanges are to take place in the Jerusalem area, in places in and around the city that you do not use.

Sher: The way our settlements are linked up in this map of yours is very impractical. Settlements need to be linked together by safe passages. Moreover, this map provides for putting 30,000 to 35,000 of our settlers within 2.5 per cent of the area of the West Bank. This map will create untenable frontiers between you and us. The frontiers will be hard to define, and the thin connecting lines between settlements will be fatal for Israel's security and will make life impossible for the settlers. This would create a unique situation.

Abu Ala: I am now entirely convinced that you are not in fact prepared to reach an agreement with us. You must accept that we will relinquish nothing except in the context of an exchange. Nor will we allow you any sovereignty in the Jordan Valley. From north to south, the valley will be ours. This is the basis on which we shall operate.

Day eleven: Friday, 21 July

With Clinton away and Barak still locking himself up, nothing official could be accomplished. The informal talks of the tenth day simply went on into the eleventh day. The two days saw wide-ranging discussion of all issues between participants on the two sides, both singly and in

groups. The Jerusalem Committee also reconvened, with the participation of Sa'eb Erekat and Hassan Asfour for the Palestinians and Shlomo Ben Ami for the Israelis. Issues raised related to all aspects of the Jerusalem question, such as the definition of the extent of the city, its municipal boundaries, the Aqsa Mosque, and custody of the holy places. Various proposals on the concepts of guardianship over the holy places, joint sovereignty, division of sovereignty and administrative modalities came under scrutiny. Another issue was the practicalities relating to the perimeter of the Aqsa Mosque and projected excavations under and near the Haram al-Sharif.

At the committee on frontiers, territory, and security, the Israelis presented a map showing a plan to hand over to us 77.2 per cent of the Holy City, with a further 8.8 per cent to be handed over on a timetable to be agreed. Of the remaining 14 per cent, 13.3 per cent would stay in Israel's hands and discussions would continue over a small area of just 0.7 per cent. In the evening, we all gathered together in a single group to talk over these proposals. Sharp disagreements arose over the concept of Palestinian sovereignty in the holy city, where what the Israelis proposed seemed inadequate. Some participants took a belligerent stance, and we seemed to be on a collision course over demands for sovereignty in particular areas adjacent to Jerusalem. We asked for the Israeli settlement areas of Pisgat Ze'ev and Gilo to be handed over to us, while they wanted the entire so-called Holy Basin (part of the immediate surroundings of Jerusalem comprising a number of Jewish and Christian holy sites). This led to an atmosphere of some hostility between the two sides.

Day twelve: Saturday, 22 July

Though Barak was still refusing to come out, he had by this time allowed some of the Israelis to visit him in his quarters. From those Israelis who had been into Barak's chalet on the second full day of his 'sit-in', we gathered that he looked depressed and seemed to be losing optimism. He apparently feared that if he reached an agreement now, it could explode in his face when the details were learned at home. He was apprehensive that the settlers would refuse to move from their scattered outposts into the designated settlement blocks, and that clashes could result. He was especially anxious over what would happen in Hebron. The fate of the settlers in neighbouring Kiryat Arba also worried him. Added to these

concerns was the possibility that part of the Palestinian population in the West Bank would find themselves within the redefined frontiers of Israel. Barak was also reportedly expressing his annoyance at Clinton for having, as he put it, 'imprisoned' the negotiators at Camp David. Paradoxically, while he was uneasy about the consequences of what he had already conceded, he also seemed keenly aware that there was only one day left before Clinton's return, with no agreement in sight, which was also causing him disquiet.

On the Palestinian side, gloom was no less evident. Disagreements between us were beginning to bubble to the surface. Abu Mazen had to go back to Ramallah for four days, in order to attend his son's wedding, a social engagement he insisted he could not avoid. All the members of the Palestinian delegation were separately attempting to gain access to Abu Ammar, to win him over to their own views on Clinton's proposals, so much so that internal rivalries and personal calculations were leading us to lose our focus. One thing we were all in agreement on was that we had begun to expect the summit to fail. This in itself was depressing, even for those of us who had been pessimistic from the outset; but we were also grimly aware that any ensuing political and security complications would be blamed on us when we returned to the region.

My personal opinion was that the time now remaining before President Clinton's return was not enough to make real progress towards any kind of agreement. In the absence of the President, the American officials did not give evidence of the urgency they had previously shown. President Clinton's perseverance, fortitude, and personal initiative were what had driven the talks onward. In his absence, Arafat and Barak did not meet. The agenda remained stagnant, with futile committee meetings after which the two parties were left in the same position with which they had begun. My feeling was that we desperately needed to get something done in the short time left before President Clinton rejoined us. At lunch, I therefore suggested to the Israelis that we resume serious talks at once in the committee for frontiers, territory, and security, since no progress seemed likely in the committees on Jerusalem and the refugees. There was no response from the Israelis, however, until the following day.

Day thirteen: Sunday, 23 July

The Israelis came to us in the morning and agreed to meet. During the day, all three committees convened. At the territory, security, and frontiers

committee, I explained to the Israelis yet again that our condition for making progress on the territorial issue was the principle of reciprocity. I also made the point that the map they were showing us was an old one that we had already seen the previous year. Gilad Sher therefore came up with an alternative suggestion. Under this proposal, the Israelis would set aside the unacceptable map that annexed 15 per cent of the territory of the West Bank. In return, the idea was that we would accept some level of annexation in principle, in the hope that differences could somehow later be ironed out. Technical talks on water, in the meantime, also ran up against a clash between entrenched positions. I told the Israelis that we would not accept any infringement of our rights to ground water resources and that we rejected the annexation of any Palestinian villages to Israel.

In the light of the discussion that took place within this and the other two committees on this day, I was more convinced than ever that we were at a dead end. At the territory, security, and frontiers committee, Gilad Sher repeated his position that as a guideline, Israel's principle would be to define an area that would include as many settlements as possible, with the minimum number of Palestinians under Israeli administration. He added that the frontier should, at the same time, meet the needs of both parties and be drawn up so as to be simple and logical, avoiding as far as possible complications that would create daily friction. At the talks on refugees, Israel insisted that it would accept no moral, political, or judicial liability, either for the creation of the problem or its resolution. We insisted on the right of return as a principle. Israel refused to agree to the return of any refugees at all on this basis, but said it would allow limited numbers to return within a family reunion scheme, for humanitarian reasons. In contrast, the Palestinians continued to rest their case on UN resolution 194, which would allow refugees wishing to return to Israel the chance to do so according to arrangements to be agreed on. Refugees would be able to choose between return and compensation. Those living in Lebanon must be allowed to return to Israel if they choose. We also wanted Israel to pay reparations to the refugees for their adverse experiences and their loss of property. The definition of refugees would include those living inside the Green Line. On Jerusalem, there was no change, and the entrenched positions were on a collision course. The Israelis once more brought up the proposal that they should have sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif, and again

began to talk about the preposterous suggestion that Jews should be allowed to pray there.

As soon as President Clinton returned later in the day, after being briefed about what had happened in his absence, he held separate meetings with Arafat and then Barak. Clinton proposed a new agenda, where we would first recapitulate the position regarding any points the two parties had been able to reach a level of agreement on, after which the most controversial issues should be prioritised. It must be said that Clinton came back like a power-house of activity, showing resolve and initiative, and giving the impression of a leader determined to achieve success. The initial topic he proposed for discussion was that of early warning posts. After this, he wanted to talk about air space, emergencies, and demilitarisation, the control of frontier crossings, the presence of an international force along the frontier with Jordan, and certain other issues he thought it were possible to sort out before moving on to the difficult questions.

Mohammed Dahlan represented our views on security matters. On the early warning posts asked for by Israel, he said we were willing to concede two. He said to the Israelis, 'You do not need three posts. That is just a demand Israel is making.' George Tenet, head of the CIA, had come during Clinton's absence to help the American team with the talks. He said, 'If we cannot agree on a simple matter like this, we will not agree on more substantial ones.' Then, he addressed us and said: 'You know the positions where the Israelis want the posts. The question is, having access to them and being able to protect them.'

On the issue of air space, Shlomo Ben Ami said it was not a matter of Israeli sovereignty over Palestinian air space, but rather a matter of Israel being able to make use of that air space. His idea was an Israeli control commission with a Palestinian liaison officer. He emphasised that both parties would be able to coordinate their air corridors, along the lines followed by the aviation authorities of other countries, as was the case between Jordan and Israel. We said we would refer the issue to our technical specialists for their advice. But we also told them, 'You are trying to create a false sovereignty over us. You do not need early warning posts, nor do you need the Israeli air force to make sorties over our heads. What you are proposing is aimed at continued Israeli security control of our people and the perpetuation of occupation in a way that will encroach on Palestinian sovereignty.' Gilad Sher denied this, asserting that the Palestinian negotiators should differentiate between security needs and

civil issues. General Shlomo Yanai said experts from the two sides had to be given a chance to draw up a plan regulating relations between us, relating to both air space and the use of the electromagnetic spectrum, on a basis of mutual consideration and respect.

In regard to Israel's request for the facility to deploy troops inside the Palestinian territories in case of emergency, in order to confront what Israel called possible threats from the east, General Yanai asked once more for the use of five locations. These were to act as bases for emergency deployment where equipment for emergency use could be deposited. In response, President Clinton asked who was to define what an emergency would be. 'There must be a degree of trust between the two states,' replied Yanai. George Tenet interjected, 'It might be possible to agree to some kind of American supervision.' Yanai responded that in matters of national security, Israel always chooses to depend only on itself. We accepted the suggestion put forward by Tenet and agreed provisionally to accept the presence of a US force at the five locations for a certain period of time. President Clinton stepped in once more to say, 'We are prepared to go a long way to get an agreement, but what the Palestinians are demanding is quite different.' Then, he said to the Israelis, 'You have to be careful not to infringe on Palestinian sovereignty. We have to define together what an emergency means. If we reach an agreement on these two issues, there will be no problem.'

We then discussed the concept of a demilitarised Palestinian state, as demanded by Israel. As such it would possess no army and permit no other armed forces to be deployed in it, whether national or international. It would agree to conclude no military treaties and enter into no military alliances with any other state. President Clinton opened the discussion.

Clinton: We must ponder all these issues when we come to deal with the final status. We have to discuss the defence of the Palestinian state against a possible aggression from quarters that will not accept Palestinian sovereignty. We must not ignore the dangers that will encircle a newly established state, which would have enemies.

General Yanai: The Palestinians should obtain guarantees of their security from Israel and the United States and that such guarantees should form part of an agreement. . . . If there were a regional defence treaty with Egypt and possibly Jordan, of which Israel would be a member, the

Palestinian state could enter such a treaty, which would provide it with ample means to defend itself.

Dahlan: We do not want a military state like others in the region. We do not need tanks or aircraft. All we want our state to be able to do is to feed its hungry subjects. But we do not want the Israelis to boast that they defend us, either. We are determined to set up a strong Palestinian security force.

Sher: Let us first agree a definition of what a strong police force would be.

Ross: We must consider the nature of possible threats such as terrorism, which threatens both sides. We must also define the extent to which the United States will become involved in the picture.

My own contribution to this dialogue was to try to bring the discussion back to the basic issues. I emphasised that the Palestinians themselves should in principle be in charge of their own security, as we would accept no security arrangement that would encroach on our national sovereignty or our dignity as an independent state. The Israelis clung to their own intrusive proposals on security, however, which blocked the way to agreement.

Disagreement grew even deeper when the issue of international frontier crossings was discussed. The Israelis returned to their argument that only Israeli control of frontier crossings would enable them to monitor demilitarisation, but said they would leave the actual process of verification to a third party. I replied, 'If you do not trust us to do the job according to international standards, we would be prepared to accept the presence of a third party.'

Dahlan: You have tested us for the past six years, and we are not ready to accept any further tests. It is the Israelis who need to be tested. We will not accept any Israeli presence at the frontier crossings. We will do what is necessary. However, we have no problem with coordinating all our arrangements with you.

Yanai: The policy of 'you can depend on us' will not work at this stage. We have relinquished our original demand to be in sole control of the frontier crossings despite the consideration that control and verification is vital in the extreme for the security of Israel.

After hearing this exchange, Clinton commented that the issue of control of the frontier crossings needed further thought and that he wished to move on quickly on to another issue, that of the Jordan Valley. General Yanai suggested the construction of a security fence coupled with a comprehensive system allowing for westward pursuit into our territory in emergencies. He also asked for between six and ten control posts along the Jordan River, to prevent infiltration, all within a special short-term security system operated by six Israeli military units consisting of 800 troops. At this juncture, President Clinton made the comment that the frontier line on the River Jordan could soon come to resemble the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. General Yanai tried to reassure him by saying the Israeli military presence would be limited and temporary.

Dahlan: For various reasons to do with your security, you are in effect preventing us from having a state of our own. Your security theories are suffocating us. The frontier with Jordan should be under our sole control. We do not want you there.

Yanai: We can work together to reduce this presence which would be at a minimum. In any event, our presence will be for a limited period of time.

Sher: This discussion is entirely about security, so, you must understand that our security requirements will not infringe upon your sovereignty or your control of your frontiers. We will be sure to make that clear in the text of any agreement.

President Clinton then entered the discussion, introducing the proposals of the United States regarding the Jordan Valley.

Clinton: (addressing the Israelis) You have in the past proposed the deployment of an international force along the Jordan River. Barak

himself told me he would not object to that. Having an international force is the only way that will make it possible for us to obtain a security agreement.

Sher: We will examine the issue, providing that the proposed international force works together with the Israeli army and is not constituted as an independent force.

Clinton: Good. You should put some thought into this, because we will also do a lot for Jordan's benefit within the framework of such an agreement. I want you also to see whether it is possible to establish joint Jordanian/Palestinian/Israeli cooperation, because it might be possible to have an international force working, for a limited period, on both sides of the River Jordan. The Israelis have explained their problems so that I see where they are coming from, but I also understand the concerns expressed by the Palestinians.

(The conversation resumed after a short pause)

Clinton: On the issue of the early warning posts, these in fact involve comparatively small areas of territory but are vital for Israel's security.

Dahlan: We agree to these posts being installed on the tops of specified mountains. We have no problem with them being there, or with the Israelis operating them, on condition that you provide us with some kind of safeguard in the form of the presence of American or other international observers.

Clinton: (addressing the Palestinians) As regards air space, there will be a single air traffic control in view of the fact that the air space is small. It is our responsibility to ensure you will not be treated inequitably, in relation to your air traffic. You also have the right not to have your lives disturbed by noise and low-level flying.

Sher: We need reassurance that authority and responsibility in the matter of air traffic control, which will remain in Israel's hands, will take precedence in all circumstances over Palestinian civil air control.

Abu Ala: We are ready to have this idea discussed by technical specialists at the level of principle, as long as it is laid down that our use of our airports is not restricted and our sovereignty is not infringed.

(From there, the discussion moved on to issue of the definition of emergency situations)

Abu Ala: President Arafat has demanded that an international force be placed on the frontier with Jordan, and not the Israeli army.

Clinton: Tell Arafat that the Israelis, in this case, have valid justification for their demands. (Addressing general Yanai) You must, however, define the meaning of 'emergency'.

(Moving swiftly on to demilitarisation)

Clinton: The principle of demilitarisation is acceptable to both parties, and agreement should now be reached on the structure of a Palestinian force and on the arms it should have at its disposal. We still have to agree on the designation of the force, so that the Israelis can put the proposal before their public.

Abu Ala: We want a state that is armed to a limited extent, not completely demilitarised.

Clinton: (addressing the Palestinians) You must also give consideration to the international frontier crossings and customs arrangements with a view to allowing there to be Israeli observers at the frontier crossings, in return for Israeli consent to having Palestinian observers at Israeli customs points.

(The next topic was the deployment of international troops in the Jordan Valley)

Sher: Israel agrees in principle to the presence of international troops in the Jordan Valley, providing the Palestinians accept the Israeli security proposal in its entirety.

Clinton: If I succeed in winning King Abdullah's support for the idea, will you agree to the force operating on both banks of the River Jordan?

Yanai: This would greatly complicate the situation.

Clinton: I ask the Palestinian side to reconsider their position. Israel has fully agreed to a text that takes Palestinian concerns into account, and I will not send American troops unless I can protect it. The presence of our troops will itself attract fire, as happened in East Timor. After sending 500 troops, I was forced to send in a further 3,000 to protect the 500.

On the evening of that day, the Palestinian delegation met the Americans to discuss Jerusalem. President Clinton took the chair and proposed three alternatives, as follows:

- 1) Agreement should include the Haram al-Sharif, the Old City, and all other issues, and should be postponed for a period not longer than five years.
- 2) The Palestinians should be granted custody of the Haram al-Sharif under Israeli sovereignty, with a special regime in the Old City, together with limited Palestinian sovereignty over certain areas of Jerusalem.
- 3) There should be Palestinian autonomy in practice in the whole of East Jerusalem, with Palestinian sovereignty over those Palestinian suburbs and villages within the perimeter of Jerusalem. The Old City should be divided, with the Muslim and Christian quarters under Palestinian sovereignty and the Jewish and Armenian quarters under that of Israel.

President Clinton asked the Palestinian delegation to convey these proposals to President Arafat and asked for a reply from Arafat as soon as possible.

Day fourteen: Monday, 24 July

This was to be the last full day of talks at Camp David. As it became clear that no compromises were about to be reached, disappointment was evident on the faces of the members of all the delegations, including the Americans. President Clinton, in particular, seemed rueful. The summit had appeared time and time again to be on the brink of failure, but, again

and again, the talks had resumed. Now, however, the end had really come. President Clinton had lost what was to be his last opportunity to make his mark in the Middle East. The US President had immersed himself in the Middle East question at the expense of many other national and international issues that demanded the attention of the White House, but still he had not achieved the success he sought. On the last day, the three parties held many conversations in an attempt at least to tie up the loose ends of the negotiations, defining the point reached in the discussion of each of the various issues and the areas of agreement and disagreement in each case. One last substantive meeting was held, at the office of President Clinton's residence rather than the conference room. This was on the issue of the refugees. Nabil Sha'ath and I spoke for the Palestinians, while the Israelis present were Elyakim Rubinstein and Oded Eran. President Clinton took the chair, with an American group comprising Dennis Ross, Aaron Miller, and Rob Malley.

President Clinton began by saying what he wanted was to run quickly over all the issues, as we had done with frontiers and Jerusalem the previous day. He went to straight to the key question of where the refugees would be allowed to live. He appeared to be prioritising considerations connected with compensation, as the Israelis preferred. He said what he envisaged was a mechanism for the collection of funds and the enlistment of support from donor countries, together with a mechanism for the distribution of such funds to host countries such as Jordan. He said Israel's role must be defined, and asked for an indication of what its commitments should be. Moreover, there should be a mechanism for the return of at least some of the refugees to Israel. He proposed that the United Nations should compile a census of the refugees and define the rules governing who would be allowed to return to Israel, by reference to UN resolution 194. On the question of compensation, Clinton said he had discussed the issue at length with the Israelis, to define the role to be played by Israel as a donor country. Israel was supposed to have established a fund for those who had fled the country, but, in reality, this fund did not exist. Israel bore a significant portion of the responsibility and therefore had to set a figure on the assets it would place in the fund, so that it would be in a position to state the extent to which it was prepared to share in the responsibility for compensation.

Afterwards, I put the Palestinian case on the return of refugees and the compensation to which they would be entitled. I emphasised that we

were willing to put a time limit on the right of return. If a refugee exercised his right of return within a specific period of time, it would give him the right to settle. Afterwards, any who had not taken up this opportunity would lose that right. Meanwhile, I said that we would not present our precise demands concerning the refugees until we knew with fair certainty the numbers of Palestinians who would ask for return or compensation. As for the return of refugees to the Palestinian state, I explained this would present no problem for us. We would at the appropriate time compile the necessary statistics and a timetable for action, which we would convey to Israel. Nor would there be any problem for us if Palestinian refugees chose to live in a third country willing to accommodate them. However, we insisted that the priority for return to Israel should be given to the Palestinians residing in Lebanon.

At that point, Elyakim Rubinstein made an intervention that was frankly no more than an attempt to confuse the issue. He brought up the completely irrelevant consideration of the Jewish refugees from Arab countries living in Israel who had also suffered hardship and had lost property. He denied that there was anything for the Palestinians that could be described as a right of return on the grounds that return to what was now a third country (Israel) could find no justification in law, and that only humanitarian cases should be considered. He added that that the Palestinian state should be the final destination for Palestinian refugees. Then he said, 'Many of us are refugees. Israel Hassoun is a refugee from Syria, while Shlomo Ben Ami is a refugee from Morocco. So, Israel is prepared to take in a symbolic number of refugees for humanitarian considerations only. Such a return would involve a few hundred refugees taken in over a period of a few years.' Finally he added, 'We sympathise with the suffering of the Palestinian refugees.'

When we queried Rubinstein about the Israeli fund for the property of refugees, he said the Israeli delegation would make enquiries about this fund, but one certain thing was that there would be no allocation of plots of land to individuals who claim to have left specific locations. He claimed there were no records for the majority of such claims, though the Palestinians were talking in terms of half the total area of Israel. He said there was no question of such claims being heard by the Israeli courts since such a process could take thirty years.

Abu Ala: I hope that the case of Palestinians who were uprooted from their land by aggression and violence and were displaced from their lands by force is not being conflated with that of Jews who were subjected to repeated enticements by Israel and dragooned by their community leaders to migrate. The specific case of the Palestinian refugees is the subject of UN resolution 194, which confirms their right to return. This must be unambiguous and there must be no confusion about this, which is the most important humanitarian issue.

Ross: The key to the resolution of this issue lies entirely in practicalities of dealing with it, not in the realms of theory. My attention has been drawn to the fact that Palestinians had been talking about priorities within the right of return, which they want to be given primarily to those living in Lebanon, because of the suffering they face there.

Clinton: Have the Israelis agreed to the return of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon?

Ross: Yes.

Rubinstein: What matters here is the number of returnees.

Clinton: (addressing the Israelis) How are you going to define your contribution to the financial compensation for refugees?

Rubinstein: Our contribution will be determined by the total sum that is required for such compensation payments. Compensation for individuals is being requested, as well as compensation for property that was lost. As for the fund for absentees, such a fund exists but has no assets. The issue of responsibility for the refugee problem goes to the heart of the matter. If the origin of the problem could be separated from the problem itself, it would then be possible for us to cooperate over the solution.

Clinton: (addressing the Palestinians) We presume that after we go back to UN resolution 194, and to the facts of the case and the available options, you won't oblige any particular individual to return, or exercise any compulsion. I have already talked to Abu Ala about this.

We must know more about the Palestinians in Lebanon, whose plight is part of the problem. The difficulty is that the mechanisms are ill defined. Then again, the solution to the problem could lie in the numbers. They aren't the only refugees outside the country. So, will the return of refugees from Lebanon lead to demands by other refugees for the same right of return?

(Nabil Sha'ath then made a full presentation on the right of return, concluding that Israel can absorb considerable numbers of refugees)

Rubinstein: We have already discussed this issue at length. To return once more to the root of the problem, when the State of Israel was established, the Palestinians missed the opportunity to establish a state of their own. In any case, we have up to now heard nothing from the Palestinians about the numbers concerned. They talk only about the options that should be offered to the refugees, and not about the figures involved.

Clinton: (addressing the Palestinians) Do you want a specific number of returnees every year, or a specific proportion of the total number of refugees?

Sha'ath: First of all, we want the return of the Palestinians living in Lebanon. This will be the initial figure we are asking for, amounting to 250,000 people. Afterwards we would like a specific number of refugees to return every year.

Clinton: You seek to establish a principle, but you are still avoiding the specifics. Are you able to be precise about the numbers of refugees that will come later, that is to say, other than those living in Lebanon?

Sha'ath: Yes, we can do that. We shall include this in the framework agreement for the final status (CAPS).

Clinton: Here is a question for the Israelis. We understand your concerns and your fears. But, what sort of numbers could you take?

Rubinstein: I want to be frank with you. I am not authorised to discuss figures, whether the Palestinians talk about 250,000 from Lebanon, or

even 150,000. These are figures I can't talk about, and I am not empowered so to do.

Clinton: The issue of return is clear to me, and I will think of a way to bridge the gap between the positions of the two sides. As for the question of Israeli participation, I believe we have received an adequate Israeli reply.

Ross: The key is to establish criteria to determine where we are going on the issue of return, and determine the Palestinian priorities. The priority should be the concept of the right of return, after which there can be questions to do with responsibility.

Clinton: (addressing the Palestinians) I suggest that you take a written note of what I am going to say to you and then come back to me on it later. You have to specify numbers and define criteria. Shall we say that we have to start with a fixed figure, then go on from there to count up numbers and years, taking into account that Palestinians in Lebanon have to be given priority. According to my reckoning, between 200,000 and 250,000 refugees in Lebanon will have the right to return. But we have to think of the consequences if 500,000 refugees decide to benefit from this right. You have to think not just of the theoretical problem but also how it will work out in practice.

Last day: 25 July

The atmosphere of disappointment was like that of the previous day, though perhaps we were getting used to it. The talks, in fact, appeared to be over. Anything that happened now, especially from the American side, was more to do with the attempt on which each party had already embarked to divert the blame for failure on to the others. We knew the Americans would particularly seek to put the blame on our shoulders, rather than the Israelis, if not to make us bear the entire burden. It seemed to us that President Clinton and most of the members of the American delegation intended to hold us responsible for failure. On this emotionally charged day, President Clinton, Madeleine Albright, and members of the American team met a group of Palestinians headed by Abu Ammar. President Clinton told Abu Ammar that though little progress had been made he had not given up.

Clinton: We have said that Jerusalem is the basic issue. Before travelling to Tokyo, I presented my proposals on Jerusalem and discussed them with Barak. I wanted to discuss this essential issue directly with Barak and I want to talk about it to you, Mr Chairman. He does not want me to get the idea that the Haram al-Sharif is the only issue. Even if we find a solution to this that satisfies both parties, other issues related to Jerusalem could still be unresolved. The outskirts of the city will be under Palestinian control. Access to some inner parts of the city will be under partial Palestinian control, with a corridor to the Haram al-Sharif. In the Old City, all we can do is to establish an administrative headquarters for the Palestinians, together with control over the Muslim quarter. This will not now apply to the Christian quarter.

Arafat: This is a step backwards.

Clinton: The pope has supported our position.

Arafat: It is not within the competence of the pope to express any opinion on the final status of Jerusalem. The pope has corresponded with us on this issue. The Patriarch of Jerusalem is Orthodox, and not Catholic or Anglican. This matter is already agreed among the three Christian sects.

Clinton: I believe it is possible to reach a solution acceptable to both parties. Sovereignty at the Haram al-Sharif sanctuary is over the land, and on the outskirts of the city the situation is as I have previously stated. As to the inner quarters, there will be some level of sovereignty. It is possible that there will be a connection with certain outer districts that will link to the Haram al-Sharif in the Old City. This is the best I can do now and I can work on the details later. We cannot resolve the problems of refugees, territory, and security before Jerusalem. We need a solution that will satisfy both parties, at least in part, because if we do not reach an agreement, the problems that will face the region are boundless. We shall work out a special status for the Old City of Jerusalem.

Arafat: And when I have a visitor in the Old City, will he sit with me under Israeli sovereignty? This is aggression against us. In an upright and honest manner, we conceded to them both the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter, even though the Western Wall has the status of an Islamic trust.

Please, Mr President, do not embarrass me in the eyes of the Muslims. I am the Second Deputy President of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. More than this, such a situation would be an aggression against us, the Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, after we have given them the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter. Mr President, I cannot give them one more square metre.

Clinton: This means that they can offer something while you cannot. Therefore, you might as well go now. You are not negotiating, not making any offers. They are moving forward, but you are not. You think you should get a medal for saying they can have the Jewish quarter.

Arafat: This is our capital, which they occupied in 1967. We cannot relinquish it. Our position today is better than what they are offering us. Do you want me to sell Jerusalem?

Clinton: Well, go home, then. I can do no more than this and I can stay here no longer than I have already done. If you want to be a hero in the Arab and Islamic countries, you can. I know this is a hard choice. I cannot do better than this. I shall be sad, and I fear the peace process will not continue. Do you find it easy to say no?

Arafat: Your Excellency, I hope you will look at the letter I have received by way of the Norwegian Foreign Minister. Are you asking me to sell the Christian holy places in the Old City of Jerusalem, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Via Dolorosa, as well as the Islamic holy places?

Clinton: Nobody is asking you to do that.

Arafat: If you were the custodian of the Christian and Islamic holy places, what would your attitude be?

Clinton: So we aren't talking about politics, then?

Arafat: What does sovereignty mean? We have the example of Hebron before us. What have they done in Hebron? What have they done at the entry to Bethlehem? I know who I am dealing with. I am dealing with

people who do not respect what they do not believe in. Some Jewish sects, like Natori Karta, do not recognise the Western Wall. Apart from the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter, the whole of Jerusalem should be under our sovereignty. Should we give them everything? No! I can wait two, twenty, even a hundred years, until a man comes who can liberate Jerusalem. I cannot sell the Holy City.

Clinton: What do you mean?

Arafat: I mean the sovereignty, Your Excellency. I cannot concede sovereignty over East Jerusalem.

Sa'eb Erekat: (made a lengthy interjection, concluding that it was unfair of President Clinton to say we were unwilling to make progress)

Clinton: What do you suggest?

Erekat: We suggest that we continue with negotiations.

Clinton: Let me see what I can do.

Arafat: I shall send Sa'eb Erekat to negotiate with Ben Ami, but I do not know what will come of it.

Clinton: I shall try to support him, to the best of my ability. I am afraid that there might be a new government in Israel after Barak's return.

Albright: I think much has been achieved, and I think the issue of Jerusalem could be postponed.

Clinton: There is one thing that worries me. I want to reach an agreement, but some Arab leaders have not contributed anything in this connection. There could be a partial solution, but, in the end, the Israelis don't want to end this conflict. I want to think of the most feasible options.

Arafat: The two most senior rabbis in Israel have issued an edict forbidding prayers at the Haram al-Sharif. When Israel's military hero, Moshe

Dayan, occupied East Jerusalem in 1967, he forbade Jews from praying at the Aqsa Mosque and issued a decree to that effect. Barak, on the other hand, issued a decree two days before we came here, permitting Jews to pray at the Haram al-Sharif. He did this deliberately. I am not the one who has declared that Jews cannot pray at the Aqsa Mosque. It is the Israeli rabbis.

Clinton: Had we dealt with this situation in an earlier generation, we would have reached an agreement. The situation is different now.

In the evening of that day, President Clinton called a final meeting with the Palestinians and those Israelis who wanted to come, without President Arafat. By this time, everyone sounded bitter and disillusioned, particularly Clinton himself. The American leader, as the summit's host, had staked his reputation on its success and had made unremitting and strenuous efforts to overcome the obstacles that had arisen between us.

Clinton: We now have four options before us. These are:

- 1) The collapse of the peace process;
- 2) The postponement of the Jerusalem issue while other questions are resolved;
- 3) The partial postponement of the Jerusalem issue while other questions are resolved;
- 4) The publication of a statement declaring that the summit has made some progress and that the peace process will continue, with further negotiations to be completed later.

Berger: I think we do not want the final option because it would imply the end of the process we have been engaged in here. After that, Barak would form a national unity government.

Abu Ala: Options two and three do not represent options we can take. We cannot accept either of them.

Ben Ami: Our proposal for Jerusalem is as follows:

- 1) The outskirts of the city with some access routes to them are to come under Palestinian sovereignty.
- 2) There would be 'functional autonomy' in practice for the inner quarters.
- 3) If a deal is struck, some areas could be exempted.
- 4) There will be special arrangements for the Old City, with a government headquarters adjacent to the Aqsa Mosque to be allocated to the Palestinian state. The Palestinians will be given custody over the Haram al-Sharif, while the Jews are also allowed to pray there.
- 5) There will be special arrangements for the Christian holy places.

Berger: Could we consider a UN resolution declaring the Aqsa Mosque to be an Islamic holy site, while preserving Jewish privileges in it, specifying for example that the Temple of King Solomon lies underneath it? (Sandy Berger rapidly withdrew this statement)

Albright: You already have the state in your pocket. Are the Palestinians now going to ask for everything else?

Clinton: As regards the Haram al-Sharif, my proposal is to award the Palestinians custodial sovereignty over it.

Ben Ami: Israel must keep overall sovereignty.

Clinton: The options before us are as follows:

- 1) A comprehensive deal, which is not available at the moment.
- 2) Postponement of the Jerusalem issue.
- 3) We could still reach agreement on refugees, territory, frontiers, and security, as well as agreement that the outskirts and inner areas of Jerusalem would have functional autonomy in practice (with Palestinian custodial control but not Palestinian sovereignty). On this proposal, the final settlement of the issue of the Old City would be postponed, with the Haram al-Sharif under Palestinian custodial control together with residual sovereignty vested in Israel. Negotiations on the remaining issues would continue.

- 4) Alternatively, it is possible that the Old City could be divided, with the Muslim and Christian quarters under Palestinian sovereignty, as part of a comprehensive deal regarding refugees, frontiers, land, and security. The Jewish and Armenian quarters would be under Israeli sovereignty, with the Haram al-Sharif under Palestinian custodial sovereignty with residual Israeli sovereignty.

But we could not, really, take that poisoned chalice. So, we turned down all such proposals, which we considered were not commensurate with our people's struggle and its glorious sacrifices. We utterly repudiated them, fully aware that the burden of the failure of the summit would be laid upon us. Knowing this was the case, Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger urged us to postpone discussion of the Jerusalem issue, with the result that there could be no agreement on the other issues.

Against this backdrop, we left Camp David brusquely and in a bad temper, with minimal farewells between the three leaders and the members of the three delegations, whose personal relationships had declined almost to zero, especially after Clinton blamed the Palestinians for failure. Even before leaving Camp David, Barak started to brief journalists, embarking on a venomous propaganda campaign against us. We packed up hastily, leaving behind a message for Clinton from Abu Ammar thanking the US President. Abu Ammar's letter praised Clinton's determination, warning against the possible consequences of failure and emphasising that we on the Palestinian side we continued to place our faith in the Americans to help us reach a just, permanent, stable, and equitable peace. The text of this letter follows:

25 July 2000.

Your Excellency, President Clinton

I would like to emphasise our great appreciation of your major role and the positive efforts you have made throughout this significant period, and your determination, which we have witnessed in the last few days, to achieve a just and permanent peace. Your role in rescuing the Middle East from its wars, confrontations, and hostility will leave its mark on the history of all the peoples of the region including our own.

I hope that Your Excellency will believe that we shall continue to do our best to support your efforts. We know that there lies behind them a real desire to lead us into a new era where true peace prevails. In view of the crucial position of the issue of Jerusalem in the peace process, we agree with Your Excellency that it merits all the effort expended on it and all the attempts that have been made to discover a creative solution. The objective should be a guarantee that agreement on the Holy City will be the starting point for a comprehensive peace agreement between the Israelis and us, as well being the basis for peace in the entire Middle East.

However, the proposals for Jerusalem that we have heard will not achieve this objective, as we cannot accept any formula that would lead to the imposition of Israeli sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif or other holy sites, whether Islamic or Christian. The sought-for solution must preserve the integrity of the city, not dividing it into segments or subjecting it to various authorities. Otherwise, great harm will come to its citizens, which would lead the Palestinian people to regard the outcome of this process with hostility.

I wish candidly to point out to Your Excellency that any imposition of Israeli sovereignty over any Islamic or Christian holy places will be rejected by Muslim and Christian Arabs as well as Muslims and Christians at large.

Any solution of this sort would aggravate the situation and undermine the very peace and stability that we seek in the area. This is a thing neither you nor we wish to see.

Our rejection of these proposals, however, will not distract us for a moment from our appreciation of the outstanding endeavours you have unceasingly made. We also confirm that we are anxious that you should continue your search for a comprehensive, just, and permanent settlement based on international legitimacy and on our common desire to achieve an established and equitable peace.

Yasser Arafat

Although we were well aware how of serious the consequences of our failure at Camp David would be, the feeling that the Palestinian negotiators had at the end of the process was one of relief. We felt like prisoners released from a sentence that had endured for two apparently endless

weeks. The Palestinian leadership had undergone a fierce inquisition, by day and by night, and was constantly buffeted by attacks that almost destroyed us. All the members of the Palestinian delegation shared these feelings. Abu Mazen, Akram Haniyyeh, Sa'eb Erekat, Mohammed Dahlan, Mohammed Rashid, and I left Camp David by car, bound first for a hotel in Virginia and then on to the international airport in Washington. As soon as we passed through the gateway of Camp David, we began to joke foolishly amongst ourselves, like prisoners feeling the relief of release from their confinement.

On the country road along which we drove, which ran through impressive hills and rolling forests, we felt an urge to put Camp David well and truly behind us. We were anxious to reach Washington and to be on our way back to our homeland. In our efforts to unshackle our country from occupation, we had ourselves been taken prisoners, albeit temporarily. As we drove on, our heads were full of vivid memories, of all the anxiety and worry we had suffered, and of the place itself and the people we had met there. We thought also of the courageous stand taken by Abu Ammar, and of his fortitude and patience. Carried away by our mixed and turbulent feelings, we scarcely paid sufficient attention to the spectacular scenery and vistas of natural beauty through which we passed. We were laughing with relief, and Sa'eb Erekat surprised us all when he began to improvise Arabic songs in the colloquial language. He sounded like a storyteller from the *Thousand and One Nights*, making Camp David the subject matter of his impromptu lyrics. He pressed us all to take part in what began to feel like a celebration on the occasion of our release. We had the sensation of having made good our escape from a trap that had been set for us with much care and premeditation.

Deep down, however, we knew that our exultation at our release would be short-lived. In the end, what had happened was the worst scenario that we could have envisaged. As we had all observed, Clinton's inclination to back Barak had quickly become only too obvious. Meanwhile, allegations that the Arabs were exclusively responsible for the failure at Camp David soon began to gain wider circulation. The American media gave immediate publicity to stories about the unreasonable behaviour of the Palestinians that swiftly began to take on the status of fact. Finally, back in the region, having decided we were not what it liked to call 'partners for peace', Israel reverted once more to attacking us with bombs and bullets. The subsequent assault on the Palestinian people and the

Palestinian National Authority was to continue for years. The pretext was that the Palestinians had violently spurned the hand of friendship extended to them by Israel, and had rejected the supposedly magnanimous offers that Barak had made at Camp David, allegedly with a courage and generosity never displayed before by any other Israeli Prime Minister.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE AFTERMATH OF CAMP DAVID: THE EARLY DAYS

In the days after Camp David, both those who took part in the summit and others who had eagerly observed it began to make their assessments and formulate their views. I too began to reflect on what the summit had meant, what it achieved, and where it had failed. This had been no ordinary episode in the succession of Israeli–Palestinian talks. It was a qualitatively different phase in the evolution of the negotiations. Each of the three parties differed in their assessments of it, and valuable lessons for all the parties concerned were undoubtedly there to be drawn. One point of agreement between the three participants was the regret expressed by all at having missed the opportunity to make Camp David a turning point in the long history of the Palestinian–Israeli dispute. In making their separate efforts to put on record what happened at Camp David, the aim of each of the three parties was to avoid such understandings as had been reached from going to waste. The common intention was to create documents that could be taken as a starting point for any new round of negotiations, as and when it might take place.

On the basis of the notes I had taken, I rapidly made an unofficial summary for my own benefit and that of my colleagues of the Palestinian negotiating position. With due modesty, I would say it accurately describes the requirements of the Palestinians and their responses to positions taken by Israel. On a number of the issues, some degree of agreement was achieved. I do not pretend that this summary in any way stands in place of the joint communiqué that was never issued at the time. It was, however, my conception of the position reached, from which later talks could be resumed:

Unofficial summary

1) Frontiers and security

Israel will retain only the areas allocated for settlement blocks on the Green Line. These will constitute no more than 4 per cent of the area of the West Bank, together with a further 1 per cent for security purposes, in addition to the areas inhabited by Jews in Jerusalem. Settlers will be relocated from other zones within the Palestinian territories to the hinterland of Israel. No long-term options will be extended to settlers who are not within the agreed settlement blocks that might result in settlers other than those already within the blocks being enabled to stay. Areas that are to be given up by the Palestinians for Israeli settlements shall be equally compensated by the cession to Palestine of territory presently within Israel adjacent to the Gaza Strip.

Areas near Al-Khalil (Hebron) could be ceded to Israel in compensation for the corridor for safe passage to be established between Gaza and the West Bank, together with guaranteed areas alongside the Green line. This exchange would be on a reciprocal basis. The exchange should enable the Palestinians to claim land of equal value on the Israeli side of the 1967 border. After adjustments for security in Jerusalem and the settlement blocks have been made Israel will be able to say the new frontiers are not those of 1967.

Any provisions for the relocation of population will be undertaken in stages. These will include the relocation of the inhabitants of the Israeli security settlements in the Jordan Valley and elsewhere. There will be a programme for the relocation of between 50,000 to 70,000 settlers (up to 50 per cent of the total) into Israel. There will also be a swiftly implemented international scheme to provide facilities for those moved in any exchanges, including homes, infrastructure, and employment opportunities.

In the Jordan Valley, there will be an Israeli force, under the flag of an international peace-keeping force (but not the United Nations) as specified in the agreement. No Israeli forces shall patrol the region alone. The non-UN international forces will be in charge. However, the Israeli forces will control the early warning posts, as well as the security checkpoints which will be limited in number.

2) The cessation of the conflict

The end of the conflict and the cessation of all territorial claims will be declared in parallel with the signing of a withdrawal agreement and the declaration of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, which shall be recognised by Israel upon the signing of the agreement. This state will be named 'Palestine'. The agreement will be declared to be the full and final implementation by Israel of UN Security Council resolution 242.

The end of the conflict will be interpreted as putting a definitive end to all hostility between Israel and Palestine, and between the two peoples of Israel and Palestine. Israel will call upon Jews in all parts of the world to recognise the State of Palestine and respect its existence, while Palestine will call upon all Palestinians, and all Arabs, whether Muslim or Christian, to enter into an era of mutual respect with Israel. The two states will refrain from the expression of religious or national hatred, and will end all acts of religious or nationalist hostility towards each other.

3) The refugees

According to the Palestinian position, the refugees should have the right of return to historic Palestine. In practice an authentic right of return could be implemented in two ways.

- 1) Palestinians should be free to return to the new State of Palestine to live as full citizens with the right of residence.
- 2) However, any Palestinian should also be free to live in any other place he may choose, including Israel, while retaining the right to hold a Palestinian passport, always in accordance with the law of his country of residence.

In either case, the following conditions shall apply:

- There shall be a Palestinian fund for the resettlement and rehabilitation of refugees, supported by an international fund for the compensation and rehabilitation of refugees, to provide support for refugees in their lives in the new State of Palestine.
- Palestinian refugees shall enjoy the right to choose between settlement in a number of associated host countries, including Palestine, but also including Israel, as well as Canada, Australia, certain parts of Europe,

and various other regions. This will be implemented under an agreement between Palestine and the world community, and the countries concerned. Priority for return to Israel shall be given to refugees whose place of birth was historic Palestine.

- Those Palestinians who owned land in the part of historic Palestine that is now Israel, shall have the right to purchase land there and new homes in which to live. This shall be in accordance with the local building regulations, according to what is available, without discrimination as to price or any costs over and above the prevailing prices. Those who live in Israel will do so according to the Israeli family reunion scheme and in accordance with any agreements that may be reached between Palestine and Israel, and between Palestine and the refugees themselves.
- An international fund for compensation and rehabilitation will be established, to compensate and rehabilitate those who choose not to take up residence in the State of Palestine, or who need assistance for the resettlement of their families. The international commission shall assist Palestinians to settle in the places where they reside, or in Palestine, or in countries of their own choice, in consultation with the international fund and its staff.
- A special family reunion programme shall be set up for those who desire to settle in Israel, desiring to live in peace in Israel and subject to its laws. Certain of the original refugees may wish to live in Israel without becoming Israeli citizens and without declaring any allegiance to Israel, but pledging to live in peace without any claim against Israel on their own behalf or that of their descendants.
- Similarly, a humanitarian fund shall be established in the first year of the implementation of compensation and rehabilitation of the inhabitants of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Under the terms of this scheme, 250,000 refugees from camps such as Burj Al-Barajneh, Sabra, and Shatilla will be permitted as a matter of priority to live in Israel, where they will be provided with accommodation and employment. At the same time, 50,000 refugees in Lebanon will be granted work permits in the associated countries named above.
- Those regions subject to provisions for the exchange of territory, as mentioned above, which are currently part of Israel but which will be ceded to Palestine, shall be prepared for habitation, and employment will be created for the refugees who currently live in the camps in Lebanon.

- It is understood that relocation in Palestine and Israel will be accomplished in accordance with the United Nations General Assembly resolution 194, provided that these refugees live in peace side by side with their neighbours in the State of Israel.
- All refugees benefiting from these compensation or relocation programmes shall give their assurance that after the implementation of an agreement between Palestine and Israel there shall be no further claims on their part.
- This solution to the plight of the refugees shall be regarded as the full implementation of resolution 194. It shall also represent the just settlement of the refugee problem, as referred to by UN Security Council resolution 242.

4) The curtailment of hatred

The issue is whether both Palestinians and Israelis are able to develop an attitude of mutual and historic respect that will prevent the indefinite continuation of their conflict. Both peoples are deeply attached to their national myths and narratives, which have played a significant part in the prolongation of the dispute. Now, each narrative should come to include two novel elements. First, each party should acknowledge the narrative of the other. Second, and more important, the two parties must affirm, separately and jointly, that the search for peace with dignity is now the vital element in their relationship, which should no longer be founded on hatred.

5) Jerusalem

- 1) In those areas of Jerusalem inhabited by Arabs, sovereignty shall lie with the Palestinians. In those areas of Jerusalem inhabited by Jews, sovereignty shall lie with Israel. Jerusalem shall be one and undivided, with open entry to the entire city for all its inhabitants, whether Palestinian or Israeli. There shall be no restriction on the access of individuals to any place holy to Muslims, Jews, or Christians for peaceful religious purposes. In addition to all areas of East Jerusalem populated by Arabs, all areas not presently populated by Jews, including public lands recently appropriated for Jewish use, shall fall under Palestinian sovereignty.
- 2) The Israeli and Jewish areas, lying within defined frontiers, which

are at present inhabited and built up, shall not be permitted to expand beyond a further 5 per cent of their present area. Their boundaries shall lie within a restricted framework and not within the area at present allocated for their growth. This will apply in particular to Ma'ale Adumim, which shall not be permitted to expand further. The objective of this is to avoid the disruption of the continuity of the Palestinian territories. Undeveloped plots of land shall be developed for the purposes of public service, health, education, and the social welfare of the inhabitants. Public areas shall be reserved for industrial development and tourism, thus creating employment for both Jews and Arabs. The territory itself shall be under Palestinian sovereignty.

- 3) That part of the Old City consisting of the Islamic and Christian quarters shall lie under Palestinian sovereignty. Jewish settlers in these quarters shall either be resettled with compensation, or agree to live under Palestinian sovereignty. The Armenian quarter shall fall under Palestinian sovereignty, with appropriate international security arrangements for the route that links the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter to West Jerusalem. The Jewish quarter, the Western Wall, and the Wall of the Haram shall all lie within Israel and fall under Israeli sovereignty. The Palestinians shall, voluntarily, refrain from asserting any sovereign right on these places.
- 4) Those areas designated as of special cultural and religious status shall have special security arrangements, with Palestinian, Israeli, and international participation. There shall be no Israeli patrols of any kind in the Palestinian and Islamic cultural and religious places, including the Haram al-Sharif, and no Palestinian patrols in the Jewish and Israeli cultural and religious places.
- 5) Israel shall enjoy full administrative control (without sovereignty) over the Mount of Olives Cemetery and Silwan (King David's Town).
- 6) The Palestinians shall be empowered to declare their sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif, though Israel will not acknowledge this in the agreement. Israel shall declare that it has decided not to exercise in practice its claim to sovereignty over the Temple Mount (the Haram al-Sharif). The status of the Haram al-Sharif shall have three guiding principles: a) the existing control of the religious sites by the Waqf Council shall be maintained,

effectively placing them under Palestinian control. Worship shall be restricted to the Muslims, but Jews and Christians shall retain their right to visit these places; b) there shall be an official end to the occupation of the Holy Sanctuary when the occupation of Jerusalem is replaced by this new agreement. This will apply to the whole area; c) no excavation for antiquities may be undertaken, and there shall be no alteration to the historical structures in the area or their foundations, without agreement between Palestine and Israel. The international security forces shall enforce this agreement and monitor its implementation.

- 7) Each party shall affirm its historical and religious ties to the area it controls by establishing an official presence there, as well as by means of official declarations to the United Nations, and in letters addressed to the President of the United States, who should acknowledge receipt of such letters from the two parties regarding their respective historical claims. The lives of both peoples will be secured by their respect for this peace agreement. In this connection, a letter from the President of the United States will have particular relevance as it will confirm the support of the United States for the mutual recognition of the two parties and their mutual respect in relation to worship and the expression of religious commitment. On behalf of the United Nations Security Council, the UN Secretary General shall declare his receipt of such letters, expressing his respect for the historical and religious claims of both parties. He will also express his support for a peaceful solution to this issue, and the need for mutual religious respect and tolerance. He will receive the Palestinian declaration of sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif and express his appreciation of and respect for Israel's decision not to insist on its claim to sovereignty.
- 8) Free access to the Old City and freedom of worship in it shall both be guaranteed. There shall be no unilateral changes of legal status. Development and road construction will be prohibited. Archaeological investigation is to be banned without prior agreement. Should there be any material changes they should be confirmed in letters to the President of the United States and the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Note

This agreement between Palestine and Israel shall be declared to have replaced all existing United Nations resolutions on the Israel-Palestinian conflict. It shall also constitute the full implementation of UN General Assembly resolution 194, together with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 on Palestine and the territories under Jordanian administration occupied by Israel after 1967.

This was the summary of my ideas at the end of Camp David of what would constitute the Palestinian position at the opening of future talks. As to my personal thoughts on the summit, as I pondered it in the days after it came to an end, I would include the following observations:

- 1) Had Camp David been no more than a routine series of talks, like all those we had held since Oslo, we would have assessed it as useful and would probably have counted it as a success. However, as it was a meeting held at the level of a summit, and had been intended to take crucial decisions, it could not be seen as anything other than a failure.
- 2) The question has to be asked, was the participation of a third party, even such a major party as the United States, the correct option for reaching an agreement? In practice, would bilateral negotiations have been more fruitful, judging by the results that emerged from the secret bilateral Oslo and Stockholm talks? The reason bilateral talks may be better in such situations is that a third party, if introduced, will always tend to seek a diplomatic success at any price, by bringing pressure to bear on the principal parties and especially on the weaker one. In this case, the Palestinians were the weaker party, and I felt the United States undoubtedly tried to bring pressure to bear.
- 3) Is there room for the Palestinians to be self-critical in their assessment of the Camp David experience? We should admit that the Palestinian delegation was handicapped by its lack of internal harmony. Antagonism was rife between the members of our group. Although Abu Ammar was well aware of all the details of this regrettable situation, he never stepped in to resolve it. Nor did he talk to the members of our delegation collectively. On the contrary, he spoke almost always to each of us separately,

listening to the opinions of first one and then another, taking their separate views into account in formulating his own policy. This was especially so when failure at Camp David began to look inevitable and he wished to emerge with the least damage to his own standing.

- 4) Barak never made any serious attempt to hold a bilateral meeting to bridge the gaps that existed or overcome the major obstacles to the talks that emerged at the level of the delegations. I have often wondered why he came to the summit. Was it merely out of courtesy to Clinton, as it did not seem to be his intention to talk directly to Arafat, even though he was the only Palestinian leader able to take the difficult decisions? Abu Ammar himself wondered why Clinton did not insist on such a meeting.
- 5) Probably the major mistake made by the Americans at Camp David was their neglect of what we had already achieved at the Stockholm talks, even though Dennis Ross had actually come to Stockholm where Ben Ami and I briefed him on the progress of the talks there. Ross and his colleagues had at the time been surprised by the progress made on some issues, particularly territory and frontiers, and had expressed their admiration for our efforts.
- 6) It seems to me that the Americans had insufficiently prepared their position. In the first instance, the American administration had submitted only with reluctance to Barak's insistence on holding the summit, despite the later enthusiasm President Clinton evidently developed. The nature of the American role remained undefined, and no schedule for negotiations was ever laid down. This sometimes made the Americans appear ignorant of the history and complications of the conflict. The impression was given that their only goal was to shore up the precarious position of the Israeli Prime Minister, whose political career was already in tatters. Above all, the Americans paid no attention to the principles of international legitimacy, or to the need to adhere to the United Nations resolutions as the basis of any successful and acceptable international negotiations.
- 7) Clinton's personal attack on me, though I resented it at the time and cannot help it looming large in my memory of the events

at Camp David, was not directed specifically at me, but rather at the entire Palestinian team. The Palestinians as a group were being held responsible for the collapse of the talks. The incident reinforced our suspicion that the Americans were biased towards Israel. This became clear at the end of the summit when Clinton praised Barak and spoke disparagingly of Arafat.

- 8) We soon began to realise that though the Americans were exerting pressure on us, they were putting no similar pressure on the Israelis. They also began to hint at financial benefits that might accrue to us if we fell in with the scenario envisaged by the Americans and by Barak. Both Clinton and Albright said that they would take a signed accord to the G8 summit, the US Congress, and to donor countries, to fund its implementation. In fact, no member of the Palestinian team was tempted by these pecuniary inducements.
- 9) Albright separately asked the question of both Abu Mazen and myself, 'Are you ready to go on supporting Arafat?' Had the Americans concluded that there were discrepancies between the positions of the members of the Palestinian team regarding the intended agreement? Or had hints been made to the Americans by some members of the Palestinian team that there were internal disputes that could affect Arafat's decisions?
- 10) The Israelis undoubtedly attempted to influence me, personally and directly. On numerous occasions, Ginossar and Hassoun came to my room and talked to me at length in private, trying to convince me how important it was to reach an agreement and the dangers that would ensue if we did not. They also attempted to present the American proposals, which were of course essentially Israeli proposals, in a better light.
- 11) Questions were raised by the Americans and the Israelis, and even by some of my Palestinian colleagues, about Abu Mazen's return to Ramallah for four days to attend his son's wedding. Some wondered whether it would not have been possible to delay this event and queried Abu Mazen's motivation.
- 12) The key question, of course, must be, 'Who was to blame for the failure of Camp David?' Was it the US Administration? Or was it Abu Ammar and the Palestinians, as was unfairly claimed? Or was it Barak, who said his task was, as he put it, to lift the

veil from Arafat's face? Peres later explained this by saying that Barak was not interested in an agreement but wanted only to expose Arafat and his supposed inadequacy. All this requires closer examination in order to rebut the claim that Abu Ammar and the Palestinians did not want to reach an agreement. Israeli information management since Camp David has been founded on the assertion that there is no Palestinian partner with whom to reach an agreement. It is unfortunate that this claim has been taken up by the Republican administration in the United States, which otherwise disowned everything they inherited from the Clinton administration relating to the Middle East. The Bush administration has parroted the former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's statements in an attempt to avoid any commitments arising from earlier agreements with the Palestinians, in particular in relation to the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and the resolution of the essential issues that lie at the heart of the Middle East conflict.

At the same time as I was making these assessments, some of the American diplomats, including Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk attempted the construction of what would be known as the Camp David 'collective memory'. These two diplomats liaised with certain members of the Palestinian team in an attempt to sum up the outcome of Camp David in a memorandum expressing the American view of the understandings that had been reached. Their intention was to avoid having to return to the starting line each time the negotiations were resumed. They hoped to be able to base their summary on their own records of the summit, and to obtain approval for it from the Palestinians and the Israelis. However, the conflicting conclusions and readings of what was said at Camp David made it impossible for them to achieve a common record that would sum up the progress made at the talks. The American effort came to grief essentially because of the sharp differences between the Palestinians and the Israelis, especially on major issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, and frontiers.

On the Palestinian side, we made no systematic collective review of our negotiating style, nor did we examine the weaknesses and strengths of the Palestinian performance during the summit. Neither were any official records or notes made from the Palestinian point of view of any

understandings reached between the Israelis and ourselves. We received widespread acclaim from the Palestinian public on our return from Washington, from a people who recognised that we had stood firm against Israel's unacceptable proposals. On the other hand, the international media campaign that laid the blame for the failure entirely upon our shoulders soon got under way. Adulation on one side and opprobrium on the other unsettled us and led us to lose our focus. We were unable in the short term to hold a calm post-mortem on the summit, and we were vulnerable to the danger of making uncoordinated responses in the face of the escalating accusations that our team had missed an opportunity. Within the innermost Palestinian circles, we constantly asked each other whether we could claim there had been any gain for the Palestinians at Camp David that would stand as a landmark in the peace process.

While there were few tangible achievements from Camp David, we concluded that one thing we could claim was that the summit had at last disclosed with full clarity the essential differences between our position and that of the Israelis. We also felt that the two sides had both put forward more profound and revealing proposals than ever before, which went beyond the tactical manoeuvres, evasion, and fencing that had characterised previous negotiations. Camp David, we decided, had served as a platform to display in full detail how the Palestinians saw the conflict, and what would be necessary to bring it to an end in a way that would be worthy of all the suffering and sacrifice of the Palestinian people. The Israelis had already repeatedly heard our side of the story but had obstinately refused to accept the minimum requirements for an honourable peace that would not be rejected by the future generations. After Camp David was over, Barak, acting in character, went as far as to embark on a round of fresh demands, including his new claims for supposed Israeli rights to pray in the Haram al-Sharif, that no Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim leader could countenance.

From our point of view, another advantage of Camp David was that it provided us with an unprecedented platform for us to present our position to the President of the United States. For the first time, we were able to do this without the misrepresentation inevitably introduced by intermediaries. Previous US presidents had been always briefed by their aides, who introduced their own incorrect assumptions and judgements, but President Clinton came to his own conclusions. This was made abundantly

clear at Camp David when Clinton said to Arafat at a bilateral meeting: 'I have never before known your requirements and needs as I do now.'

A third point was that we felt we had made an important discovery, namely that Israel's decision-makers had hitherto been dismissive of the ability of the Palestinian leadership to maintain its fundamental position. They had underestimated the ability of the Palestinians to stand firm in the face of unfair demands over the fundamental issues relating to territory, Jerusalem, and the rights of the refugees, and had overestimated the extent of the concessions they might wring from us through orchestrated and insistent pressure. The Palestinian people were at last able to discover from our first-hand experiences the evasiveness of the Israelis and how slim the chance was of making peace with a state that worshipped power and believed its ability to control the course of events was without bounds.

Camp David had in fact been full of lessons for each party to learn. However, both the Americans and the Israelis took the easier route of attempting to shirk their own responsibility for the mistakes that were made, placing the blame for failure on us. The main allegation we faced after the talks was the claim made by the Israelis and endorsed by the Americans that the Palestinians had refused to accept the hand of friendship that had been extended to them. The imputation was that we had in effect sabotaged the peace process by refusing an offer of unprecedented generosity from Israel regarding the extent of its proposed withdrawal from the West Bank. As this insinuation gathered strength and became more widely accepted, the result was to force the Palestinians into a defensive position. We were obliged to rebut these allegations, while world public opinion seemed only too receptive to the false claim that was being made. This was that the Palestinian leadership had been, as the Israelis put it, insufficiently mature to meet Barak halfway and make the realistic concessions that were unavoidable as the price for reaching a compromise.

Meanwhile, little publicity was given to unofficial appraisals made by some American negotiators at Camp David, which apportioned a considerable amount of the responsibility for failure to the American team. According to these self-critical assessments, the Americans had failed to provide the necessary leadership to carry the negotiations through, and had not placed on the table proposals of its own, free of collusion with one side or the other. Only after the summit was long over, and time was

running out for President Clinton, did the US leader produce the so-called 'Clinton Proposals', which were eventually put forward a few days before the end of his second term of office. Unfortunately, this coincided with the final collapse of the Israeli coalition led by Ehud Barak, which meant that there was no Israeli partner to pick up President Clinton's ideas. However, had President Clinton's ideas been fully aired during the summit itself, they could have contributed to a more positive end to the talks. They could at least have established a basis for future negotiations, though perhaps would not have led to the resolution of the conflict in itself. Clinton's proposals could have crowned the summit's efforts rather than emerging later as an appendix to the negotiations, rendered less relevant by the passage of time. In fact, though President Clinton's ideas, given in full later in this chapter, leave questions to be answered, they are not today entirely without value.

In any event, the perseverance shown by the Palestinians, which seems to have surprised both the Israelis and the Americans, also surprised much of the Palestinian public and the Arab world. Those who had spread scurrilous rumours that the Palestinian leadership was going to Camp David in order to offer further concessions, and that we would quickly submit to the pressures that would be brought to bear, were confounded. This was clearly illustrated by the enthusiastic popular reception given to Abu Ammar on his return. Arafat gained more support and praise from the Palestinian people than he had received for some years past. In other words, in the wake of Camp David, the Palestinian leadership began to regain its credibility with the Palestinian people. This was badly needed, in the widespread atmosphere of scepticism that had dogged the Palestinian negotiators through previous rounds of talks. Had rumour and hostility worsened, they would have undermined the legitimacy of the existing leadership. Other Palestinian factions had already begun to bid for power, claiming to be better able to represent the people.

Following Camp David, the people once more showed their steadfastness and displayed their determination to demand their legitimate rights to defend their land, and safeguard their holy places. This soon manifested itself in popular outbursts against the occupation and against the deadlock of the peace process. These took the form of what came to be known as the Aqsa Intifada, which many observers saw as a popular reaction to the failure of Camp David to produce a lasting solution to the problems of the region. However, I reject the suggestion that this second

Intifada was a premeditated plan on the part of the Palestinians, or that it had been orchestrated to follow the anticipated failure at Camp David. This was the account offered by some in Israel, who accused the Palestinian leadership of planning the uprising even before Camp David took place. The Aqsa Intifada was in fact a spontaneous reaction to the long history of oppressive Israeli practices, and arose from a catalogue of Palestinian grievances, all brought to a head by the arrogant and ostentatious visit by Ariel Sharon to the Haram al-Sharif on 28 September 2000.

Who was angry with whom?

As I have suggested, no sooner was Camp David over than the Israeli media machine released a torrent of fabrications about what they said was the responsibility of the Palestinians for the 'deliberate' attempt to make the Camp David negotiations fail. This fierce campaign of lies was constructed around two main accusations. The first was the claim made by Ehud Barak that Arafat was not a genuine partner for peace. This was reinforced by the way President Clinton explicitly blamed us for the failure of the talks, which he had promised not to do. The other accusation was that we had refused a generous and unprecedented offer from Israel. In addition, the Israelis instantly made a long list of other unfair and misleading accusations against us as soon as they had access to the microphones of the journalists waiting at the gates of Camp David.

In reality, disaster had loomed large from the start, at a summit that was predicated on unrealistic assumptions by Israel as to what we would agree to. Underlying everything was the presumption that we would readily agree to give up yet more of our precious land. Addressing the Israeli delegation, in the presence of President Clinton and a number of his senior aides, I rejected the map they brought, saying, 'Land is a body. You cannot cut it up. What part do you want, a finger? An eye? Or what?' Their map was the same one I had rejected at the Stockholm negotiations a few months before. At that time, I said to Shlomo Ben Ami, 'This map does not give us a viable state. Under it, we would be recognising the occupation and accepting the maintenance of the Israeli hegemony over the Palestinian people.' Thus, I found myself saying to Ben Ami at Camp David exactly what I had previously said to him in Stockholm.

It was at this point in the talks that President Clinton in effect accused

me of being personally responsible for the failure of the summit. For me, the incident was like a full stop at the end of a paragraph, confirming in my mind all the ominous early hints and warnings that the summit would fail. From then on, the Israelis and the Americans continually criticised my role in the negotiations, though I heard later that after Camp David was over President Clinton said I was right to be adamant against what I disagreed with on principle. Some began to suggest that I had been adamant from the start against any agreement, and that I was in effect boycotting the talks whilst sitting at the table, by refusing to contemplate any compromise. It was even said that my agreement to participate had been a mere formality, given so that I could not be accused of an actual boycott.

After Camp David was over, I avoided entering into any recriminations over my personal position. Going back to my personal papers, I find that the first time I actually talked about Camp David in public, as distinct from within Palestinian leadership circles, was a whole year later, on its first anniversary. At a meeting with foreign correspondents in Ramallah arranged for me by the Palestinian Information Ministry, I explained much of the Palestinian thinking about the summit. I said, 'We found no proposal to discuss. Nor did we find a negotiating method or a well-defined plan for our work. Our sojourn at Camp David was more like a public relations campaign against us than a policy discussion.' In general, the publicity gained by the Israeli lie that we were responsible for the collapse of the talks could probably be put down to the failure of the Palestinians at first to contradict Israel's misleading statements. The tale of Israel's thwarted generosity became the dominant myth in media circles and political forums. But it must be said that it was President Clinton's clear bias towards the Israeli viewpoint in the period following the Camp David talks that gave extra currency to the lie. Afterwards, Ariel Sharon's ministers also continued to circulate the same falsehoods, among them such Labour Party stalwarts as Shimon Peres, David Ben Eliezer, and others who had no first-hand knowledge of Camp David and should have known better.

As for the reason why President Clinton spoke antagonistically about Arafat and his team, my feeling is that the US President had become deeply committed to the idea of a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians and had been just as deeply disappointed when it failed to materialise. When the hard line taken by Arafat and the Palestinian delegation deprived him of this achievement, he was angry and disappointed, lashing out

undiplomatically at Arafat as a result. He believed Camp David could have been a crowning achievement for his time in office, for which he would be remembered, and that it would have expunged the memory of the various scandals and difficulties in which he had been involved. There was also the factor that most participants in the American delegation at Camp David, together with most of Clinton's aides in Middle East affairs, were biased to Israel's side. It also seemed that Clinton and his team suffered from the illusion that if sufficient pressure were brought to bear on us, we would eventually accept Israel's offers, no matter how unfair they might be. Therefore, the steadfastness of the Palestinian stand at Camp David genuinely surprised and shocked the Americans, who had been overoptimistic in their estimates.

As for my personal assessment of the outcome of Camp David, I hold Ehud Barak and the US administration responsible for failure. I believe that the 'Swedish track' that preceded Camp David, which was interrupted for spurious reasons, achieved a breakthrough of sorts. In Stockholm, I had agreed with Shlomo Ben Ami on the issues that needed to be discussed within the permanent solution framework. I was therefore taken by surprise when Ben Ami told me in May 1999 that Barak wanted to hold a summit meeting. He gave me three reasons for this, two of which had nothing to do with the negotiations themselves. The first reason was weakness of the governing coalition in Israel, and the second the fact that President Clinton's second and final term of office at the White House would come to an end in January 2001, after which his good offices would no longer be available. The third reason was that Barak apparently believed more could be achieved at the level of a summit, where the lead negotiators are those who have the ultimate power and responsibility to make the final decisions, so that all issues can be discussed, with no red lines.

I said to Ben Ami, 'Shlomo, a summit may eventually be crucial, but now is not the time. We can hold a summit after we have been able to narrow the gap to an extent that will enable our leaders to take the last few hard decisions. The leaders should not take part now, because if the summit fails, it will be a failure for them, and political catastrophe will ensue for both sides.' I suggested that we continue our own talks in order to press forward as far as we could towards bridging the gap. However, Barak had made up his mind and the Israelis insisted on the summit. Meanwhile the Americans, who saw themselves as facilitators, failed to do enough groundwork to see if it was possible to reconcile the two

opposing positions and to build something on the basis of the few understandings that had already been achieved.

Where was the generous offer?

In the last analysis, there was never a formulated Israeli proposal at the Camp David summit. Throughout, the Israelis studiously held back from making any real, concrete offer. The ideas the Israelis aired at Camp David were never put in writing. In general, they were presented orally and through the vehicle of the Americans, rather than as explicitly Israeli proposals. Barak sheered away from face-to-face meetings with Arafat lest Arafat should try to put on record any definite Israeli concessions. Barak, as well as Clinton, insisted that Arafat accept the unwritten proposals conveyed via the Americans as a general basis for discussion before embarking on more detailed negotiations. The Palestinians have subsequently found it hard to prove that they were not responsible for the failure. They have been unable to shed the image that portrayed them as extremists. It was true that at Camp David, because of our adherence to principle, we were unable to respond to the American proposals or to offer counter-proposals. What was expected of us was compromise, and this we could not give. For example, President Clinton became angry with me when I refused to work on the details of a map: I argued that Israel must first accept that any agreement regarding territory should be based on the frontiers of 4 June 1967. (I would refer the reader to the article published in the *New York Review of Books* by Rob Malley and Hussein Agha, which gives a considered and realistic view of Camp David.) Other than in occasional perceptive documents such as the above, the Palestinians have been depicted in Israel and the United States as extremists, unable to respond to Barak's supposedly supreme efforts. For their part, though they stood firm, the Palestinians nevertheless still see themselves as the party that made concessions.

The Palestinians fight back

While the American and Israeli propaganda campaign against the Palestinian leadership continued, we began at last to mount an organised response

to the Israeli and American allegations that continually blamed us for the failure of Camp David. We rallied a team of our experts to wage a methodical media campaign, aimed particularly at the Israeli public, which had been brainwashed by Ehud Barak's incessant allegations. The team produced a brochure that listed the main issues raised by the Israelis regarding the outcome of the negotiations, together with our answers to them. Its members gave lectures and led public discussions in the region and abroad, in Europe and elsewhere. In the region, they engaged with a number of Israeli intellectuals and public opinion leaders. The goal of the operation was to offer a definitive refutation of Barak's claim that he was the hero of Camp David, who had succeeded in unmasking Yasser Arafat's true position and Arafat's alleged underlying lack of interest in peace. I give below, as presented in our publication, the principal Israeli accusations, formulated as questions, together with the Palestinian answers to them.

- 1) Why did the Palestinians reject the peace proposals made at Camp David?

'In order to reach a just and lasting peace between the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, there should be two viable states living side by side, within a framework of equitable neighbourly relations. Israel's proposals at Camp David, which were never put in writing, do not provide room for a viable Palestinian state, because they divide Palestinian territories into four separate cantons under Israeli control and surrounded by Israeli territory. The Camp David proposals deny the Palestinians the right to control their own frontiers, air space, and water resources, at the same time as they legalise and expand illegal settlements in Palestinian territories.'

- 2) Is it not the case that Israel has agreed to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967?

'No: Israel has demanded to be allowed to annex 9 per cent of the occupied Palestinian area, conceding only the equivalent of 1 per cent of that area to the Palestinians in exchange. This figure excludes Jerusalem and the surrounding area that Israel has already annexed. Moreover, Israel demanded to control a further 10 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territories by way of a "long lease". Either way, the issue is not over

percentages, but over the principle of independence and the viability of the Palestinian state.'

3) Why have the Palestinians not accepted the principle of land exchange?

'The Palestinians have given consideration to land exchange, but they have asked for it to be precisely reciprocal, with each side receiving the same area as the other. Palestine should receive land adjacent to its frontiers of equivalent area and value to the territory Israel wishes to annex. The proposal actually made by Israel for an exchange of nine to one in its favour is inequitable and leads us to question how genuine is Israel's commitment to a just regional settlement.'

4) Why do the Palestinians reject Israel's proposals on the geography of their state?

'The Israeli proposals divide Palestine into four cantons surrounded by areas controlled by Israel. These are: the Northern West Bank, the Central West Bank, the Southern West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Access from one canton to another will be through Israeli sovereign areas. Hence, the movement of Palestinian citizens within their independent state would be under Israeli control. Israel will also control the movement of goods, rendering the Palestinian economy subordinate to that of Israel. Finally, Israel's proposal to retain control of all Palestine's frontiers will restrict international movement. Such a Palestinian state would be at Israel's mercy, with a degree of independence inferior even to that of the Bantustans under apartheid in South Africa.'

5) What is the objection of the Palestinians to Israel's proposals for East Jerusalem?

'The Camp David proposals put forward by Israel require the Palestinians to give up all claims to those parts of Jerusalem occupied by Israel. This would, in practice oblige the Palestinians to recognise the Israeli annexation of the whole of East Jerusalem. At Camp David, we understood that Israel was prepared to recognise Palestinian sovereignty over isolated Palestinian quarters inside East Jerusalem which would be surrounded by illegal Israeli settlements. Those quarters would not only be separated

from each other but also from other parts of the Palestinian state. Such a proposal would create ghettos in the heart of Jerusalem.'

- 6) Why do the Palestinians insist on dealing with the Israeli–Palestinian dispute in terms of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338?

'These resolutions were accepted by both parties at the Madrid Conference in 1991 and as part of the Oslo Accord in 1993. The sole purpose of negotiations is to implement these resolutions, which call for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967.'

- 7) Why did the Palestinians bring about the collapse of the peace process, at precisely the moment when tangible progress had begun to be made in preparation for a final settlement?

'The Palestinians joined the peace process on three understandings. These were first that it would bring about a concrete improvement in their lives during the transitional phase; second that the transitional phase would be no longer than five years; and third that the final status would include the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. However, in practice the peace process has achieved none of these things. As to the hopes of the Palestinians for an improvement in their lives, in reality they continued to suffer from severe restrictions on their movements which tended, if anything, to become worse. The Palestinian economy badly deteriorated, Israeli settlements expanded more than ever before, and the dismemberment of the West Bank and Gaza Strip accelerated, with the construction of bypasses for settlers and the erection of more military checkpoints. At the end of the day, Palestinians saw no improvement to their daily lives.

As regards the implementation of agreements that formed part of the transitional phase, agreed dates were passed over time and again. Furthermore, the way Israel framed its proposals critically diminished Palestinian support for the peace process. At Camp David, Barak repeated his earlier warnings that his "proposals" would be the final Israeli proposals before the beginning of talks on the final status. He also said that if those proposals were not accepted, Israel would seriously consider what he called "unilateral disengagement", in other words that Israel would, in effect, impose a settlement.

The Palestinians feel that Israel has betrayed them, as it pledged at Oslo to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories, according to the terms of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.'

- 8) Doesn't the violence that erupted in the wake of Camp David prove that the Palestinians do not want to live in peace with Israel?

'In 1988, the Palestinians recognised Israel's right to exist, which they have reaffirmed on many occasions, including at the Madrid Conference in 1991 and at Oslo in 1993. Meanwhile, Israel has never made an unambiguous official declaration of the Palestinian right to a state. Since the Madrid Conference, the Palestinians have been patiently waiting to obtain their freedom and independence. Israel, however, has continued systematically to impose facts on the ground through the construction of new settlements in the occupied territories. Israeli dwellings in the occupied territories, leaving aside Jerusalem, have increased by 52 per cent since Oslo, while the number of settlers, including those in East Jerusalem, has more than doubled. The Palestinians really do want to live in peace side by side with Israel. But peace must be on a just basis, and cannot be the unjust peace that the strong can dictate to the weak.'

- 9) Doesn't the failure at Camp David prove that Palestinians are simply not yet ready for a settlement?

'The Palestinians have already accepted Israeli sovereignty over 78 per cent of the total area of historical Palestine, in other words 23 per cent more than the area allocated to Israel in the UN Partition of Palestine resolution in 1947. The Palestinians agreed to this on the presumption that they would be able to have sovereignty over the remaining 22 per cent of historical Palestine. An overwhelming majority of Palestinians accepted this concession. The "very generous" offer we hear of was not really made at Camp David. The Palestinians were in fact constantly asked for yet more territorial concessions. No people can be expected to surrender more and more of their basic rights, thus prejudicing their state's ability to survive.'

- 10) Have the Palestinians abandoned the two-state solution, and are they now asking for the whole of historic Palestine?

'The latest developments have undoubtedly hardened positions on both sides. Both Israeli and Palestinian extremists have started to demand the whole of historic Palestine. Yet there is no indication that the Palestinian Authority or the majority of Palestinians have abandoned the idea of the two-state solution. At the same time, the viability of a two-state solution is under real threat because of the continuing Israeli settlement activity and the construction of settler roads, which have the effect of preventing the full separation of the Palestinian territories from Israel. Without a halt to these activities, the two-state solution may become untenable.'

- 11) Surely it is unreasonable for the Palestinians to demand the unlimited right of return of all refugees to Israel?

'The refugee issue was never seriously discussed at Camp David, because Barak took the position that Israel bore no responsibility for the refugee problem or for its solution. By definition, however, there can be no comprehensive resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict without a solution to the central issue of the predicament of the Palestinian refugees. International law prescribes that any civilian who was not involved in hostilities and has been obliged to flee, shall have the right to return after the end of hostilities. However, Israel's partial recognition of the right of return does not, in fact, mean that all the Palestinian refugees will be allowed to return to their former homes. Besides this recognition, various options need to be developed. There is also a need to address the situation of those Palestinian refugees who prefer to remain with their new status as Palestinian nationals in the country where they at present find themselves, or to resettle as Palestinian nationals in a third country, or to resettle in the independent Palestinian state. The return of those who wish to reside in Israel could be achieved in stages, taking into account Israeli demographical concerns.'

Barak's responsibility

As we know, failure is an orphan, while success is a child claimed by many parents. Indeed, the outcome of Camp David and what followed provides proof of this aphorism. I do not believe that the failure at Camp David, though we had expected it from the outset and repeatedly warned

against it, was in fact planned by any of the three parties engaged in these negotiations. Certainly, nobody set out to achieve failure, as all were aware of the deleterious consequences that would ensue. However, aiming deliberately at failure is one thing, but being drawn involuntary into it is another. This was the story of Camp David.

Whether Israel set out to achieve failure or not, any reasonable analysis would attribute the largest part of responsibility for Camp David's failure to the view typically taken by Israel of the Palestinians. First, the Israelis regard the Palestinian problem as inextricably linked with terrorism and violence and as perpetuated by unavoidable geographical realities. Second, it is sad to have to say that many Israelis regard the Palestinians as people of a lesser racial category who do not merit equal treatment with Israelis and whose suffering and aspirations do not merit fair or objective examination. Third, Israel views the Palestinians as an irreconcilable enemy whose intentions cannot be trusted and whose words cannot be believed. For these reasons, Israel finds it hard to have confidence in the ability of the Palestinians to bear the responsibility of partnership in a peace process under which Israel is obliged to implement commitments that many Israeli politicians wish had never been made.

These prejudices, which are intrinsic to Israel's internal political symbolism, had crystallised into a set of ideas that Barak took to Camp David and which governed the way he conducted his negotiations there. The Israeli Prime Minister behaved like an estate agent who could not bring himself to sell the property on his books. He was immobilised by his fear of giving up lands he believed had been promised by God, and terrified by the demands of the Palestinian negotiators for a deal that would look to the Israeli public like a sell-out. He could not bring himself to carry out an act of what he perceived as overwhelming generosity to a people he felt in his heart were unworthy of it. He also felt that what he saw as the security risks arising from Israel's commitments under the peace process must be neutralised through the withdrawal of concessions Israel had already made, while at the same time ratcheting up the level of Israel's demands and stipulations.

This standpoint and these ideas undoubtedly led to Barak's particular style of negotiation at Camp David, and greatly contributed to the inexorable collapse of the summit, even though the Israelis had not necessarily planned explicitly and in advance for the summit to fail. Nothing could be more indicative of this than Barak's failure to provide written

proposals or even working summaries. Meanwhile, the Americans undertook to convey Barak's ideas to the Palestinians, presenting them as American proposals to which the Palestinians could be persuaded to agree. The Americans began to appear to us in the guise of couriers, transmitting whatever ideas the Israeli team might come up with, which changed from day to day and were simply abandoned if there was no Palestinian response.

At the summit, Barak found himself torn between two forces. On the one hand, he felt bound by the many red lines he had publicly committed himself to before going to Camp David – his list of 'noes'. On the other hand, he was attracted by some positions that transgressed various long-standing taboos of the Israeli collective mentality, particularly those regarding Jerusalem. Throughout the summit, Israel's Prime Minister took shelter behind a barricade of ill-founded ideas, such as the power of concerted American and Israeli pressure to lower the expectations of the Palestinians. His hope was that the Palestinians would be forced to reduce their demands across the agenda of the summit, including Jerusalem, the refugee issue, territory, and the rest. This is perhaps not the place to subject Barak's personality to psychological analysis. However, it cannot escape notice that as a former Israeli Chief of Staff and Minister of Defence Barak's instinct was to maintain his personal security at all costs. At Camp David, he chose for the most part to lead the Israeli negotiators from within the walls of his assigned residence, refusing to mingle in the informal exchanges in which the Americans tried to encourage all to participate. At one point, he pointedly ignored Arafat when they met virtually face to face at dinner. He took constant care that he did not become involved in any bilateral or trilateral meeting that included Arafat, who would have the last word on accepting or rejecting any proposals. Later on, he literally locked himself up in his quarters.

After the summit ended, Shlomo Ben Ami admitted that the Israelis had been convinced that the Palestinians would make fresh concessions at the talks. They discovered in due course, however, that the Palestinians had come to Camp David with a new principle. This was that the Oslo Agreement embodied the last concessions the Palestinians were prepared to make. According to Ben Ami, the Israelis were not initially aware of this. They were convinced that pressure on the Palestinians would be effective and bring the results Israel wanted. They felt sure that the Palestinians would not wish to compromise their newly minted relationship with the United States, and would therefore be flexible. This indicates three things.

First, it shows that Israel's opening assumptions were divorced from reality. Second, it indicates that they did not believe they could negotiate their objectives straightforwardly, by a process of give and take with the Palestinians, but preferred to resort to subterfuge. And third, it shows the extent to which the Israelis were dependent on American pressure being exercised on their behalf, and confident in its results.

In short, what Barak offered would have led to the maintenance of Israeli control of the Palestinians, and restrictions on any Palestinian state sufficient to ensure its continued subordination to Israel. Nothing Barak proposed could have served as the basis for a final and comprehensive settlement that would have secured the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. We therefore refused what Israel persisted in describing as its generous offer, as we found no serious contribution to peace in Israel's proposals. Had we accepted, we should only have succeeded in giving our endorsement to the perpetuation of Israel's occupation of our land, now and in the future. We told the Israelis and the Americans that our desire for peace and neighbourly relations with Israel was real and earnest, and we offered reasonable guarantees of security to the Israelis in exchange for the serious consideration of our proposals. Yet all that went the way of the winds. Now, international public opinion retains no recollection of Camp David other than the myth of Israeli generosity, and the image of the Palestinians spurning the extended hand of friendship. In due course, no doubt, these false memories will fade.

Recovery from Camp David

Our public image soon began to improve. The steadfastness shown by the Palestinian delegation at Camp David, in the face of the pressure exercised on us by the Americans and Israel's attempts to dictate the outcome, was appreciated in certain Palestinian circles both at home and abroad. When Abu Ammar returned to Gaza from Washington, the people gave him a huge and spontaneous welcome, as I have explained. As soon as we got our breath back, we embarked on a series of internal reviews. The Fatah Central Committee and the PLO Executive Committee held sessions, followed by the PLO's Central Council and the Palestinian Legislative Council, as well as other leading Palestinian institutions. All expressed support for what was described as the courageous stance of the negotiators.

On 3 August 2000, a week after our return, I gave an assessment of the summit to a session of the Palestinian Legislative Council. I spoke about the psychological pressures that had been brought to bear on us, which we had withstood. I also told the Council that our negotiating team had stuck to the parameters defined by the Central Council on the eve of the summit, which served as the basis of our position. My colleagues also spoke one by one about their work at the summit. The solidarity we received on that day led me to believe the Palestinian position was more unified than it had previously been. We began to feel, and apparently the Israelis shared the feeling, that we could not just leave the negotiations there, at the point where Camp David had stopped. We felt we should start afresh, preferably away from the glare of publicity, which had never assisted our efforts. It seemed to us that there was much that could be salvaged from Camp David that might serve as the basis for future talks.

In the hope of breathing life into the stalled peace process once more, and making a conscious effort not to descend into recrimination, we initiated a series of bilateral meetings on broader issues involving a number of Palestinian and Israeli negotiators, some of whom had been at Camp David. This time, I did not take part, as I had my reservations about the style of negotiation that had begun to emerge. I felt we should talk about practical matters, and I was not interested in what seemed to me to have become a process of striking moral postures. In addition, there was the view the Americans and the Israelis shared that I personally had stood in the way of the success of Camp David, which I took to mean that my presence might be counterproductive. However, by my count, some thirty-eight meetings were held in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other places inside Israel and the Palestinian territories, on the basis we had already laid down in Stockholm that we had to negotiate a whole package. Both sides agreed that nothing could be regarded as having been concluded until agreement on all issues was reached.

On the international front, the United States, which never abandoned its diplomatic efforts, despite the change of regime, encouraged the resumption of talks. Shlomo Ben Ami became Israel's acting Foreign Minister in early August 2000 after the resignation of David Levy, and our Egyptian brethren made many approaches to him and to Ehud Barak. Despite Clinton's apparent disheartenment in the immediate aftermath of Camp David, the Americans began to talk about

holding a fresh summit as soon as September 2000, before the negotiating positions of the two sides regressed to the starting point. In the last phase of President Clinton's term of office, the American diplomats conferred intensively with the Egyptians. In due course, as further problems presented themselves, the Americans rescheduled the date for a renewed summit to November 2000.

On 25 September Abu Ammar met Barak for the first time since Camp David, at the Israeli Prime Minister's residence at Kokhav Ya'ir. I was present at the meeting, at which Barak showed some optimism that a framework agreement could be reached. After this, negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis began again in Washington. The diplomatic contribution of the Americans in these months of 2000 was a prelude to Clinton's proposals revealed in December. Meanwhile the European states also began to take a hand. In Paris, numerous meetings were held between the Palestinians and the Israelis under French auspices, often including American representatives. A week after the outbreak of renewed violence between Palestinians and Israelis on 28 September, after the Sharon incident, President Chirac of France and US Secretary of State Albright arranged a meeting between Abu Ammar and Barak to discuss how to halt the strife and revive the peace process. It was agreed to transfer the talks from Paris to Sharm el-Sheikh, where a summit meeting would be held in the presence of Egypt's President, Husni Mubarak. The aim was a ceasefire, with the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the positions they had taken outside the Palestinian towns in the West Bank. For the time being, the peace process took second place in the international priorities to the deteriorating security situation in the in the Palestinian territories.

However, Barak reneged at the last minute on his promise to go to Sharm el-Sheikh. He insisted that, before he would attend, the Palestinian leadership should declare a ceasefire in advance, as well as accepting security measures he wanted to dictate. More than ever, the violence seemed likely to escalate rather than diminish. The situation deteriorated further after Barak sent his air force to attack Palestinian targets, including a Palestinian police headquarters. President Clinton and President Mubarak intensified their efforts to calm the situation, telephoning Barak to encourage him to come to Sharm el-Sheikh. Barak eventually agreed, and the Sharm el-Sheikh summit was held on 16 October 2000. Those present were President Clinton and President Mubarak, King Abdullah of Jordan, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and Javier Solana, representing

the European Union, as well as Abu Ammar and Prime Minister Barak. The communiqué called for an end to acts of violence, the resumption of contacts to coordinate security measures, the reopening of crossing points, the collection by the Palestinian Authority of illegally held arms and the withdrawal of Israel's forces to the positions they held before 28 September 2000. The United States deputed George Tenet, head of the CIA, to oversee the implementation of what was agreed. In practice, almost nothing was done, and Israel continued its virtual state of siege against the Palestinians.

Violence became the dominant factor on the ground. Many Palestinians were killed, while Arab and international TV networks followed the developing confrontation, putting pictures of the Israeli forces in action against Palestinian civilians on the region's and the world's television screens. The destruction meted out by the Israeli air force helped to swing the tide of opinion. The Arab states turned against Israel after an emergency summit in Cairo. Egypt recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv and King Abdullah declared he would send no new Jordanian ambassador to Israel until there was a change in the situation. At the Israeli Labour Party's conference, there were angry verbal exchanges between Barak and Peres. Meanwhile, Barak was coming under ever greater pressure in the Knesset, where he began to explore the idea of an emergency government including Likud. The effect of this would have been that Barak might have saved his government while at the same time ending the peace process. Shimon Peres, whom Barak had sidelined from the peace process in the course of the previous sixteen months, offered to meet Abu Ammar in Gaza to try to rescue the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings. Barak agreed to this, and on 1 November Peres arrived in Gaza, accompanied by Shlomo Ben Ami and Gilad Sher. At this meeting it was agreed that Barak and Arafat should issue a joint communiqué.

Despite Barak's apparent agreement to this idea, it was never to happen. The next move came when President Clinton issued separate invitations to Abu Ammar and Barak to meet him at the White House. These meetings were the first steps towards a new initiative by President Clinton, who was becoming ever more anxious about the fate of his Middle East initiative as the date of his departure from the White House drew nearer. On 28 November 2000, Ehud Barak announced he intended to hold early elections, amid strong indications that he would be unseated by

Ariel Sharon, leader of the Likud opposition. The Knesset voted by a majority of seventy-nine to one, with twenty-seven abstentions, to dissolve parliament.

While all this was taking place, Israeli and Palestinian interlocutors held many lower level meetings. These encounters, of which Abu Mazen and I attended only a few, continued up to late 2000. Abu Ammar kept close personal control over these talks, which were restricted to a small group of Palestinian negotiators. Their efforts ran into the sand, as the Intifada escalated. I had a number of meetings with American officials, including Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk. I also met some Israeli officials and political figures whom I knew well, such as Shlomo Ben Ami, Yossi Beilin, Shimon Peres, and others. At all these meetings, I reiterated our agreed Palestinian position, always taking care to reaffirm our desire to reach a comprehensive and just peace agreement. By December 2000, as violence was reaching further new peaks, the peace process had completely run out of steam.

President Clinton's proposals

Although President Clinton was about to cede the White House to his Republican successor, he nonetheless continued to produce new ideas for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, drawing on the Camp David discussions and the subsequent negotiations. The President chose not to formulate his ideas on paper as an official document. Instead, on 23 December 2000, he delivered them verbally to a meeting of Palestinian and Israeli delegates who had been holding talks at the Bolling Air Force base near Washington on ways to restart the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement. Madeleine Albright and the National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, were present, together with other American negotiators, including Dennis Ross, Aaron Miller, and Rob Malley. The White House Chief of Staff, John Podesta, and the Deputy National Security Advisor, Bruce Rydal, were also there, as well as the interpreter Jamal Hilal. The Palestinian delegation included Yasser Abed Rabbo, Sa'eb Erekat, Mohammed Dahlan, Samih Al-Abed, and Ghaith Al-Umari. The Israeli team comprised Shlomo Ben Ami, Gilad Sher, Shlomo Yanai, Pini Meidan-Shani, and Gidi Grinstein.

The Americans wanted to go beyond the current remit of those talks

and to seize the last opportunity for the Democratic administration to tackle the issues that had broken up the Camp David summit, especially the issue of Jerusalem. Dennis Ross even hinted that it could be possible to convene a new trilateral summit, if a way to agree on the basic issues could be worked out ahead of time. When he invited the Palestinian and Israeli delegations to meet him at the White House, President Clinton outlined stratagems that could be adopted to progress towards the resolution of the issues of land, refugees, and Jerusalem. On 23 December 2000, these final talks with the Clinton administration reached their apex, when President Clinton introduced his ideas. He began by saying, 'I put before you the best I have been able to come up with. This is not negotiable. Your leaders have to say by Wednesday 27 December whether they accept my ideas or not. I must know whether each leader is prepared to talk about signing an agreement based on these ideas. I stress that these ideas are not proposals put forward officially by the United States. They are simply an explanation of my personal conception of how to reach an agreement within the two weeks I have left. These proposals will be removed from the agenda, as soon as I leave the White House at the end of my term. The present situation, with all its violence, must not continue. We have to put an end to it.' President Clinton then outlined his proposals as follows (as minuted by the Palestinian delegation – the record differs slightly from that presented by Dennis Ross in his memoir):

Territory

As you have heard, my view is that the solution should be in the mid-90 per cents. Between 94 and 96 per cent of the West Bank should be allocated for the Palestinian state. Between 1 and 3 per cent should be exchanged with Israel. There will need to be other territorial arrangements such as the permanent safe passage.

The two parties should also consider the exchange of leased areas to meet the needs of both sides. There are various methods to achieve this, in a way that addresses the needs and concerns of both the Palestinians and Israelis.

It will be necessary for both parties to develop a map meeting the following criteria: 80 per cent of settlers to be in blocks; geographical contiguity; reducing the areas to be annexed to a minimum.

Security

The leading principle lies in an international presence that can be removed only by mutual consent. Such a presence will ensure the observation of the implementation of the agreement between the two sides.

In my judgement, the Israeli withdrawal should be completed over thirty-six months, together with the phased deployment of the international force. At the end of this period, a limited Israeli presence will remain for a further thirty-six months at fixed locations in the Jordan Valley under the aegis of the international force. This period may be reduced if regional developments diminish the threats to Israel.

On early warning posts, Israel will need to retain three facilities in the West Bank, with a Palestinian presence to undertake liaison and communication duties. These facilities will be subject to review after ten years, and any change to their status should be made by agreement between the two parties.

Regarding Israeli emergency deployment, I think you still need to develop a map relating to precise areas and routes. I propose the following definition for an emergency: 'An imminent verifiable threat to Israel's national security, which has a military character and requires a general state of emergency to be declared.'

Naturally, international troops will need to be notified if a decision of this kind is taken.

Concerning air space, I propose that the State of Palestine will exercise sovereignty over its air space. However, the two parties have to work out special arrangements to accommodate Israel's needs, including the necessity for Palestine to be a 'demilitarised state'. The Palestinian team suggests that an alternative formula could be 'a state with limited arms'. As a compromise, I suggest referring to it as 'a non-militarised state'.

This will be consistent with the fact that in addition to Palestine's possession of strong security forces, there will be international forces for border security and for the purposes of deterrence.

Jerusalem and refugees

My feeling is that the remaining differences are related to formulations rather than realities on the ground.

Jerusalem

The general principle is that the Arab areas are to be Palestinian and Jewish

areas are to be Israeli. This also applies to the Old City. I also urge both parties to develop maps that maximise geographical contiguity for each side.

Regarding the Haram al-Sharif (the 'Temple Mount'), I believe the differences do not relate to practical administration but to the symbolism of sovereignty and to finding a way to show respect for the religious beliefs of both parties.

I am aware that you have discussed some formulations and that there may be one on which you can agree. I would like to add two possible further formulations that would guarantee Palestinian control of the Haram al-Sharif in practice in a way that will respect Jewish beliefs. In the case of each of these two formulations, international supervision would provide mutual trust.

- 1) Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif and Israeli sovereignty over 'the Western Wall and the area holy to Jews which is part of it' or 'the Western Wall and the holy of holies which is considered part of it'. There will be strict commitment by both parties not to undertake any excavation beneath the Haram al-Sharif or behind the Western Wall.
- 2) Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif and Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall, with joint administrative sovereignty over the issue of excavation beneath the Haram al-Sharif and behind the Western Wall. Thus, mutual consent would need to be obtained before any excavation.

Refugees

I feel that dispute on this issue also relates more to formulations than to what will happen on the practical level.

I believe Israel is prepared to acknowledge the moral and material suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of the 1948 war, and the need to assist the world community to resolve this problem.

An international committee should be set up to implement everything included in an agreement made by you. This will include compensation, resettlement, rehabilitation, and so forth.

The United States is prepared to lead an international effort to help the refugees.

The fundamental gap concerns the way to deal with the concept of

the right of return. I know the history of the issue, and I know how difficult it would be for the Palestinian leadership to appear to resile from this principle.

It is not within the bounds of possibility for the Israeli side to accept any reference to a right of return that involved a 'right of return to Israel' not compatible with the independence of Israel's policy regarding entry to its territory, or that would threaten the Jewish character of the state.

Any solution should deal with the needs of both parties.

Such a solution should be consistent with the coexistence between two states that both parties have accepted as the means to end the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, with the State of Palestine as a homeland for the Palestinian people and the State of Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people.

On the basis of the two-state solution, the guiding principle should be that the Palestinian state will be the location for Palestinians who choose to return to the area, without excluding the acceptance by Israel of some of the refugees.

I believe we need to adopt a formula for the right of return that makes it clear that there is no definitive right of return to Israel itself, but without rejecting the demand of the Palestinian people to return to the area. In the light of the above, I suggest two alternatives:

- 1) Both parties recognise the right of the refugees to return to historical Palestine, or:
- 2) Both parties recognise the right of the refugees to return to their homeland.

The agreement will define the implementation of this right in a manner consistent with a solution on the basis of two states. It will also define the five possible 'homeland' destinations for the refugees as follows:

- 1) The State of Palestine
- 2) The Israeli areas to be transferred to Palestine under a land exchange
- 3) Rehabilitation in the host country
- 4) Rehabilitation in a third country
- 5) Entry into Israel.

The agreement will make it clear, in the context of these options, that return to the West Bank, to the Gaza Strip, or to areas included in a territorial exchange, will be a right for all Palestinian refugees.

Nonetheless, rehabilitation in the host countries, resettlement in third countries, and absorption into Israel, will be conditional on the policies adopted by those countries.

Israel may indicate in the agreement that it intends to adopt a policy of absorbing some refugees into its territories, subject to a sovereign Israeli decision.

I consider that priority should be given to the refugees in Lebanon.

The two parties will agree that implementation of these measures will constitute an implementation of resolution 194.

Settling the conflict

I suggest that this agreement will clearly signify the end of the conflict and that its implementation should put an end to all claims. It can be applied by means of a UN Security Council resolution that will specify that it constitutes the implementation of resolutions 242 and 338. The Palestinian prisoners must also be released.

I believe this is an outline for a just and permanent agreement that permits the Palestinian people to determine its future on its own land. Palestine would be a viable sovereign state recognised by the world community, with Jerusalem as its capital and with sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif, together with a new life for refugees.

This is the best I am able to do. I call on you to inform your leaderships, and to inform me whether they are willing to come to further negotiations on the basis of these ideas. I can meet them separately next week. If they are not willing, I will have done as much as I am able.

These are my ideas. If they are not taken up, they will not just be removed from the table, they will disappear with me when I leave office.

President Clinton's ideas were no surprise to us, as they drew upon ideas he had put to us at Camp David. They were difficult for us to accept, but equally difficult to turn down out of hand. The Palestinian leadership asked Clinton for certain clarifications but he refused to elaborate unless the Palestinian leadership accepted the general principles, and made a direct appeal to President Arafat to come urgently to Washington. On 2 January 2001, Abu Ammar responded to his call, going to Washington for what

proved to be his last visit to the White House. He told President Clinton that he accepted the proposals, though with some reservations, and that he was prepared to enter at once into new negotiations. Clinton said he was not prepared to change anything, and that time was running out. We looked very carefully at Clinton's proposals. The Palestinian leadership was in general minded to reject them. However, since the Israelis seemed to accept the proposals, at least in part, the Palestinian side decided to give them serious consideration in the hope of being able to modify the elements we were unsatisfied with. The Palestinian leadership formulated a response to the ideas in the form of an internal working paper, of which I present the text here.

Palestinian response to President Clinton's proposals

General principles

There should be a resolution of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, as well as the UN General Assembly resolution 194, based on international law. In addition, we cannot accept any proposal that does not guarantee the establishment of a viable Palestinian state and the return of refugees to their homes.

The American proposal has been formulated in general terms that at some points lack clarity and detail. Our position since the start of the negotiations has been that the final status agreement cannot be a document stating only general political principles, but must rather be a comprehensive agreement that sets out details, mechanisms, maps, and time schedules to put an end to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

The final status agreement should be final by definition, not merely an agreement to continue negotiations. Israel's objective in the negotiations is essentially political, namely to normalise Israel's status in the international community through making peace with the Palestinians. This is a goal that is achievable by means of a short-term agreement of a political nature. The goals of the Palestinians, on the other hand, take the form of practical steps to be taken on the ground, which can only be achieved under an agreement that contains the necessary degree of details. Otherwise, we will be faced with a situation similar to that after the signing of the transitional agreement, where we found ourselves later obliged to renegotiate every single item, at the mercy of Israel's 'good will'.

For the agreement to be effective, it must be supported by clear and effective guarantees that it will be executed.

Territory

We cannot accept a proposal that would punish the Palestinians and reward Israel's illegal settlement policies. A proposal that annexes between 4 and 6 per cent of the land (let alone as much as 10 per cent) would inevitably harm the basic interests of the Palestinians.

We find it preferable to embark on a discussion of requirements specified on a map, and not just by percentages determined in advance. Where Israel claims to have requirements within Palestinian territory, it must justify individually those needs and show they are not detrimental to Palestinian interests. Starting from percentages will lead to Israel acquiring the right to claim a fixed proportion and consequently to a situation in which we are obliged to respond to such an Israeli claim, rather than their having to justify it.

The total area from which these percentages are to be deducted is in any case not clear. Israel continues to insist, with no American objection, that this area excludes Jerusalem as Israel chooses to define it. Nor does it include the 'no man's land' or the Dead Sea. Thus, if the percentages are of the total area claimed by the Palestinians, the area that Israel might annex of what it regards as occupied territory, according to this proposal, could be almost 10 per cent, which was proposed at Camp David.

It is difficult to reconcile the proposed proportions with Palestinian geographical continuity. If the American proposal is considered in the light of the map presented by the Israelis at the last round of talks in Washington, it will give Israel control over wide areas in vital places like Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which will be annexed to Israel. This will ruin the geographical continuity of the Palestinian state, not only disrupting the movement of Palestinians within their own country but will also be seriously detrimental to development within the Palestinian state.

Any wide-scale annexation, as proposed, would destroy Palestinian water rights.

The starting point should be the principle that no Palestinian should be affected by annexation. If we accept the American proposal 'to reduce the number of Palestinians affected', we implicitly establish a general rule according to which we accept the principle that some Palestinians will be affected. In return, if we lay down a rule according to which no

Palestinian will be affected, it will be Israel's responsibility to prove the opposite, on a case-by-case basis. It will also have to pay for any exception to this rule.

Reference to 'settlement blocks' as a negotiating principle, as proposed by the United States, is unacceptable. As this term is undefined, any acceptance of it will leave scope for Israel to provide a definition. It will also render Palestinian interests in the geographical continuity of the Palestinian state subordinate to Israeli interests in the geographical continuity of the settlements, which the world community regards as illegal. This principle of 'settlement blocks' also contradicts the criteria laid down by the Americans themselves in these proposals, namely reducing the area that will be annexed and reducing the number of Palestinians who will be affected by the annexation. It is worth mentioning, in this respect, that all the settlements in the West Bank occupy, at the moment, only 1.8 per cent of the West Bank.

Without prejudice to our rejection of the existence of settlements on our Palestinian land, we shall need to know exactly which settlements Israel wants to annex.

Regarding land exchange, the American proposal does not define what Israeli territory will be regarded as compensation for the territory that will be annexed. The Palestinians insist that any annexed territory be exchanged for a territory equal to it in value and area. To us, anything other than this would be unreasonable. Yet, the American proposal does not explicitly state the principle that the land used for compensation will be equal in area to what is annexed. Nor does it broach the issue of value or location.

All previous American and Israeli proposals have referred to an exchange of land adjacent to the Gaza Strip in exchange for highly desirable land in the West Bank. However, as well as being desert, the proposed land is used, at the moment, as landfill for poisonous waste. We cannot exchange valuable agricultural land for rubbish dumps.

The American proposal for 'exchanging leased land' does not serve any Palestinian interest, as the Palestinians have no need for any Israeli land. This principle may lead to a further 10 per cent falling under Israeli control, with undefined security arrangements.

As regards the safe passage linking the West Bank to Gaza Strip, this is a Palestinian right because the West Bank and Gaza Strip are considered an indivisible geographical entity. Such a passage, under Palestinian

sovereignty, linking the West Bank to Gaza Strip, could form part of a land exchange.

Jerusalem

The proposal implicitly recognises Israeli sovereignty beneath the Haram al-Sharif, which suggests an Israeli right to excavate behind the Wall (which is the same area described as 'under the Haram al-Sharif'). This gives the impression that Israel is to renounce voluntarily a right that it holds. The proposal as it stands would violate Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif, since, according to international law, sovereignty is defined vertically, not horizontally (i.e. sovereignty applies to the soil and what lies under it, not what lies behind it).

Within the context of the first version of the proposal on the Haram al-Sharif, to accept that the 'Western Wall' is part of 'the area holy to Jews' or 'the holy of holies' would imply that the Temple lies under the Haram al-Sharif.

In the second version, the phrase 'joint administrative sovereignty' is unclear and offers Israel a wide margin of interpretation. The key word in this phrase is 'sovereignty'. If the objective is to prevent excavation, the text can provide for specific arrangements to prevent excavation under the Haram al-Sharif.

The 'Western Wall' extends beyond what is known as the 'Wailing Wall', as the enclosed map shows. The 'Wailing Wall' is 58 metres long whereas the entire Western Wall includes the tunnel opened by the ex-premier of Israel, Binyamin Netanyahu in 1996, which led, at the time, to widespread clashes.

A convention laying down that 'Arab areas will go to Palestine and Jewish areas will go to Israel' is not consistent with observation of the 4 June 1967 borders and would retrospectively legalise Israeli settlement policy in Jerusalem.

The American proposals that 'Arab areas will be Palestinian and Jewish areas will be Israeli' cannot be reconciled with the principle of the 'maximum geographical contiguity for both parties' included in the same proposal. This is apparent from the attached map, showing the results of the settlement policy in occupied East Jerusalem, which has been condemned by the world community. This formula would ultimately lead to the existence of small and dispersed Palestinian enclaves within the city, while Israel would be able to maintain its geographical contiguity.

Hence, the phrase 'maximum geographical contiguity for both sides' will, in fact, be interpreted as 'maximum geographical contiguity for Israel'.

The American proposal is not clear on the status of the 'green areas' that are presently under Israeli control in East Jerusalem, on which Palestinians have been banned from building since the start of occupation.

Israel continues to demand sovereignty over a number of religious sites in East Jerusalem which are not geographically defined (including the Jewish Cemetery, Mount Zion, King David, and others). The American proposal is unclear in this connection.

Any solution acceptable to the Palestinians must guarantee geographical continuity between Palestinian areas in Jerusalem, on the one hand, and between Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories, on the other.

One of the basic elements of the Palestinian position on Jerusalem relates to its status as an 'open city' with free access for all. This status is essential, not only to secure free access to and worship at all holy places for all those who believe in the sanctity of the city, but it is also fundamental to guaranteed communications and freedom of movement within the Palestinian state. The American proposal does not refer to this essential principle. If the term 'open city' is dropped, this idea will no longer be operative.

Palestinian refugees

The American proposals reflect the complete acceptance by the Americans of the Israeli position stipulating that the application of the right of return will be entirely subject to Israel's consent. It is essential, here, to recall that UN resolution 194, which is regarded as the basis for a just settlement of the refugee problem, provides for the return of refugees to their 'homes', not to a 'homeland' or to 'historical Palestine'.

Israeli acknowledgement of the 'moral and material suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of the 1948 war' would nevertheless leave the door open to Israeli claims that the Arabs are responsible for the refugee problem. Israel must admit responsibility for creating this problem.

Confining Israel's role to 'assisting the world community to resolve this problem' implies that responsibility for solution falls on the world community, with Israel having no special part to play in this respect.

The suggestion of a comprehensive international mechanism is a positive step, but the important thing here is the detail.

In our recognition of the State of Israel, we cannot legally define it as the 'homeland of the Jewish people', since the religious or ethnic nature of a state is an internal affair of that state and therefore inappropriate for a third state to specify in an international treaty.

Similarly, and by the same reasoning, we cannot accept the definition of the Palestinian state as a 'homeland for the Palestinian people'.

Both versions proposed by President Clinton conflict with resolution 194, which approves the return of refugees to their 'homes' and not to their 'homelands'.

Basically, the American offer gives Israel a free hand to decide whether it will admit any refugees, and then to determine the number of those who are to be admitted, together with their identity, and their eventual domicile. The language used by the President relieves Israel of any commitments, obliging it only to consider the admission of refugees in the capacity of migrants and not as returnees.

Regarding the five options:

Return to Palestine is an internal Palestinian affair. Its inclusion in the text would imply our acceptance that Palestinian immigration policy is subject to interference from outside.

The areas in Israel that come under the exchange of territory create a paradox, since resolution 194 provides for return of refugees to their homes. When a refugee returns home, he or she should enjoy the legal right to live anywhere in the state to which he returns. Therefore, if a refugee returns to such an area before the exchange of land, he or she will have the right to live anywhere he or she wishes in Israel. But, if he or she returns after the exchange of land, he or she will have the right to live anywhere he wishes in the State of Palestine.

Rehabilitation within host countries, and resettlement in third countries, will depend on the will of the countries concerned, and no rights appertaining to the refugees will be created by including them in the agreement.

In the case of admittance to Israel, the word 'admittance' implies a purely discretionary exercise of sovereign power under which the refugees enjoy no rights.

Priority to the refugees in Lebanon would be legally impossible to define.

The essence of the right of return is freedom of choice. Palestinians

must be given the right to choose their domicile, up to and including return to the home from which they were driven out. No historical precedent has existed under which a people has surrendered its basic right to return home, whether they have been driven out or whether they fled in fear. The Palestinian people will not be the first to establish such a precedent. The recognition of the right of return, and the offer of choice to the refugees, are prerequisites to an end to the conflict.

The Palestinians are prepared to think creatively and flexibly of mechanisms for the application of the right of return. In many discussions with Israel, various mechanisms have been discussed for the application of the right of return, in a way that would end the plight of the refugees and calm Israel's fears. The American proposal, however, does not refer to any of these ideas. In fact, it returns to the old Israeli negotiation positions.

The American proposal offers no guarantee regarding the implementation of the rights of the refugees to recovery of their property or to compensation.

Security

It must be made clear that the international presence will be a guarantee of the full implementation of the entire agreement, not just of the security items.

There is no reason to allow Israel three years to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As Israel has succeeded in absorbing more than a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union within the last few years, one year should be more than enough to evacuate some thousands of settlers.

It is not clear whether the proposed withdrawal period relates to all troops and settlers, both of whom are to be deemed part of the occupying forces in the Palestinian territories.

A protracted period of withdrawal could jeopardise the peaceful implementation of the agreement and create a continuing source of friction.

There is no necessity for Israeli forces to remain in the Jordan Valley.

Israel has been unable to convince us of its need to deploy forces in the Jordan Valley in an emergency, particularly given the presence of international forces.

Without prejudice to the above point, the proposed definition of an emergency as 'an imminent verifiable threat to Israel's national security

that has a military character and requires a general state of emergency to be declared' gives Israel ample room for manoeuvre to reoccupy Palestine, even in the absence of a genuine threat to its security. But, if we were to agree to discuss the principle of redeployment in emergencies, the American definition would need to be amended to 'mobilising Israeli forces'.

Regarding the early warning posts:

If the principle of early warning posts is accepted, it will be vital to agree the positions of these posts in advance. The retention of such posts at their present locations near Ramallah and Nablus and in East Jerusalem would hamper Palestinian development. In reality, Israel has no need for more than one early warning post, which could be installed within Israel's own territory.

The presence of 'Palestinian liaison' will not suffice. International administration for such posts or at least regular and unannounced inspection of the posts should be stipulated, in order to ensure that Israel will use them only for their intended purpose.

Israel must have no veto over the proposed review that would follow after ten years. Warning posts should be permitted to remain only for a limited period of time, subject to Palestinian consent.

The American proposal for special arrangements relating to Israel's training and operational needs in Palestinian air space is extremely vague. If what is intended is not further clarified, Israel could use this provision to carry out military training in Palestine's air space, while the citizens of Israel are preserved from such dangers. The Palestinians are still committed to making territorial arrangements for air navigation within the internationally accepted criteria. Any arrangements other than these would diminish Palestinian sovereignty and damage relations with neighbouring countries.

Palestine must demand Israeli concessions in return for any right to conduct air operations and exercises in its air space.

Under no circumstances will Palestine be obliged to cede powers to Israel regarding the arrangements for civil aviation in Palestine.

Further topics

The American proposal lacks any reference to certain issues essential for the establishment of comprehensive and permanent peace. In particular, the proposal fails to refer the following points:

- Water: differences are still wide and Israel continues to insist that international law is not applicable to negotiations.
- Compensation: compensation should be applicable for the damage consequent upon the occupation, including, though not exclusively, compensation for natural resources, income, taxes, environmental damage, the exploitation of land, and human resources.
- Environmental
- Future economic relations
- Other bilateral issues between the two states.

The end of the conflict

The end of the conflict will be realised only when all the causes of the conflict and its continuation have been fully resolved. This, in turn, can be achieved only through a comprehensive agreement that provides detailed mechanisms for the resolution of all the issues that constitute the core of conflict.

The settlements that Israel has reached with both Egypt and Jordan provided that the end of the conflict would be declared to have taken place only after a final and comprehensive peace treaty had been concluded. Unless the American proposals are clarified in ways that take the above observations into account, they will not result in a realistic settlement of the conflict. Without real solutions on the ground, verbal formulations intended to terminate the conflict will fail to make sense.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ON THE THRESHOLD OF TABA

In the closing months and weeks of 2000, with Israel still in the throes of political crisis, Ehud Barak broadened his government and rebuilt his political alliances, building bridges with many who were doves in terms of the peace process. He was reconciled with Shimon Peres, who had been ostracised for months. In November 2000, Shlomo Ben Ami was confirmed as Foreign Minister, a post he had accepted on an acting basis in August 2000. In addition, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak moved up to the more important position of Transport Minister, and Gilad Sher, Barak's policy coordinator continued to play a key role in Barak's inner circle. Barak was by now surrounded by a group that pushed hard for the resumption of the Camp David process on the basis of the proposals included in Clinton's paper, which, with various reservations, both Palestinians and Israelis had listened to favourably in December. In other words, we had opposite us a pro-peace Israeli team very enthusiastic about a peace process based on two states, whose like might not reappear in the foreseeable future. This gave the Palestinian side a strong incentive to keep the peace process going. The result was the Taba talks that took place from 21 January 2001.

As I have previously indicated, I had decided after Camp David to hold myself aloof from negotiations, vowing not to expose myself further to the stress and criticism the role seemed inevitably to bring. However, when the decision was taken that we should go to Taba, Abu Ammar insisted that I head the Palestinian delegation. After a lengthy wrangle with him at his office in Gaza, where I persisted in trying to keep out of the talks, I finally gave in. But before giving my consent, I asked him to tell me what his real objective was in going to Taba. He indicated that he was willing to be very flexible, and simply wanted to seize the opportunity to obtain whatever would be of advantage to the Palestinians. 'Just go,

take your colleagues,' he said, 'and do whatever you find suitable. I shall endorse anything you and your colleagues agree to.' The Palestinian delegation we assembled included many of the senior negotiators who had long been linked with the peace process. Among those who participated were Nabil Sha'ath, Yasser Abed Rabbo, Sa'eb Erekat, Mohammed Dahlan, Hassan Asfour, and a number of distinguished technical experts, including Dr Samih Al-Abed, Dr Jad Is'haq, and Khalil Tafakji.

On the Israeli side, the leader of the team at Taba was Shlomo Ben Ami, who had effectively headed Israel's negotiating team since Barak formed his first coalition, and was my long-standing counterpart. I had come to know him well and found in him a staunch man of peace who did not shrink from taking the initiative. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak was a senior soldier who had quit the military for politics and was also in Barak's cabinet. He had left a good impression when he negotiated the Gaza-Jericho first agreement with us. He represented a positive momentum. Yossi Beilin, Ehud Barak's Justice Minister, who had been involved from the earliest days in setting up the Oslo talks, was one of the originators of the vision of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. I had known him for a long time. Yossi Sarid, leader of the Meretz Party, who had left the government because he refused to serve alongside the religious parties, had also long called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. He was a prominent leader at the peace camp. Finally, Gilad Sher, Barak's closest adviser, was a distinguished lawyer who had also come to politics from a military background. He reminded us a little of Barak himself, haunted by caution and driven by minute details. We saw him as Barak's informer, who reported back assiduously. Yet I would also say he, too, was in his heart a man of peace.

On the morning of 11 January 2001, we had our first opportunity to get the measure of the new Israeli mood when we met the Israeli negotiators at the Erez crossing point. Shimon Peres, Shlomo Ben Ami, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, and Gilad Sher came to a meeting with a Palestinian group led by myself and including Yasser Abed Rabbo, Sa'eb Erekat, and Mohammed Dahlan. We got off on a bad footing, with an unfortunate quarrel between Shahak and Abed Rabbo, when some remark provoked the latter into calling Barak a war criminal. We smoothed this over and got down to the business of explaining our response to Clinton's proposals. We told them we had asked Clinton for a map with details of his proposals for Jerusalem. We also informed him that we had difficulties with the

term 'Western Wall', which seemed to apply to a larger entity than the part of the 'Western Wall' that is often known as the 'Wailing Wall'. We also stressed that Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif had to relate to both the territory on the ground and below the ground. We also told them we rejected any notion that we might lease territory back to Israel, and that exchanges of territory had to be reciprocal. We reiterated the significance for us of the right of return and the release of all prisoners.

Though this encounter offered the opportunity for an exchange of views, it concluded with no agreement. In the afternoon the Palestinian and Israeli delegations moved to Gaza to meet again at Abu Ammar's offices. Shimon Peres opened the proceedings with a short statement, to which Abu Ammar responded.

Peres: We lost the 1996 elections because of violence. We must now, therefore, try to reduce the prevalent violence and narrow the gap between you and us. We would like to see a friendly and viable Palestinian state. This desire has been unwavering on our part, despite the occurrence of problems and difficulties: we should not permit these to prevent us from achieving our objective of coexistence as two peoples.

Abu Ammar: We must achieve something before President Clinton leaves the White House. We have little time before he leaves office. Although the task is daunting, we should continue to negotiate up until 20 January, when President Clinton comes to the end of his term. Then we shall enable President Clinton to say to his successor and also to the world, 'This is my plan. Continue what we have started, because the way ahead of you is already paved.'

Shlomo Ben Ami: We were surprised at this morning's meeting to find that a number of your queries on President Clinton's paper related to issues that Clinton does not raise. Because of the wide range of issues touched on in your observations, the accomplishment of anything within the remaining few days would be beyond the range of human capability.

Abu Ammar: Begin and Sadat put all the issues between them on the table at Camp David and still succeeded in reaching an agreement.

Ben Ami: Yes, but, there are much bigger differences between us than there were between them. We have to resolve the problems of Jerusalem, refugees, and security.

Peres: I suggest that we draw up a list of agreed issues and leave the controversial issues aside for later. We have to convince our two peoples that we are determined to persevere with this dialogue until we reach an agreement. You must also, Mr Chairman, impose iron discipline on security during the next three weeks.

Abu Ammar: We must do what is within our capacity, and do our utmost.

After these preliminaries, Peres and Abu Ammar held a closed session in private, which was visibly resented by Ben Ami, who did not want to be shut out of anything. Peres's relationship with Ben Ami and Sher, who were closer to Barak, was difficult. This reflected the strain between Barak and some of his ministerial colleagues. The problem was Barak's desire to maintain a monopoly over decision-making and the way in which he sidelined even senior ministers with whom he disagreed. Leading figures on the Israeli left often accused Barak of selfishness, expressing doubt regarding the viability of his tactics. His autocracy and what must be frankly called his egotism also caused concern.

For whatever reason, however, the talks held on this occasion, despite the sense of urgency, were again fruitless. Nevertheless, our anxiety to use the remaining few days of President Clinton's presidency to try to bridge the gap between us was undiminished. The meetings, though unproductive in themselves, were in effect the prelude to Taba. Further meetings were held in the following days. I met Ben Ami on some of these occasions, Peres on others, and held one meeting at my office with Gilad Sher.

On 18 January 2001, I met Peres and Avi Gil. Peres explained how he saw the resolution of the difficult issues, including Jerusalem and the refugees. He said that Barak would refuse to sign any agreement that would distance the Jews from the so-called Temple Mount (the Haram al-Sharif). He said Barak was starting to advocate a somewhat fanciful solution to the problem, under which Jerusalem would receive the new designation of 'the City of the Prophets'. The Secretary General of the United Nations would act as the head of this entity's municipal council, which should include among its members Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister,

in addition to others to be named at a later stage. As Peres put it, 'This is of course poetical rather than political discourse. However, regarding the refugees, we perceive in the right of return the downfall of Israel. For this reason, no Israeli Prime Minister could accept it.' I responded that the Palestinian position on Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif remained unchanged, as did the Palestinian position on the refugees. 'If there is a point of reference for these negotiations it is Madrid,' I said, 'and their subject matter and remit are firmly tied to international law. In addition, I hope we do not prejudge their outcome in an attempt to deal with the issues one by one.' The conversation then turned into general conversation about the prospects for the imminent Israeli elections and Barak's chances against the challenge of Sharon.

Later the same day we gathered yet again, this time in Israel, at the Carlton Hotel in Tel Aviv. I was accompanied by Yasser Abed Rabbo, Sa'eb Erekat, and Samih Al-Abed. The Israelis included Shlomo Ben Ami, Gilad Sher, General Yanai, Pini Meidan-Shani, and Gidi Grinstein. Ben Ami said Arafat had agreed that intensive talks should be held throughout the day on reducing violence. We all felt there was no way for progress to be made as long as violence continued. Ben Ami went on to discuss the proposed framework for the Taba talks. He called for negotiation along two tracks. The first of these would deal exclusively with the refugee issue in a big push to reach a solution. The second would cover all the other issues, with the objective of reaching a framework agreement (FAPS). 'We must work relentlessly to reach the framework agreement,' said Ben Ami, 'and must not lose hope that it will be within our powers.' At this meeting, I outlined the Palestinian position on the basic issues. Erekat then discussed the problem of the different interpretation of concepts between the Israelis and ourselves, particularly on security. He said we were finding no partner and no common aim. I intervened in order to fend off the hostile Israeli reaction, saying, 'We are partners at these negotiations.' Mohammed Dahlan did not attend this meeting, and I thought it was odd that in his absence General Shlomo Yanai accused Dahlan of not wanting to make a real contribution to any joint effort. One important step was taken that afternoon, when we settled on 21 January 2001 as the start of the Taba talks.

Shlomo Ben Ami and I picked the Taba Hilton as the venue for the talks for a number of reasons. We felt it would be better for serious negotiation to be held neither in Israel, nor in Palestine, but on neutral territory. We did not want to meet in the United States, as we felt that it would be a

bad omen to appear as if we were simply continuing Camp David. And though we had a good experience of meetings held in Europe, both of us felt it would be better to concentrate our minds by remaining in the region. We therefore decided to take up the offer already made by the Egyptian government to provide a venue on Egyptian territory. Egypt had never faltered in its efforts to promote and sustain the peace process and Palestinian national rights, but at the same time its peace treaty with Israel meant that it could present itself as neutral between the two sides.

The series of meetings, later to become known as 'the Taba talks', began on 21 January 2001 as planned and continued for six days. The results were better than ever previously in terms of the negotiation of final status issues. On the other hand, they remained incomplete, as time ran out for Israel. Because of the approaching elections, the Israeli delegation needed to go home to deal with pressing political concerns. In the aftermath of Taba, a paper was prepared by the European Union envoy in the Middle East, Ambassador Moratinos, which gives a comprehensive account of the negotiations and the remaining difference between the two sides. (Ambassador Moratinos's 'non-paper' on Taba may be found on the Internet, at www.mideastweb.org/moratinos.htm*).

I give below my own diary of the day-by-day progress of the talks.

Taba diaries

Day one: Sunday, 21 January 2001

The Palestinian delegation I headed at Taba included Yasser Abed Rabbo, Nabil Sha'ath, Sa'eb Erekat, Hassan Asfour, and Mohammed Dahlan. Our experts and advisers included Samih Al-Abed, Jad Ishaq, Khalil Tafakji, Omar Ghaith, Omar Dajani, Amr Al-Sakfali, Basil Jaber, and Bashar Juma'a. Shlomo Ben Ami headed the Israeli team and was accompanied by Yossi Beilin, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Gilad Sher, Shlomo Yanai, Israel Hassoun, Pini Meidan-Shani, and Gidi Grinstein, as well as a number of advisers. The first session was held at 9 a.m., at the Taba Hilton. The atmosphere was businesslike and earnest. All present were highly conscious of the need to make use of the short time available to reach the sought-after agreement. I opened the session as follows:

* This information was correct at the time of going to press.

Abu Ala: Basically, we are here to engage in serious discussions with the objective of agreeing a framework for an attempt to reach comprehensive agreement on the issues under examination. A comprehensive agreement will include the major issues crucial to a settlement. These are:

- 1) Territory, frontiers, and settlements
- 2) Jerusalem and the control of the holy places
- 3) The refugees
- 4) Water
- 5) Security and mutual security arrangements.

We do not begin from point zero. We have already made significant progress in negotiations in Jerusalem, Stockholm, Washington and afterwards at Camp David, followed by a multitude of other meetings. We therefore have a basis of talks and negotiations on which we can build.

Our view is that each of these issues must be resolved by building on what has been concluded at previous negotiations. Settlement on any of the issues, as and when reached, must include both the principle and the details of each of the issues in question, unambiguously and clearly stated and including the following elements:

- 1) The mechanism for implementation
- 2) The timetable for implementation
- 3) Maps and any other appropriate details
- 4) Such international guarantees as may be appropriate.

As regards our plan of work, we must decide together whether we intend to discuss all the issues in one committee or whether we need to set up separate committees to discuss each issue.

Finally, our view is that the starting point of these negotiations must be international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the Madrid conference, and that we should take into account such efforts as we have already made elsewhere.

Ben Ami: We also come in all seriousness, and we would like to say that whatever we agree here will be implemented. We are gathering at the end of ex-President Clinton's term of office, to build on what he left for

us. We believe he has constructed an equitable basis for the necessary effort, and it will be tragic if we fail to build on the foundation he has laid down, despite the reservations both parties have expressed regarding his ideas.

Abu Ala: President Clinton's proposals should be taken as one of the bases for these talks, but they are not the sole basis.

Ben Ami: They do, however, provide us with a convenient and reasonable position from which to continue the negotiations.

Abu Ala: We agreed with President Arafat to start work through two committees. One should deal with frontiers, territory, Jerusalem, settlements, and security, and the other should deal only with the issue of the refugees. In my view, however it would also be useful to have a separate committee on security, another that would deal with water, and perhaps further committees to deal with such remaining issues as the economy and economic cooperation.

In the event, we agreed to set up only the two committees originally proposed, one, dealing with all issues under discussion, to be jointly headed by myself and Shlomo Ben Ami, and the other dealing exclusively with refugees, under the chairmanship of Nabil Sha'ath and Yossi Beilin. The plan was for each committee to coordinate its work with a team of experts and technocrats from both sides in order to finalise the text of the agreement in detail. Almost immediately, within the broad-based committee, there was disagreement on how it should deal with its remit. There was also an immediate problem over maps. Shlomo Ben Ami attempted once more to pressure us into presenting our own map for comparison with that put forward by the Israelis. We refused to do so, however, until we could judge what direction the negotiations were taking.

Ben Ami: We have defined the territory we need and have put forward a map. So, why do you not produce a map of your own?

Abu Ala: You must propose a more reasonable map than this, which eats up Palestinian territory. In addition, we continue totally to reject your suggestion that you could lease further land from us.

Ben Ami: There are other issues we find difficult, such as President Clinton's suggestions for resolving the issue of the refugees.

Abu Ala: We also have observations on security, such as the early warning stations, the definition of emergencies, use of our air space, supervision of crossing points, international troops, roads, and the demilitarisation of the state, which Mohammed Dahlan will explain.

Dahlan: The most important element of the future relationship between the two states will be the struggle against terrorism. Do not seek to control us in this, but permit us to perform the task alone. There should be complete separation between Palestinians and Israelis to remove all friction between us. The separation of populations will give us a greater guarantee. The more our security overlaps, the more unstable the situation will be. This is an experience we have already had, and we should not repeat it. We may be in entire agreement on the principle of fighting terrorism, but there should be no joint action on the ground. Separation in security matters is the most important guarantee for us both. In relation to regional concerns, international or United Nations forces are the only answer to your requirements, especially as regards the frontiers and the Jordan Valley.

Regarding the early warning stations, we are committed to what Abu Ammar has proposed, together with the reservations we put forward at Camp David regarding the period for which they should be necessary. On the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the evacuation of settlements, you should need a maximum of no more than a year to complete the operation. On air space, your proposals would deprive us of sovereignty, as you would control our skies. In the field of civil aviation, it is possible that we could work together and agree to use our air space jointly. The issue of the nomenclature of the Palestinian security forces does not greatly concern you. We could agree on how such forces are armed. At all events, we need a state that can defend itself, but without a level of armaments that threatens Israel. Therefore, our demand is for a Palestinian state adequately armed for its own defence.

Ben Ami: I have some observations to make. I agree that the experience to which you have made reference should not be repeated. I am particularly

aware of this, owing to the confrontation through which we are living. We are aware how much the Palestinian civilian population suffers. What has been proposed, however, lacks consistency. On the one hand, you assert that our common aim is to fight terrorism. On the other hand, Israel's strategic requirements are not accommodated. We no longer worry that the Palestinian state may pose a threat to Israel.

When we talk about early warning stations, they are not directed against the Palestinian state. Nor do we imply we do not trust the Palestinian state. The whole issue relates only to external threats. Nor is Palestinian air space the target. The early warning stations are part of the agreement and will be subject to a review in ten years time. The three-year period proposed for the completion of withdrawal is only to do with reassuring our people about security. You must have noticed that the Jordan Valley is the basic element in Sharon's manifesto.

Day two: Monday, 22 January

This was a day devoted to maps. The Regional Affairs Committee met, with myself, Yasser Abed-Rabbo, Sa'eb Erekat, and Hassan Asfour on our side, and Shlomo Ben Ami, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, and Gilad Sher on the other. The Israelis put on the table a map of the settlement blocks, including Ariel, Jerusalem, and Kfar Etzion, together with 92 per cent of the occupied territory transferred to Palestinian sovereignty.

Abu Ala: (angrily) We are not prepared to discuss partial or old maps. Yesterday, you came up with a map for the Etzion Block. We are not prepared to discuss any maps that annex Palestinian towns or villages to Israel. In addition, the percentages of our territory that you want to take are unacceptable.

Sher: The map we are showing here relates to 73 per cent of the settlers, not 80 per cent. This means the future of 7 per cent is yet to be determined. In practical terms, we would be obliged to evacuate a minimum of ninety settlements in order to implement this map.

Abu Ala: (disapprovingly) Eighty per cent of the settlers could equally well go back to Israel, reside in Palestine under Palestinian jurisdiction, or get compensation. But if you insist that you want land and settlement blocks to house the 80 per cent, then the question would be, how much

territory do you want for this purpose? They could all be housed in fifty high-rise buildings, but you might come along and say you need thousands of hectares for them. That is why this theory is basically flawed.

There continued to be wide differences between us, and after a short discussion, we decided to invite other colleagues to participate in the talks. We also agreed to divide the Regional Affairs Committee into two, with a small drafting group. One group included Sa'eb Erekat and Mohammed Dahlan on one side, with Gilad Sher and Shlomo Yanai on the other. The other group, headed by me, included, Yasser Abed Rabbo, and Mohammed Dahlan, facing Shlomo Ben Ami, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and General Yanai for the Israelis. At lunch, we mingled with all the members of the Israeli delegation, continuing our conversations on an informal basis.

When the committees resumed their work, the discussions focused on security arrangements. General Yanai reviewed the security items on the agenda, such as the deployment of Israeli forces in an emergency, which meant in practice if there were a threat to Israel from the east. Ben Ami said the Israelis had in mind three small areas in the West Bank as emergency deployment bases. He also said Israel accepted the proposal included in President Clinton's proposals on the early warning stations, providing for the presence of a Palestinian liaison officer amongst the staff of the posts.

General Yanai: We differ in our views of demilitarisation. We cannot accept the presence of any military force other than our own west of the River Jordan. We have to make sure that the crossing points and your frontiers are under our control, so that no military equipment can enter Palestinian territory. We suggest that you cooperate with us in the monitoring operations. President Clinton suggested at Camp David that this item be implemented, which we have accepted.

We recognise that you will enjoy sovereignty over Palestinian air space when the state is established. At the same time, we need to use this air space for the practical operations of our air force. A military aircraft would need between two and three minutes to get from Amman to Israel's centres of population, which is a risk that we cannot take. However, fighting terrorism is not a difficult issue, nor is the question of joint operations on the border. President Clinton's suggestion here was that the Palestinians

and Israelis work with a third party, possibly Jordan, to provide joint frontier security. We both rejected that, but we do not know how the Palestinians would react to the involvement of some other party in this respect.

Dahlan: Six months after Camp David, we are now at the end of the game, not the beginning. Do not try to camouflage what is in reality a process of the usurpation of our rights on the pretext of maintaining security settlements, because we simply are not going to accept that. For us, these are all matters of sovereignty as well as of national and personal dignity.

It seemed to us at the end of the second day of the Taba talks that the Israelis were starting to retract what they had offered at Camp David. This emerged during the discussion of maps, borders, crossings, and related subjects. We simply stood our ground, waiting to see what further developments there might be in the few days that remained at Taba. At both committees, our team adamantly refused even to discuss any map annexing more than 4 per cent of our territory. We also refused to countenance any declaration that the conflict was at an end until after the signing of a comprehensive agreement covering all issues, and especially those of sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif and the Old City of Jerusalem. We also continued to insist that UN resolution 194 was the basis for the settlement of the refugee problem.

Day three: Tuesday, 23 January

As on the previous day, the focus was on maps, though this time our maps were presented. Cartographic experts on both sides played a major role.

Abu Ala: Yesterday, you presented an unacceptable map concerning which we have many observations. For instance, we were surprised to see that you intended to annex the Latrun salient. Who gave you that right? We also have a problem with your plans for Gush Etzion, Ariel, Ma'ale Adumim, and Giv'at Ze'ev. There is no possibility that we would agree to the annexation of Ma'ale Adumim, Giva'at Ze'ev, and Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa) to Israel. This must be absolutely clear.

Samih Al-Abed then presented our map showing our plans for all the settlements, including the periphery of Jerusalem comprising Rammun and Naveh Yaacov. The area allotted for settlements in our map was no larger than 2.5 per cent of the West Bank, to be exchanged for Israeli territory equal to it in quality and size. Gilad Sher objected to a number of the ideas and principles on which our map was based.

Sher: Before we study this map thoroughly, I would like to say that it covers all the publicly owned land in the Latrun area, which amounts to 46 square kilometres. This area is calculated twice. First you calculate the West Bank area without Latrun, and then you deduct Latrun from the final result. Moreover, your map fails to include some areas that are vital for Israel, such as Ma'ale Adumim and Giv'at Ze'ev. The area allocated in this map for annexation to Israel is 180 square kilometres, which is 2.5 per cent of the West Bank. We do not plan to annex 4.5 per cent, as you say. You include East Jerusalem as territory annexed from the West Bank area, though you are well aware of our position on that. Jerusalem cannot be taken into account when the West Bank area is calculated, whether for percentages or population. You are aware that our strategic interests and the settlements are unconnected. For settlement reasons, we have to annex a minimum of 650 square kilometres of the West Bank.

Further, your map provides for the evacuation of 130 settlements housing a minimum of between 100,000 and 120,000 settlers. But, you are well aware that the Americans accepted at Camp David that Israel wants to keep in place 80 per cent of its settlers, within a framework providing territorial continuity. You have now suggested the return of 60,000 settlers to Israel. This leaves a percentage that would not even require the 2.5 per cent of the occupied territory you are prepared to agree to. This map is not in accordance with President Clinton's proposals, nor can it be translated into practice on the ground. Settlements cannot be connected together 'in theory'. They have to be connected to one another in practice, as they at present are. Do you have a better map than this? This map is not acceptable. It does not allow us to accommodate 80 per cent of our settlers, and it does not provided continuity. Not does it take into account the leasing of territory. For this reason, it does not meet our needs.

Abu Ala: Jerusalem is historically part of the West Bank, and it is the capital of Palestine. Latrun is not yours. It is part of our land. We would

prefer to see all the settlements evacuated, but we have taken into account the status quo and President Clinton's proposals and have suggested what we believe to be reasonable. Ma'ale Adumim is choking us and preventing us from getting to Jerusalem from the east, and Giv'at Ze'ev closes off Jerusalem from the north. This we do not accept. We have requirements of our own, which is a legitimate consideration. We are unable to sympathise with the requirements of the settlers, nor do we accept them.

Meidan-Shani: We need a better map. We can wait until you are prepared to show us one. The 8 per cent we want could be made up of five areas that we annex to Israel, and three other areas on which we would take a long lease. Or we could annex six areas and lease two. Clinton's criteria strike the right balance between needs and interests, for both you and us.

Abed Rabbo: You have never shown us a serious map. Your latest map, the one we saw yesterday, indicates that your intention is to increase the annexed area to 13 per cent.

At our plenary session that evening, in which the members of the territorial, refugees and security committees participated, the discussion covered a wide range of issues.

Nabil Sha'ath and Yossi Beilin reported on the absence of progress achieved by the committee on refugees. Two highly controversial issues dominated the meeting of the territorial committee. These were the Haram al-Sharif and the principle of leasing territory. Other issues were the territorial exchanges, roads, territorial continuity, and settlements. In the field of security, we went over the disputes that had arisen over many issues, including the control and use of air space, and the proposed international force in the Jordan Valley. Among further issues we spoke of were the level of armaments appropriate to the Palestinian state, plans to combat terrorist activity, and the early warning stations. We also discussed possible future mechanisms of regional and economic cooperation, and water issues. Finally we came to the criteria for declaring the conflict at an end, and the related question of the release of prisoners.

On security, Mohammed Dahlan briefed us on his discussions with General Yanai. He reported that a timetable had been drawn up covering certain issues, all of which were requests made by Israel. Four points could be agreed: namely the presence of international troops, the disarmed status

of the Palestinian state, the need to suppress terrorism, and the early warning stations. He also remarked that agreement was within reach on security coordination at the regional and bilateral levels. Some issues, however, were not susceptible to agreement. These included Israeli bases in the Jordan Valley, air space, and the use of the electromagnetic spectrum. Each of these points was linked to the issue of sovereignty. They would also aggravate friction between the two sides, which nobody wanted. On air space, what General Yanai was effectively demanding was Israeli sovereignty in practice over Palestine's skies, which we could never accept.

On Tuesday 23 January, in the afternoon of the third day of the Taba talks, two Israeli civilians were killed in the West Bank town of Tulkarem. The talks in Taba were called off, and in protest at the incident, which Israel described as kidnap and assassination, Ehud Barak hastened to summon Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami back to Jerusalem, together with Justice Minister Yossi Beilin. Gilad Sher was also recalled to Jerusalem, while the other less senior Israeli negotiators crossed the border to Eilat. I began to consider our position, but the negotiations in any case looked likely to end before fulfilling any of the hopes pinned on them.

Day four: Wednesday, 24 January

In the event, in a swift intervention on the part of the Egyptians, General Mustafa Al-Biheiri, a senior Egyptian intelligence officer, arranged for us to meet the non-ministerial Israeli negotiators on the afternoon of 24 January, at a venue away from the Taba Hilton whose location was kept confidential. At this meeting Mohammed Dahlan and I met Gilad Sher, who had by now returned from Jerusalem, as well as Israel Hassoun and Pini Meidan-Shani. The objective was to attempt to keep the Taba talks afloat in the absence of the Israeli ministers. The Israelis made much of the consequences of failure for us both, but especially for the Palestinians. They threatened that the possibility of a Palestinian state might vanish for ever if we did not press on, and that the chance of a major historical achievement might become nothing more than an empty dream. I later made a statement condemning the deaths of the two Israeli civilians, in which I was also able to announce that as far as we were concerned the negotiations would continue.

We discussed the possibility of a summit between Barak and Abu Ammar, which might offer a last hope for success if we were unable to reach any conclusion in our own negotiations. Sweden was suggested as a possible

venue for such a summit, if agreed. Our deliberations over this proposed emergency summit led to the convening of a late evening plenary meeting when the senior negotiators returned, where we reviewed the progress of the previous few days and what we might do in the time left. Shlomo Ben Ami talked about security issues and expressed concern over media leaks, suggesting that we continue working through committees, including that on Jerusalem. He repeated that the Palestinian map failed to meet Clinton's criteria for security and stability, and objected once more to the inclusion of Latrun and Jerusalem. He went on, 'We are not here to engage in tactical skirmishes, but to reach an agreement that we can get our people to support.' Another dispute broke out over the extent of the territory to be annexed to Israel. Ben Ami reduced Israel's bid to 6.5 per cent while we increased our offer to 3 per cent, on condition that it was exchanged for territory of equal extent and quality.

At that point, Yossi Sarid, who had by this time joined us, said that he personally would be able to accept 3 per cent as a bargaining position, but that the Israeli government was in a difficult position.

Sarid: If I were to be realistic, I would say the difference between 3 per cent and 6.5 per cent is not hard to bridge. The only difficulty is that it is hard to please the settlers. Had we said a year and a half ago that Israel would evacuate an area of this extent, we would have stirred up a problem. But if we say now we are going to withdraw to that level, we would be able to do it. The difference between the two percentages could be seen as relatively unimportant. Although an outside observer might think it would be miraculous if we could agree, if we can work hard and make a greater effort it may not be beyond our grasp.

In conclusion, Ben Ami said, 'Our position on your map is that we cannot live with it. So it would be better for all of us to comply with Clinton's proposals.'

At the end of that day, I sent Abu Ammar a letter, summing up progress in the talks. In conclusion, I suggested that we should issue a joint communiqué on the Taba talks and their current situation. I continued to make a number of preliminary suggestions as to what form this might take. I quote here the text of my letter to President Arafat:

Greetings

After four days of serious negotiations covering the essential issues, we have been unable to bridge any of our differences.

On territory

In contrast to all previous maps they have produced, they presented a map showing the south with Palestinian territory fully contiguous and clear of settlements, and the north also contiguous and clear, with the two connected together through a central sector penetrated by the three settlement blocs. These are: 1) Ariel, an extensive area cutting into the Latrun salient and the neighbouring area of Modiin, including the villages of Imwas, Yalo, and Beit Nuba; 2) the Jerusalem sector of Ma'ale Adumim and its neighbouring settlements; and 3) the Giv'at Ze'ev bloc. Though we have contiguity thanks to this, these settlement blocks still distort the geography of our homeland and completely encircle Jerusalem. My proposal is that we devise an alternative to what was offered at Camp David, repeating our rejection of their annexation of Ma'ale Adumim and Giv'at Ze'ev. We hoped they would respond to this, but they returned with their position virtually unaltered, including the timetable.

On Jerusalem

The committee has discussed only limited issues and has accomplished nothing of significance.

On refugees

We have negotiated on the right of return, the mechanisms for compensation, the role of UNRWA, and other issues. I presented our Camp David paper, and for their part they presented a paper of their own. Although their latest paper was different from the one they put forward at Camp David, it continues to be unacceptable.

On security

Disagreement remains on those issues related to sovereignty. These include the so-called emergency positions in the Jordan Valley, as well as sovereignty over air space and the electromagnetic spectrum. Here also, we had anticipated they would return to us with responses on these issues, but they came back with virtually the

same positions and requested a declaration of principles. We believe their intention was to use this declaration in the imminent election campaign, regardless of the damage it could cause to our interests and to the negotiations.

Without commitment, we suggested that if an agreement should prove to be impossible, we should issue a statement that should read as follows:

Taba: a proposed joint communiqué:

'Israeli and the Palestinian delegations have held, over the last six days, serious, in-depth, and practical talks, with the objective of arriving at a permanent, lasting, and practical agreement between the two parties.

The Taba talks have been unique in their positive atmosphere and the shared will that has been shown to meet the requirements of national security, and the essential needs of both parties. However, in view of the circumstances and the constraints of time, it has not been possible to agree on all topics, in spite of the substantial progress made on all items on the agenda.

The two parties declare that they have never been closer to reaching an agreement. Therefore, we are both convinced that the remaining gaps can be bridged when negotiations are resumed after the Israeli elections.

The parties also pledge to return to normality and to a strong security situation on the ground, through mutual commitment and adherence to the spirit of the Camp David Memorandum.

The two negotiating teams discussed the four main issues, namely refugees, security and frontiers, Jerusalem, and settlements, with the objective of reaching a permanent agreement ending the conflict and bringing peace to both peoples. The two parties took into consideration the ideas put forward by President Clinton, together with explanations and qualifications by the parties. Substantial progress has been made on all issues mentioned above. Each party has shown comprehension to the position of the other, and in some instances these positions have been brought closer together.

As has been mentioned, the shortage of time has stood in the

way of the achievement of all the issues under discussion. However, in the light of the real progress that has been achieved in the area of bridging the gaps between the two sides, both parties are confident. There is the possibility that a comprehensive peace agreement on the final status can be reached within a short space of time, if the necessary effort is made and if the urgent need for such an agreement is acknowledged. Both parties are therefore confident that this process will be continued as soon as this is practically possible.

The Taba talks have marked the end of a profound and protracted phase of the negotiations on final status between Israel and the Palestinians, during which the two parties have striven to re-establish trust between them. Both parties agree that they have never been closer than they are today to reaching an agreement. We leave Taba with hope and with a feeling of mutual achievement in laying the foundations necessary to rebuild trust and proceed with the essential matters related to all the basic issues.

The two parties would like to thank President Husni Mubarak of Egypt for hosting the talks, and would also like to thank the European Union for supporting them.

Day five: Thursday, 25 January

The day was devoted to issues connected with Jerusalem. Discussions on Jerusalem had already been under way for a few days, at the level of a sub-committee made up of Sa'eb Erekat and Gilad Sher. On this particular day, however, we held a session in which I was supported by Yasser Abed Rabbo, Sa'eb Erekat, Hassan Asfour, Mohammed Dahlan, Khaleel Tafakji, and Omar Al-Aqqad. On the other side of the table were Shlomo Ben Ami, Yossi Sarid, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Gilad Sher, and others. The Israelis started the meeting by reminding us of President Clinton's proposals, but suggested that either party might suggest ideas of its own. I hastened to enquire what Israel's plans were concerning compensation for Palestinian property in West Jerusalem. I also expressed my support for the principle of an undivided Jerusalem, with both East and West open to both Palestinians and Israelis. Shlomo Ben Ami affected to be outraged by this suggestion, which he had heard many times before.

Ben Ami: We are looking for solutions!

Abu Ala: If you do not agree that Jerusalem should in its entirety be an open city, then you must recognise East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. In this case the Palestinian state will exercise total sovereignty over it, in the same manner as any country in the world exercises sovereignty over its own capital. We would then be obliged to exercise passport control over all wishing to enter our areas.

Ben Ami: Because of half a neighbourhood in the Old City, you rejected President Clinton's proposals at Camp David.

Abu Ala: To us, this is Jerusalem. It is sacred to Arabs, to Muslims all over the world, and to the world's Christians. Therefore, we want Palestinian sovereignty over it and over the locality of Mount Olives and the Tombs of Prophets, as well as what you call the Holy Basin. But we will offer access to visitors.

Sarid: We cannot bear the burden of negotiation on our own, and neither can you. If you expect all the concessions needed to reach a solution to come from us, then I think our task will be impossible. We have to share the burden.

Ben Ami: We were close to each other on Jerusalem, basically and in broad terms, though sovereignty continued to be a key issue, particularly over the Armenian quarter and the Holy Basin. You must acknowledge our spiritual link to places that are the most sensitive in Jewish history. Even the secularists among us are unable to accept or understand any agreement that does not provide for the Mount of Olives to be part of Jerusalem.

Abu Ala: We made huge concessions at Oslo. We gave up all claims to the territory that was occupied by Israel before 4 June 1967 including West Jerusalem and accepted UN Security Council resolution 242. Today, we cannot discuss any further issues before agreeing on sovereignty over Jerusalem.

Sa'eb Erekat:

I discussed Jerusalem with Gilad Sher and Israel Hassoun, on the basis of a territorial definition of East Jerusalem as it was in 1967. You, on the other hand, want to talk about East Jerusalem as it is now, with the

settlements as part of it. In other words, Israel is looking at a 'greater Jerusalem'. We believe that there should be no problem for Palestinian sovereignty within the boundaries of East Jerusalem as we see it, and we have started to discuss measures to provide continuity between both parts of the city. Our position is that we will accept planning and regulation in Jerusalem, as long as they do not contradict our principles. We would also like the two parts of the city to be mutually open to movement. We suggest the following principles as guidelines for our work:

- 1) East Jerusalem is a part of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.
- 2) Settlements in Jerusalem are to be viewed as part of Israel's settlement activity.
- 3) The holy places of the three religions are to be respected.
- 4) The Haram al-Sharif will be under Palestinian sovereignty.

Ben Ami: I believe we went a long way in this direction in our talks at Andrews Air Force Base, before we began the talks at Camp David. I also recall that we discussed various understandings, including one that was not based solely on the existence of an 'East' and a 'West' Jerusalem, but recognised the Jewish areas in East Jerusalem. This is compatible with what Sa'eb has talked about. If you insist on defining as settlements the Jewish areas in Jerusalem and around West Jerusalem, such as Naveh Yaacov and Gilo, then discussion between us will cease. If you want to raise issues, they should be confined to the boundaries of East Jerusalem, and if you agree to include the issue of the settlements within that, then I am not worried. But, if you want to assimilate the Jerusalem settlements to the rest of the settlements and talk about them on the same basis, we will have a problem. The Holy Basin, to us, includes the Temple Mount, the Wailing Wall (the Western Wall), the Mount of Olives, as well as other places in that zone. We need to define the differences between our positions, so that we can determine how far we have gone. Regarding the Temple Mount, you want sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif while accepting our sovereignty over the Wailing Wall, which is the part of the Western Wall that is within the Temple Mount complex. This is our position and we want to know your view of it.

Abu Ala: There is no such a thing as the 'Holy Basin'. To us, all of Jerusalem is sacred. In the word of God, praise be to Him, we read, 'the Aqsa Mosque, which is blessed all around'. It is sacred to us, both to the Muslims and the Christians. We therefore reject your concept of the 'Holy Basin'.

Erekat: At Camp David, Gilad Sher said that the term 'Holy Basin' refers to the Jewish quarter and to the Wailing Wall. But, I never heard any talk of this 'Western Wall' at Camp David.

Sher: The Western Wall is the Wailing Wall. The Holy Basin includes the Old City within its walls, the Muslim Cemetery, the Garden of Gethsemane, the churches, the Jewish Cemetery, King David's City (Silwan), and the Mount of Olives.

Gilad Sher then presented a map of Jerusalem with which he demonstrated his concept of the 'Holy Basin'. He proposed that sovereignty over the Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City should be Palestinian, in return for Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish quarter and the Armenian quarter. In the course of discussion, he offered to restrict Israeli sovereignty over half the Armenian quarter. We rejected this, continuing to insist on having Palestinian sovereignty over the whole of the Armenian quarter, the Islamic Cemetery, Mount Olives, Silwan, the Omayyad Antiques Park, and the Rababah Valley, which was regarded as a no man's land until 1967.

Sarid: It is conceivable that we could make some concessions in the Old City and in the Holy Basin. But, do you expect the Israelis to be the only ones to make concessions? We have to share this burden.

Ben Ami: I add to what Yossi Sarid has said, namely that we have gone a considerable way on Jerusalem. It is important to acknowledge that we have all made significant efforts here. Sovereignty is the basic issue, however, and we cannot acknowledge that all the areas you refer to are Palestinian. I feel that we have discussed Jerusalem today like we have never done before. We do not want to remain prisoners of our own positions. We wish to see if there is a possibility to make a move. If we want to achieve a breakthrough, we have to consider what we could really achieve. What is holy to the Jews is not just the holy places, but also the areas around

them, as well. Even secular Israelis believe that, and Israeli public opinion believes that the so-called King David's City is part of the Holy Basin.

At the end of Thursday, the issue of the ongoing violence between Palestinians and Israelis at home caused us some difficulty, and we spent the evening consulting among ourselves about how to continue, while the Israelis did likewise.

Day six: Friday, 26 January

We nevertheless returned to the table on Friday to discuss the core issues. We sat together for four hours on Friday morning, and continued to talk informally over lunch. There had begun to be a general feeling that time was running out, with the Israeli elections due on 6 February. A worrying factor was that Sharon had begun to threaten that he would not honour any deal made at Taba by the Palestinians and Ehud Barak's government. I made statement to a CNN reporter as follows: 'I think it is very difficult to reach an agreement in the time left. We might end this negotiation at a certain point that keeps the momentum until after the election. We do still have time.' Yossi Sarid emphasised to the media that we were, as he put it, 'making a very serious effort to achieve as much as possible'.

After lunch on Friday, the Israelis crossed the frontier to the Israeli town of Eilat, ahead of the Jewish Sabbath, which they wished to celebrate on Israeli territory. We travelled with the Israelis to Eilat, to continue talking to them over their Sabbath dinner, which we shared with them at Eilat's Princess Hotel while engaging in an informal conversation about the issues.

Day seven: Saturday, 27 January

We continued talking informally at Eilat on Saturday morning, notwithstanding the Sabbath, which restricted the movement of the Israelis until sunset. After sunset, we returned together to Taba. By this time, it was clear that there would be no agreement, but nonetheless we felt progress had been made, even if this consisted mainly of keeping channels open between the two sides. We should have issued a closing communiqué summarising what had been agreed upon at Taba; but, owing to the width of the gap between us concerning many of the basic issues, we contented ourselves with a joint press conference held by Shlomo Ben

Ami and myself, at which a brief statement was provided, of which I give the text below:

The Israeli and Palestinian delegations conducted during the last six days serious, deep and practical talks with the aim of reaching a permanent and stable agreement between the two parties.

The Taba talks were unprecedented in their positive atmosphere and expression of mutual willingness to meet the national, security and existential needs of each side.

Given the circumstances and time constraints, it proved impossible to reach understandings on all issues, despite the substantial progress that was achieved in each of the issues discussed.

The sides declare that they have never been closer to reaching an agreement and it is thus our shared belief that the remaining gaps could be bridged with the resumption of negotiations following the Israeli elections.

The two sides take upon themselves to return to normalcy and to establish a security situation on the ground through the observation of their mutual commitments in the spirit of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.

The negotiation teams discussed four main themes: refugees, security, borders and Jerusalem, with the goal of reaching a permanent agreement that will bring an end to the conflict between them and provide peace to both peoples.

The two sides took into account the ideas suggested by President Clinton together with their respective qualifications and reservations.

On all these issues there was substantial progress in the understanding of the other side's positions and in some of them the two sides grew closer.

As stated above, the political timetable prevented reaching an agreement on all the issues.

However, in light of the significant progress in narrowing the differences between the sides, the two sides are convinced that in a short period of time and given an intensive effort and the acknowledgment of the essential and urgent nature of reaching an agreement, it will be possible to bridge the differences remaining and attain a permanent settlement of peace between them.

In this respect, the two sides are confident that they can begin and move forward in this process at the earliest practical opportunity.

The Taba talks conclude an extensive phase in the Israeli–Palestinian permanent status negotiations with a sense of having succeeded in rebuilding trust between the sides and with the notion that they were never closer in reaching an agreement between them than today.

We leave Taba in a spirit of hope and mutual achievement, acknowledging that the foundations have been laid both in re-establishing mutual confidence and in having progressed in a substantive engagement on all core issues.

The two sides express their gratitude to President Husni Mubarak for hosting and facilitating these talks.

They also express their thanks to the European Union for its role in supporting the talks.

Shlomo and I then gave short briefings, and each made statements. Below is the text of what I said, as recorded by the microphones of CNN:

First of all, I'm happy to express my thanks to fraternal Egypt for hosting these important negotiations, which we all believe have been the most important phase of negotiations on the final status. I would also like to express my thanks to the European Community and to Mr Moratinos, who has been with us during this phase of negotiations and who has done very constructive work in pushing the negotiations forward and in trying to help us reach an agreement.

What I'm going to say is not going to be a big surprise. I would say that we have spent six days in a very serious and genuine effort, during which we have examined and discussed the four points that we agreed were the key issues for a settlement. These are territory, frontiers, Jerusalem, and the issues of refugees and security.

I can say that we have managed to achieve two major important things. First, we have removed much ambiguity about our positions and the way that we are now capable of working as negotiators. Our leadership can reach decisions with greater clarity on the issues in question today. Second, there have been issues that we have addressed for the first time in such a detailed manner. For

instance, on the question of territory, we have held in-depth and highly detailed negotiations at the level of the chairmen of the two delegations. In addition, there has been very detailed discussion between the technical experts from both sides. It was an unprecedented move by both sides to discuss matters in such a detailed manner.

On the question of Jerusalem, all the relevant issues were addressed. The issues relevant to the Palestinian refugees were also discussed, including both the principle of the right of return and other issues related to the question of the refugees. Similarly we have addressed the issues with regard to security. I can therefore say positively that all of these issues have been discussed comprehensively and in detail.

No doubt, there have been gaps in our discussions. I cannot say these problems were easy, because the questions themselves that are being addressed are not easy. They are in fact difficult. The outstanding gaps are certainly difficult.

Undoubtedly, we hope that these serious negotiations that we have held will reflect positively on the question of trust between the two sides that has been disrupted as a result of the violent events that we have witnessed recently. We hope they will help to restore the confidence between the two sides to the level it was at before these events broke out. We also hope they will help to put an end to what I call aggression against the Palestinian people, so we can move forward and continue towards the end of this process, by which we hope to achieve the goals to which we aspire.

Unfortunately, the period that separates us from today until the elections in Israel is short and will not allow us to complete the work that we have started. However, we do hope that we can resume our efforts after the elections to finish what we have begun. What we are doing here – and I hope my Israeli partners will allow me to say this – is not a conversation between Shlomo Ben Ami and Abu Ala, or between Yasser Abed Rabbo and Yossi Beilin. It is being conducted between the Government of Israel on the one hand, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Palestinian National Authority on the other. Whatever outcome comes out of these negotiations is therefore binding for both sides, so that in due course

the two sides can resume the talks from the point that we ended them today.

I therefore repeat that we have been engaged in a serious endeavour, and we anticipate that it will not be long until we can once more meet to resume our efforts. Our goal is to reach peace and stability and to achieve the national rights of our people, with peace for both sides.

We then opened the briefing to journalists for questions. Each of us, in our different formulations, had emphasised that the two sides were closer than ever to reaching agreement. In reply to a question on refugees by an Israeli journalist, I stressed that the Palestinian position was that 'return is a sacred right, on the basis of UN resolution 194'. At the end of the press conference, the Israelis offered to take us back to Gaza by helicopter, but we declined and made our own way back by car. As with other negotiating sessions, the moment when the talks ended was a time when we wished to be on our own, and there was also the risk of adverse comment, if we arrived in Gaza in an Israeli helicopter. Nothing had come of the suggestion of a summit meeting between Abu Ammar and Ehud Barak, which could have been held in the margins of the annual meeting of the world's political leaders and leading economic figures at the Davos Forum in Switzerland. In fact, Abu Ammar gave an address at Davos in which he was harshly critical of Israel, in the wake of which Barak reportedly decided that he saw no point in continuing the negotiations with the Palestinian side until after the imminent Israeli elections. Further talks were therefore ruled out.

We left Taba on Sunday 28 January. Although our areas of agreement were limited, they were nevertheless more significant and wider than at any previous post-Oslo negotiation, including Camp David. On the exchange of territory, for example, we suggested this should cover between 2 and 3 per cent of the area of the West Bank, while the Israelis reduced their demand to between 4 and 6 per cent. Regarding the maps, we held the first serious discussion by specialists from both sides on technical details. Our position was that areas on the maps where land could be exchanged had to be specified before discussing the percentages of land subject to exchange, whereas they demanded that the percentage be defined in advance with the area left undefined. At one point, Yossi Sarid said that if progress were to be made on Jerusalem, it would be possible to make

progress on land exchange and other issues. In fact, Sarid suggested that two or three experts on either side should secretly continue discussing the details of these matters until the imminent Israeli elections.

Regarding the timetable for Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories, we suggested that the process be completed within a maximum of eighteen months, whereas the Israelis still asked for three years. We were keen on the establishment of a mechanism for withdrawal under international supervision. On armaments, it was agreed that the Palestinian state would possess limited arms that would not threaten Israel's security. However, disagreement remained deep and wide on the central issues, particularly Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif, as well as on refugees. I recall that that Yossi Sarid, who seemed to be the Israeli negotiator most eager to reach an agreement, said on the final day of the Taba talks that he believed the Jerusalem issue and that of the Haram al-Sharif could be settled after the imminent Israeli elections. Shlomo Ben Ami suggested that we put the hard issues on the negotiating table and give priority to the Haram al-Sharif, placing it under Muslim sovereignty and confiding its administration to the Palestinians for a period of possibly three years.

In a brief summary I wrote for Abu Ammar immediately following the close of the Taba talks, I reported that the negotiations had continued for six days between two high-level and responsible delegations. Each had come with authorisation from its respective leadership and had come with the intention of reaching an agreement. I reported that the talks had duly covered the four principal and central issues that represented the key to a resolution of the conflict. These were 1) territory and frontiers; 2) Jerusalem; 3) security; 4) the refugees.

My report was as follows:

Territory and frontiers

The Israelis presented a map suggesting a 6 per cent land swap, with geographical continuity for us in the West Bank. The eastern borders of the Palestinian state were those of the Jordan River. The territorial exchange proposed as defined in the Israeli map consisted of the Ariel Settlement, Efrat and Gush Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim Area and Giv'at Ze'ev, as well as the Latrun Area. Palestinian and Israeli experts undertook detailed scrutiny of the map, in an effort to challenge the Israeli position on land. We rejected the idea of 'leasing'. We consider that any exchanges should be on a one-for-one basis.

Jerusalem

We talked only about the so-called 'Holy Basin'. We totally rejected this concept. On the Haram al-Sharif, they offered two proposals. The first of these was full Palestinian sovereignty, with a proviso that we would agree to undertake no archaeological excavation due to the existence of Jewish holy sites underground. We rejected the strict prohibition on excavation. The second proposal was the idea of transitional sovereignty exercised by a number of Muslim countries, later to be transferred to the State of Palestine. (NB: if sovereignty is to be transferred automatically to the State of Palestine after a transitional period we would have no objection. However, if this were to be subject to later renegotiation, then we would reject this idea.)

Further issues under discussion

We rejected Israeli military outposts in the Jordan Valley for emergency use, which has been the Palestinian position since Camp David. We raised no objection to early warning stations, provided there would be an international and a Palestinian presence. On air space, they demanded Israeli control, which we rejected on the grounds of infringement of our sovereignty. On armaments, they put forward their customary stipulation that the Palestinian state should be demilitarised. We said we required limited armament.

Refugees

Our position was that a Palestinian right of return is fundamental. This is a red line for us, without which there can be no agreement. They rejected the right of return as it would destroy Israel. They also argued that no other state demands the right of return for its people to a third country. We also discussed compensation and responsibility for the tragedy of the refugees, and the role of UNRWA. Important as these issues are, they remain matters of secondary importance until agreement is reached on the right of return. (Agreement may be possible if we talk to the same Israeli negotiators in the future and if we resume from where we left off. Otherwise, God help us.)

Abu Ala, 30 January 2001

Progress made at Taba

With mature reflection, I would say the progress made at Taba was as follows:

- 1) The two parties agreed to regard the 4 June 1967 frontiers as the basis of the frontiers between Israel and the Palestinian state.
- 2) The Israelis agreed that any territorial annexation in the West Bank would be within the framework of an exchange against similar Israeli territory. However, disagreement remained on the percentage of land proposed for annexation and exchange.
- 3) Israel agreed that Gaza Strip would be entirely under Palestinian sovereignty with no settlements, and that the Palestinian state in the West Bank would contain no settlements after territorial adjustments had been made.
- 4) The two parties agreed to establish a safe corridor extending from Beit Hanun in northern Gaza Strip to the boundaries of Al-Khaleel (Hebron).
- 5) The two parties agreed that the Arab neighbourhoods of Jerusalem should come under Palestinian sovereignty, whereas the Jewish neighbourhoods would be under Israeli sovereignty, in conformity with what was agreed at Camp David. We also agreed that Jerusalem would be an open city and the capital of two independent states.
- 6) Despite disagreement over the issue of the refugees, some progress was made in this connection. The Israelis accepted that there should be a fair settlement of the refugee issue, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution 242, and in a manner that would lead to the implementation of the UN General Assembly resolution 194.
- 7) Israel agreed that the Palestinian state should have sovereignty over its skies and that Palestinian rights in the field of civil aviation would be observed. Israel also acknowledged Palestinian sovereign rights over use of the electromagnetic spectrum within the territory of the Palestinian state.
- 8) The parties agreed that the eastern border between the West Bank and Jordan should be in its entirety the border of the Palestinian state. However, disagreement remained over the length of time allotted for Israeli withdrawal from Jordan Valley.

- 9) Israel agreed to devise protocols under which an international presence might be established in the Jordan Valley, and at the early warning stations, in such a way as would satisfy the needs and concerns of both sides.
- 10) Israel agreed that the frontier crossings should be under Palestinian sovereignty, on condition that the problem of observation and verification at such crossings was resolved through an international presence, or a similar measure.

The Palestinian delegation

It must be admitted that the Palestinian delegation went to the Taba Hilton in haste, without having made sufficient preparation. We had not constructed a clear vision of what we hoped to get from this round of talks, held when Ehud Barak's outgoing government was clearly at its last gasp. We had no negotiating strategy agreed in advance by the highest levels of our leadership. I have mentioned that Abu Ammar, when I asked him what he hoped to achieve from the talks, gave me *carte blanche*, saying, 'I will accept whatever you agree to.' I would like it to be clear that we were aware of our shortcomings. A further problem was that within our negotiating team, all of us took different and sometimes contradictory views of the current situation and what our objective should be. One thing I would like to underline, however, is that Abu Ammar, though Barak afterwards always blamed him for the failure at Taba, was in fact very keen on clinching any agreement that might enable him to realise his old dream of an independent Palestinian state.

Despite the less than perfect state of preparation of the Palestinians, it was noteworthy that all the international participants concerned took an intense interest in the Taba talks, so much so that they seemed almost more committed than were the two principal delegations themselves. The European Middle East envoy, Miguel Moratinos, was present, together with a number of his staff. The European team compiled the summary of the talks to which I have referred, which could have served as a basis for the resumption of the talks. The United Nations Middle East envoy, Terje Rød-Larsen, a doughty peace campaigner from the days of Oslo, was also at Taba. He observed the negotiations and did what he could to encourage the negotiators, most of whom he already personally knew.

No American official attended, as President George W. Bush had just taken over from President Clinton, whose staff had immediately dispersed, in the way of American administrations, which are very personal to the president they serve.

Postscript

Perhaps what concerns me most, as I conclude this account, is to put on record a number of my own observations about what went wrong at Camp David and at Taba, and at all the other rounds of talks that took place in those years.

- 1) Many people had counted on Ehud Barak to push the peace process forward, since he was an ideological opponent of Binyamin Netanyahu, who had taken an extreme right-wing stance. Barak, however, disappointed many Israelis, including a number of his own ministers and aides. He also disappointed many Palestinians who had invested much in their hopes of him as a peacemaker, and who had never hesitated to support his election campaign in whatever way they could. They initially saw in him a legitimate heir of Yitzhak Rabin. In his election campaign, he made many statements that were met by the Palestinians with acclaim. He told his Likud opponents that he would act differently. In the event, however, he failed to implement agreements with the Palestinians, including those he made himself, just as Netanyahu had done. The difference between Barak and his predecessor, Binyamin Netanyahu, was in the end not great.
- 2) Camp David was a failure. It has been described as an extemporised exercise in negotiation, because of its lack of forethought. It ended by negating the understandings and modest progress achieved at Stockholm and the other Middle East negotiations that had preceded it. Beginning with the Oslo negotiations, these had demonstrated that the method of confidential bilateral talks, away from the watchful eye of the media and free from leaks, was a viable negotiating technique. Such talks were more fruitful than negotiations that took place under open scrutiny, even in

the presence of a third party, and even if that party presented itself as an honest broker. The United States, acting as a third party, was always too keen to achieve success at any price, with the result that pressure was always exercised on the weaker of the two negotiating parties, namely the Palestinians. The goal was to get us to drop our objections to so-called compromises, which were always at the expense of our vital interests.

- 3) Barak's oft-repeated claim that he made a generous offer at Camp David was no more than a systematic propaganda campaign intended to dissociate Israel from the responsibility for failure. It was also meant to call into question the truthfulness of the Palestinian negotiators, as we continued to deny that Barak made any kind of offer at Camp David. In fact, proposals were made to us by the Americans that the Israelis were never under any obligation to fulfil.
- 4) Barak's reluctance to embrace the possibility of a positive outcome at Taba was an indication of the degree to which he was alienated from his own negotiating team, made up of his senior ministers and aides. These negotiators worked hard for a positive result, and towards the end showed great interest in putting on record a partial agreement that could have paved the way for possible future negotiations with Likud. It is conceivable that such talks could have taken place, had there been a basis for them, despite the questions raised by Likud over the legitimacy of holding the Taba talks during the election campaign.
- 5) Barak's attack on our Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, when he described Arafat as an obstacle to peace, foreshadowed an even fiercer onslaught by Ariel Sharon when he came to power. Sharon and George W. Bush between them deemed Yasser Arafat to be irrelevant to the peace process, and decided it would be preferable to marginalise him politically, or even to eliminate him physically, as a precondition for the resumption of talks with a new Palestinian leadership. That draconian decision was blatantly obvious in the siege that was laid to Arafat's headquarters and the threats that were made to kill him, deport him, or attempt to impose an international embargo on him.
- 6) Each Palestinian negotiator, both at Camp David and at Taba, had his own personal agenda and made his own calculations, which

sometimes contradicted those of other members. This amounted to a self-imposed handicap that made it impossible to make adequate progress at either venue.

No doubt there will be room for alternative views and interpretations about this long process of negotiation. However, I would like to say in conclusion that, in my view, the Palestinian leadership never throughout this period neglected any chance to make peace, whatever our shortcomings. All our efforts were based on two principles. The first of these was our inalienable right to put an end to occupation in all its forms and manifestations, and establish an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The second was that there must be a settlement, in a manner satisfactory to us, of all matters relating to the final status and the permanent resolution of the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel, including the status of Jerusalem, the future of the refugees, and all other key issues. In this light, what may have looked to outsiders to be a wasted opportunity at Camp David and after was in reality worse still: it was a mere phantasm, as no satisfactory solution was ever on offer.

Today, much time has passed since Taba, and yet more blood has been shed on both sides of the conflict. The moment has come for me to pay tribute to my late brother Abu Ammar, President Yasser Arafat. Abu Ammar was not well understood by some parties and powers, and in certain capitals, and was subject to a malicious smear campaign, which presented him as an obstacle to peace. The reality was quite otherwise. In fact, he was the principal source of the momentum and determination of the unrelenting Palestinian effort to achieve a satisfactory peace. His goal was always no more and no less than the establishment of the Palestinian state to which he had dedicated his life. In due course the Israelis may come to rue the absence of the Palestinian leader historically best qualified to make peace and to sign a historic peace agreement. His courage, and the admiration he inspired amongst his people, made him the leader most able to sign such a crucial document on behalf of all the Palestinians.

APPENDIX 1

THE WYE RIVER MEMORANDUM

Palestine, Politics, 24 October 1998

The following are steps to facilitate implementation of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of September 28, 1995 (the 'Interim Agreement') and other related agreements including the Note for the Record of January 17, 1997 (hereinafter referred to as 'the prior agreements') so that the Israeli and Palestinian sides can more effectively carry out their reciprocal responsibilities, including those relating to further redeployments and security respectively. These steps are to be carried out in a parallel phased approach in accordance with this Memorandum and the attached time line. They are subject to the relevant terms and conditions of the prior agreements and do not supersede their other requirements.

I. FURTHER REDEPLOYMENTS

A. Phase One and Two Further Redeployments

1. Pursuant to the Interim Agreement and subsequent agreements, the Israeli side's implementation of the first and second F.R.D. will consist of the transfer to the Palestinian side of 13% from Area C as follows:

1% to Area (A) 12% to Area (B)

The Palestinian side has informed that it will allocate an area/areas amounting to 3% from the above Area (B) to be designated as Green Areas and/or Nature Reserves. The Palestinian side has further informed that they will act according to the established scientific standards, and

that therefore there will be no changes in the status of these areas, without prejudice to the rights of the existing inhabitants in these areas including Bedouins; while these standards do not allow new construction in these areas, existing roads and buildings may be maintained.

The Israeli side will retain in these Green Areas/Nature Reserves the overriding security responsibility for the purpose of protecting Israelis and confronting the threat of terrorism. Activities and movements of the Palestinian Police forces may be carried out after coordination and confirmation; the Israeli side will respond to such requests expeditiously.

2. As part of the foregoing implementation of the first and second F.R.D., 14.2% from Area (B) will become Area (A).

B. Third Phase of Further Redeployments

With regard to the terms of the Interim Agreement and of Secretary Christopher's letters to the two sides of January 17, 1997 relating to the further redeployment process, there will be a committee to address this question. The United States will be briefed regularly.

II. SECURITY

In the provisions on security arrangements of the Interim Agreement, the Palestinian side agreed to take all measures necessary in order to prevent acts of terrorism, crime and hostilities directed against the Israeli side, against individuals falling under the Israeli side's authority and against their property, just as the Israeli side agreed to take all measures necessary in order to prevent acts of terrorism, crime and hostilities directed against the Palestinian side, against individuals falling under the Palestinian side's authority and against their property. The two sides also agreed to take legal measures against offenders within their jurisdiction and to prevent incitement against each other by any organizations, groups or individuals within their jurisdiction.

Both sides recognize that it is in their vital interests to combat terrorism and fight violence in accordance with Annex I of the Interim Agreement and the Note for the Record. They also recognize that the struggle against terror and violence must be comprehensive in that it deals with terrorists,

the terror support structure, and the environment conducive to the support of terror. It must be continuous and constant over a long-term, in that there can be no pauses in the work against terrorists and their structure. It must be cooperative in that no effort can be fully effective without Israeli-Palestinian cooperation and the continuous exchange of information, concepts, and actions.

Pursuant to the prior agreements, the Palestinian side's implementation of its responsibilities for security, security cooperation, and other issues will be as detailed below during the time periods specified in the attached time line:

A. Security Actions

1. Outlawing and Combating Terrorist Organizations

(a) The Palestinian side will make known its policy of zero tolerance for terror and violence against both sides.

(b) A work plan developed by the Palestinian side will be shared with the U.S. and thereafter implementation will begin immediately to ensure the systematic and effective combat of terrorist organizations and their infrastructure.

(c) In addition to the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, a U.S.-Palestinian committee will meet biweekly to review the steps being taken to eliminate terrorists calls and the support structure that plans, finances, supplies and abets terror. In these meetings, the Palestinian side will inform the U.S. fully of the actions it has taken to outlaw all organizations (or wings of organizations, as appropriate) of a military, terrorist or violent character and their support structure and to prevent them from operating in areas under its jurisdiction.

(d) The Palestinian side will apprehend the specific individuals suspected of perpetrating acts of violence and terror for the purpose of further investigation, and prosecution and punishment of all persons involved in acts of violence and terror.

(e) A U.S.-Palestinian committee will meet to review and evaluate

information pertinent to the decisions on prosecution, punishment or other legal measures which affect the status of individuals suspected of abetting or perpetrating acts of violence and terror.

2. Prohibiting Illegal Weapons

(a) The Palestinian side will ensure an effective legal framework is in place to criminalize, in conformity with the prior agreements, any importation, manufacturing or unlicensed sale, acquisition or possession of firearms, ammunition or weapons in areas under Palestinian jurisdiction.

(b) In addition, the Palestinian side will establish and vigorously and continuously implement a systematic program for the collection and appropriate handling of all such illegal items in accordance with the prior agreements. The U.S. has agreed to assist in carrying out this program.

(c) A U.S.-Palestinian-Israeli committee will be established to assist and enhance cooperation in preventing the smuggling or other unauthorized introduction of weapons or explosive materials into areas under Palestinian jurisdiction.

3. Prevention of Incitement

(a) Drawing on relevant international practice and pursuant to Article XXII (1) of the Interim Agreement and the Note for the Record, the Palestinian side will issue a decree prohibiting all forms of incitement to violence or terror, and establishing mechanisms for acting systematically against all expressions or threats of violence or terror. This decree will be comparable to the existing Israeli legislation which deals with the same subject.

(b) A U.S.-Palestinian-Israeli committee will meet on a regular basis to monitor cases of possible incitement to violence or terror and to make recommendations and reports on how to prevent such incitement. The Israeli, Palestinian and U.S. sides will each appoint a media, specialist, a law enforcement representative, an educational specialist and a current or former elected official to the committee.

B. Security Cooperation

The two sides agree that their security cooperation will be based on a spirit of partnership and will include, among other things, the following steps:

i. Bilateral Cooperation

There will be full bilateral security cooperation between the two sides which will be continuous, intensive and comprehensive.

ii. Forensic Cooperation

There will be an exchange of forensic expertise, training, and other assistance.

iii. Trilateral Committee

In addition to the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, a high-ranking U.S.-Palestinian-Israeli committee will meet as required and not less than biweekly to assess current threats, deal with any impediments to effective security cooperation and coordination and address the steps being taken to combat terror and terrorist organizations. The committee will also serve as a forum to address the issue of external support for terror. In these meetings, the Palestinian side will fully inform the members of the committee of the results of its investigations concerning terrorist suspects already in custody and the participants will exchange additional relevant information. The committee will report regularly to the leaders of the two sides on the status of cooperation, the results of the meetings and its recommendations.

C. Other Issues

(a) The Palestinian side will provide a list of its policemen to the Israeli side in conformity with the prior agreements.

(b) Should the Palestinian side request technical assistance, the U.S. has indicated its willingness to help meet those needs in cooperation with other donors.

(c) The Monitoring and Steering Committee will, as part of its functions, monitor the implementation of this provision and brief the U.S.

2. PLO Charter

The Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Central Council will reaffirm the letter of 22 January 1998 from PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat to President Clinton concerning the nullification of the Palestinian National Charter provisions that are inconsistent with the letters exchanged between the PLO and the Government of Israel on 9-10 September 1993. PLO Chairman Arafat, the Speaker of the Palestinian National Council, and the Speaker of the Palestinian Council will invite the members of the PNC, as well as the members of the Central Council, the Council, and the Palestinian Heads of Ministries to a meeting to be addressed by President Clinton to reaffirm their support for the peace process and the aforementioned decisions of the Executive Committee and the Central Council.

3. Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters

Among other forms of legal assistance in criminal matters, the requests for arrest and transfer of suspects and defendants pursuant to Article II (7) of Annex IV of the Interim Agreement will be submitted (or resubmitted) through the mechanism of the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Legal Committee and will be responded to in conformity with Article II (7) (f) of Annex IV of the Interim Agreement within the 12 week period. Requests submitted after the eighth week will be responded to in conformity with Article II (7) (f) within four weeks of their submission. The United States has been requested by the sides to report on a regular basis on the steps being taken to respond to the above requests.

4. Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Pursuant to Article XI (1) of Annex I of the Interim Agreement, and without derogating from the above, the Palestinian Police will exercise powers and responsibilities to implement this Memorandum with due regard to internationally accepted norms of human rights and the rule of law, and

will be guided by the need to protect the public, respect human dignity, and avoid harassment.

III. INTERIM COMMITTEES AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

1. The Israeli and Palestinian sides reaffirm their commitment to enhancing their relationship and agree on the need actively to promote economic development in the West Bank and Gaza. In this regard, the parties agree to continue or to reactivate all standing committees established by the Interim Agreement, including the Monitoring and Steering Committee, the Joint Economic Committee (JEC), the Civil Affairs Committee (CAC), the Legal Committee, and the Standing Cooperation Committee.

2. The Israeli and Palestinian sides have agreed on arrangements which will permit the timely opening of the Gaza Industrial Estate. They also have concluded a 'Protocol Regarding the Establishment and Operation of the International Airport in the Gaza Strip During the Interim Period.'

3. Both sides will renew negotiations on Safe Passage immediately. As regards the southern route, the sides will make best efforts to conclude the agreement within a week of the entry into force of this Memorandum. Operation of the southern route will start as soon as possible thereafter. As regards the northern route, negotiations will continue with the goal of reaching agreement as soon as possible. Implementation will take place expeditiously thereafter.

4. The Israeli and Palestinian sides acknowledge the great importance of the Port of Gaza for the development of the Palestinian economy, and the expansion of Palestinian trade. They commit themselves to proceeding without delay to conclude an agreement to allow the construction and operation of the port in accordance with the prior agreements. The Israeli-Palestinian Committee will reactivate its work immediately with a goal of concluding the protocol within 60 days, which will allow commencement of the construction of the port.

5. The two sides recognize that unresolved legal issues adversely affect the relationship between the two peoples. They therefore will accelerate efforts through the Legal Committee to address outstanding legal issues

and to implement solutions to these issues in the shortest possible period. The Palestinian side will provide to the Israeli side copies of all of its laws in effect.

6. The Israeli and Palestinian sides also will launch a strategic economic dialogue to enhance their economic relationship. They will establish within the framework of the JEC an Ad Hoc Committee for this purpose. The committee will review the following four issues:

- (a) Israeli purchase taxes;
- (b) cooperation in combating vehicle theft;
- (c) dealing with unpaid Palestinian debts; and
- (d) the impact of Israeli standards as barriers to trade and the expansion of the A1 and A2 lists. The committee will submit an interim report within three weeks of the entry into force of this Memorandum, and within six weeks will submit its conclusions and recommendations to be implemented.

7. The two sides agree on the importance of continued international donor assistance to facilitate implementation by both sides of agreements reached. They also recognize the need for enhanced donor support for economic development in the West Bank and Gaza. They agree to jointly approach the donor community to organize a Ministerial Conference before the end of 1998 to seek pledges for enhanced levels of assistance.

IV. PERMANENT STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

The two sides will immediately resume permanent status negotiations on an accelerated basis and will make a determined effort to achieve the mutual goal of reaching an agreement by May 4, 1999. The negotiations will be continuous and without interruption. The United States has expressed its willingness to facilitate these negotiations.

V. UNILATERAL ACTIONS

Recognizing the necessity to create a positive environment for the negotiations, neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in accordance with the Interim Agreement.

This Memorandum will enter into force ten days from the date of signature.

Done at Washington, DC this 23rd day of October 1998.

For the Government of the State of Israel

For the PLO

Witnessed by: The United States of America

APPENDIX 2

SHARM EL-SHEIKH MEMORANDUM

The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations

4 September 1999

The Government of the State of Israel ('GOI') and the Palestine Liberation Organization ('PLO') commit themselves to full and mutual implementation of the Interim Agreement and all other agreements concluded between them since September 1993 (hereinafter 'the prior agreements'), and all outstanding commitments emanating from the prior agreements. Without derogating from the other requirements of the prior agreements, the two Sides have agreed as follows:

1. Permanent Status negotiations:
 - a. In the context of the implementation of the prior agreements, the two Sides will resume the Permanent Status negotiations in an accelerated manner and will make a determined effort to achieve their mutual goal of reaching a Permanent Status Agreement based on the agreed agenda i.e. the specific issues reserved for Permanent Status negotiators and other issues of common interest.
 - b. The two Sides reaffirm their understanding that the negotiations on the Permanent Status will lead to the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338;
 - c. The two Sides will make a determined effort to conclude a Framework Agreement on all Permanent Status issues in five months from the resumption of the Permanent Status negotiations;

- d. The two Sides will conclude a comprehensive agreement on all Permanent Status issues within one year from the resumption of the Permanent Status negotiations;
 - e. Permanent Status negotiations will resume after the implementation of the first stage of release of prisoners and the second stage of the First and Second Further Redeployments and not later than September 13, 1999. In the Wye River Memorandum, the United States has expressed its willingness to facilitate these negotiations.
2. Phase One and Phase Two of the Further Redeployments
- a. The Israeli Side undertakes the following with regard to Phase One and Phase Two of the Further Redeployments:
 - b. On September 5, 1999, to transfer 7% from Area C to Area B;
 - c. On November 15, 1999, to transfer 2% from Area B to Area A and 3% from Area C to Area B;
 - d. On January 20, 2000, to transfer 1% from Area C to Area A, and 5.1% from Area B to Area A.
3. Release of Prisoners
- a. The two Sides shall establish a joint committee that shall follow-up on matters related to release of Palestinian prisoners.
 - b. The Government of Israel shall release Palestinian and other prisoners who committed their offences prior to September 13, 1993, and were arrested prior to May 4, 1994. The Joint Committee shall agree on the names of those who will be released in the first two stages. Those lists shall be recommended to the relevant Authorities through the Monitoring and Steering Committee;
 - c. The first stage of release of prisoners shall be carried out on September 5, 1999 and shall consist of 200 prisoners. The second stage of release of prisoners shall be carried out on October 8, 1999 and shall consist of 150 prisoners;
 - d. The joint committee shall recommend further lists of names to be released to the relevant Authorities through the Monitoring and Steering Committee;
 - e. The Israeli side will aim to release Palestinian prisoners before next Ramadan.

4. Committees

- a. The Third Further Redeployment Committee shall commence its activities not later than September 13, 1999;
- b. The Monitoring and Steering Committee, all Interim Committees (i.e. CAC, JEC, JSC, legal committee, people to people), as well as Wye River Memorandum committees shall resume and/or continue their activity, as the case may be, not later than September 13, 1999. The Monitoring and Steering Committee will have on its agenda, inter alia, the Year 2000, Donor/PA projects in Area C, and the issue of industrial estates;
- c. The Continuing Committee on displaced persons shall resume its activity on October 1, 1999 (Article XXVII, Interim Agreement);
- d. Not later than October 30, 1999, the two Sides will implement the recommendations of the Ad-hoc Economic Committee (article III-6, WRM).

5. Safe Passage

- a. The operation of the Southern Route of the Safe Passage for the movement of persons, vehicles, and goods will start on October 1, 1999 (Annex I, Article X, Interim Agreement) in accordance with the details of operation, which will be provided for in the Safe Passage Protocol that will be concluded by the two Sides not later than September 30, 1999;
- b. The two Sides will agree on the specific location of the crossing point of the Northern Route of the Safe Passage as specified in Annex I, Article X, provision c-4, in the Interim Agreement not later than October 5, 1999;
- c. The Safe Passage Protocol applied to the Southern Route of the Safe Passage shall apply to the Northern Route of the Safe Passage with relevant agreed modifications;
- d. Upon the agreement on the location of the crossing point of the Northern Route of the Safe Passage, construction of the needed facilities and related procedures shall commence and shall be ongoing. At the same time, temporary facilities will be established for the operation of the Northern Route not later than four months from the agreement on the specific location of the crossing-point;
- e. In between the operation of the Southern crossing point of the

Safe Passage and the Northern crossing point of the Safe Passage, Israel will facilitate arrangements for the movement between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, using non-Safe Passage routes other than the Southern Route of the Safe Passage;

- f. The location of the crossing points shall be without prejudice to the Permanent Status negotiations (Annex I, Article X, provision e, Interim Agreement).

6. Gaza Sea Port

- a. The two Sides have agreed on the following principles to facilitate and enable the construction works of the Gaza Sea Port. The principles shall not prejudice or preempt the outcome of negotiations on the Permanent Status:
- b. The Israeli Side agrees that the Palestinian Side shall commence construction works in and related to the Gaza Sea Port on October 1, 1999;
- a. The two Sides agree that the Gaza Sea Port will not be operated in any way before reaching a joint Sea Port protocol on all aspects of operating the Port, including security;
- c. The Gaza Sea Port is a special case, like the Gaza Airport, being situated in an area under the responsibility of the Palestinian Side and serving as an international passage. Therefore, with the conclusion of a joint Sea Port Protocol, all activities and arrangements relating to the construction of the Port shall be in accordance with the provisions of the Interim Agreement, especially those relating to international passages, as adapted in the Gaza Airport Protocol;
- d. The construction shall ensure adequate provision for effective security and customs inspection of people and goods, as well as the establishment of a designated checking area in the Port;
- e. In this context, the Israeli side will facilitate on an on-going basis the works related to the construction of the Gaza Sea Port, including the movement in and out of the Port of vessels, equipment, resources, and material required for the construction of the Port;
- f. The two Sides will coordinate such works, including the designs and movement, through a joint mechanism.

7. Hebron Issues

- a. The Shuhada Road in Hebron shall be opened for the movement of Palestinian vehicles in two phases. The first phase has been carried out, and the second shall be carried out not later than October 30, 1999;
- b. The wholesale market-Hasbahe will be opened not later than November 1, 1999, in accordance with arrangements which will be agreed upon by the two Sides;
- c. A high level Joint Liaison Committee will convene not later than September 13, 1999 to review the situation in the Tomb of the Patriarchs / Al Haram Al Ibrahimi (Annex I, Article VII, Interim Agreement and as per the January 15, 1998 US Minute of Discussion).

8. Security

- a. The two Sides will, in accordance with the prior agreements, act to ensure the immediate, efficient and effective handling of any incident involving a threat or act of terrorism, violence or incitement, whether committed by Palestinians or Israelis. To this end, they will cooperate in the exchange of information and coordinate policies and activities. Each side shall immediately and effectively respond to the occurrence or anticipated occurrence of an act of terrorism, violence or incitement and shall take all necessary measures to prevent such an occurrence;
- b. Pursuant to the prior agreements, the Palestinian side undertakes to implement its responsibilities for security, security cooperation, on-going obligations and other issues emanating from the prior agreements, including, in particular, the following obligations emanating from the Wye River Memorandum:
 - i. continuation of the program for the collection of the illegal weapons, including reports;
 - ii. apprehension of suspects, including reports;
 - iii. forwarding of the list of Palestinian policemen to the Israeli Side not later than September 13, 1999;
 - iv. beginning of the review of the list by the Monitoring and Steering Committee not later than October 15, 1999.

9. The two Sides call upon the international donor community to enhance its commitment and financial support to the Palestinian economic development and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.
10. Recognizing the necessity to create a positive environment for the negotiations, neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in accordance with the Interim Agreement.
11. Obligations pertaining to dates, which occur on holidays or Saturdays, shall be carried out on the first subsequent working day.

This memorandum will enter into force one week from the date of its signature.

Made and signed in Sharm el-Sheikh, this fourth day of September 1999.

For the Government of the State of Israel

For the PLO

Witnessed by

For the Arab Republic of Egypt

For the United States of America

For the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

APPENDIX 3

STOCKHOLM: THE FINAL AGREEMENT OF PERMANENT STATUS

(An unofficial paper summarising the Stockholm talks as at 21 May 2000)

Preface:

The Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the legislative representative of the Palestinian People, confirm their commitments to the UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and confirm that the FAPs forms the mechanism whereby these two resolutions are implemented.

They also acknowledge the unlawfulness of taking over land by war and they pledge to work in accordance with the UN Charter, international law, and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. They emphasize, as well, their determination to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict and live in peaceful coexistence and mutual respect and security of their peoples, on the basis of a just, comprehensive, and final settlement, together with an historic reconciliation through the agreed peace process.

Additionally, they acknowledge each other's right to live peacefully and securely on their respective land, within borders free from threat of force.

Furthermore, they state that the framework agreement is concluded within the framework of the Middle East peace process which was started in Madrid in 1991 and the Declaration of Principles agreed on 13/09/1993. Moreover, they believe that the FAPs provides the ground for decisions related to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, and that its conclusion, hence, puts an end to the problem between the two sides and constitutes the start of a period of historic reconciliation and peace.

Therefore, the two parties have agreed on the following:

Article I

The Permanent Status Agreement and the End of the Palestinian-Israeli Problem

The Permanent Status Agreement consists of the Final Agreement of the Permanent Status (FAPs) and the Comprehensive Agreement of the Permanent Status (CAPs). The FAPs lay down the principles, guidelines, time schedule, and mechanism related to all issues of the permanent status.

1. After signature, no historically-based issue can, in the future, be raised.
2. The two parties must conclude the CAPs no later than 13.09.2000, i.e. the date for declaring the establishment of the Palestinian state.
3. The CAPs shall cover later agreements and protocols of security, environment, water, law and order, legal and in crime and civil cases, and communications.
4. The Permanent Status Agreement is an integral part of decisions on historically-based issues between the two parties and bans any other claims. Its implementation is deemed a fulfilment of complete and irrevocable decisions regarding all issues of the permanent status as agreed in the agenda.

Article II

The State of Palestine and its relation with the State of Israel.

5. The State of Israel shall recognise the State of Palestine when it is established, and the state of Palestine shall recognise the State of Israel.
6. The State of Palestine and the State of Israel shall establish full diplomatic relations between them.
7. On the basis of political and security separation, the relation between Palestine and Israel will rest on peaceful coexistence.
8. Israel and Palestine shall later sign a bilateral agreement on issues of mutual benefit.
9. Legislatures in Palestine and Israel shall develop programmes for cooperation and coordination.

10. Israel and Palestine shall develop a comprehensive cooperation programme on their internationally recognised borders.
11. Israel and Palestine shall encourage cooperation between their civil institutions and local government bodies.
12. Israel and Palestine shall not enter into any federations or military, economic, or political confederations whose aims are detrimental to the interests of either side.
13. The two parties shall respect the interests of each other in international relations.
14. Both parties pledge not to interfere in each other's internal affairs. Nor shall they in any shape or form offer to help any individuals or groups on the other side without prior approval by the government of that side.
15. Palestine and Israel shall create conditions conducive to permanent peace, through legislation to put an end to incitement for terror and violence.
16. Israel and Palestine shall work together to consolidate regional cooperation and coordination.

Article III

Borders, Settlement, and Territorial Arrangement.

17. Demarcation of permanent borders between Israel and Palestine shall rest on and lead to the implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. Thence, demarcation of the permanent borders between Israel and Palestine shall be based, in principle, on the 1948 Armistice border (The Green Line). These will be adjusted by the parties to reflect, among other things, the demographical realities, religious needs, and strategic considerations, on the basis of qualitative and qualitative reciprocity, in accordance with the rules of their articles.

Demarcation of permanent borders between Israel and Palestine in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, shall be based on the second Armistice in 1976 (Green Line) as delineated in the Jordan–Palestine Armistice Agreement on 03/ 04/ 1949; and the borders between Palestine and Israel in the Gaza Strip shall be

the Armistice lines on 04/06/1967, as delineated in the Egyptian – Israel Armistice Agreement on 24/02/1994.

18. The integrity and continuity of both parts of Palestine – West Bank and Gaza Strip – shall be preserved by an extra territorial road [Efficient functioning of the safe passage to be under Israeli sovereignty] and with full coordination with Israel, together with an air corridor between two parts. This shall be affected without prejudice to Israeli sovereignty. The safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza Strip shall be subject to special land arrangements under Israeli sovereignty and subject to the safe passage protocol, until a permanent alternative is established, i.e. a safe hanging passage under Israeli sovereignty.
19. Territorial arrangements between Israel and Palestine shall be made no later than [0000] with demarcation maps no. (1) to be enclosed with CAPs map no. (11). Map no. (1) shall be executed within [0000] and demarked according to the approved understanding stated in the FAPs regarding the subject of land.
20. The two parties shall recognise the borders and territorial arrangements illustrated in the CAPs and map no. (1) as final, permanent, irrevocable, and cannot be ignored.
21. Categories of land may be determined, based on the rules of this article (Map no.1) .
 - a. The (Land of Palestine) and the (Land of Israel) are lands for Palestine and Israel with full sovereignty over them.
 - b. Territories with agreed arrangements (TAAs) are areas whose sovereignty status is determined in the CAPs. Hence, agreements covering them and sovereignty over them could be postponed.
22. Part of the Jordan Valley will be later determined with the TAAS 0 and will be under Palestinian sovereignty, with special arrangements for the purpose of Israeli security. Another part may stay under Israeli sovereignty. The two parties will allocate military zones along the Jordan Valley for Israeli military purposes. Israeli individuals and troops shall be allocated corridors under Palestinian authority, with special territorial arrangements under Palestinian sovereignty and security control.
23. The many Israelis resident in settlements along the Green Line and around Jerusalem shall have territorial continuity with Israel.

Demarcation of boundaries of settlement blocks shall be based on security, future needs, infrastructure, and freedom and safety of traffic and movement, and shall be part of the state of Israel. In any event, Palestinian inhabitants of villages that will be evacuated by Israel shall enjoy the same status as the one enjoyed by Israeli settlers in the Palestinian territories.

24. Settlers wishing to live under Palestinian rule shall remain as such, and the Palestinian rule shall remain as such, and the Palestinian state shall take responsibility for their safety and guarantee them normal life. These same settlers may be residents in Palestine while keeping their Israeli citizenship. Settlements and settlement areas under Palestinian sovereignty shall be subject to the TAAs as regards the territorial arrangements and shall be subject to arrangements related to the sovereign power and its tasks. Israel and Palestine shall guarantee free, safe, and unrestricted movement for these settlers on roads agreed to be for joint use.
25. With no prejudice to either party, Israel and Palestine shall conclude agreements to facilitate local movement of individuals, vehicles, and goods.
26. Settlements whose majority dwellers wish to move accommodation to Israel or to settlement concentrations defined in the TAAs shall be assigned to Palestine within the context of Israeli support to settle Palestine refugees.

Article IV

Jerusalem

(To be discussed at a later stage)

Article V

Security Issues of the Permanent Status

General

27. Both parties acknowledge each other's right to live in peace on its land and with its people, with no threat of war.
28. Both parties shall refrain directly or indirectly from threatening

to wage war or hinting at waging one against each other by any means at their disposal.

29. Israel and Palestine shall unilaterally and jointly fight violence and terrorism, through coordination and cooperation supported by legislations and penal measures.
30. Israel and Palestine shall set up a security system on their common borders to enforce law and order and to control cross-border traffic.
31. Planning and regulation aimed at reducing friction in certain areas are to be agreed.

(The Intervening clauses to be referred to specialists)

Article VI

Prisoners' Release

44. The Government of Israel shall release all Palestinian prisoners, including security ones, as soon as the FAPs agreement is signed.
45. The Government of Israel shall release all Palestinian prisoners, including security ones in two lots, starting from the signing of the FAPs agreement.
46. The first lot shall comprise the majority of prisoners who are members of organisations publicly supporting the peace process.
The second lot shall include all other prisoners, except for those who oppose the peace process or pose a security threat.
47. Lists of prisoners to be released shall be agreed through the joint committee and be recommended to the authorities concerned.

Article VII

Refugees

48. Israel shall acknowledge the suffering incurred by Palestinian refugees because of the 1948 war and the Palestinian-Israeli problem.
49. Both parties share an historical commitment to achieve a final solution to the Palestinian refugees issue with all its practical

- and legal aspects. Both parties, together with Arab countries and the international community, shall work towards remedying the suffering emanating from the 1948 Arab–Israeli war.
50. Acknowledging the need to achieve a practical, just, political, and humanitarian solution to the refugees problem, and in order to put an end to their suffering as a result of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, and as an absolute matter of sovereignty, Israel shall facilitate the return of (a number of) Palestinian refugees to their homes in stages and on humanitarian grounds. Such refugees shall be reunited with their families at their present places of residence, provided they take up the Israeli citizenship and renounce their legal status as refugees.
 51. The two parties have agreed to form an international committee including Israel, PLO/Palestine, host countries (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt), UN, US, Canada, EU, Japan, Russia, Sweden, and Norway.
 52. The above-mentioned committee shall prepare a form to be filled in by each Palestinian refugee. The two parties shall determine the contents of the form, in order to provide the committee with answers on whether the refugee concerned wishes to:
 - a) Return home in Israel with compensation.
 - b) Return to Palestine with compensation.
 - c) Settle in his country of residence with compensation.
 - d) Emigrate to a third country with compensation.
 53. For the purpose of compensation for loss of property, each Palestinian refugee (father of the family) may make his full claim stemming from the 1948 war on a single form. No other claims shall be allowed afterwards. Completion of compensation for property shall be considered as a settlement of all personal and collective claims made by Palestinian refugees for their property as a result of the 1948 war.
 54. An international fund managed by the committee and the World Bank shall be established. The committee and the bank shall determine the international institution that will manage the resources for rehabilitation of Palestinian refugees and compensating them. The fund shall undertake the valuation process and check all claims against criteria , time schedule , and measures to be agreed upon in the CAPs.

55. The committee shall call on the world community to donate to the fund. The core of the fund shall be financed by allocating the amount of \$ (to be specified) which shall be deducted from monies accrued in the fund of properties belonging to Palestinian absentees in Israel.
56. Remitting reparations to applicants shall be tied to their renunciation of any other property claims.
57. The refugee rehabilitation fund shall be based on the following principles:
 - a) Rehabilitation fund for host countries and individuals, run according to schemes to be agreed for each host country to enable refugees to rebuild their lives.
 - b) Execution of the said programmes shall be tied up to gradually erasing the practical and official aspects of the refugee problem in the host countries, including the gradual withdrawal of the UNRWA , granting personal and legal status to all refugees, and setting all collective claims by refugees in the host countries.
 - c) Programmes shall be prepared by the fund within a number of years (to be decided) of signing the CAPs and carried out within a number of years (to be decided).

The fund shall also monitor the implementation and control of the distribution process.
58. Powers of the fund and the committee shall be determined by the parties in the CAPs, on the basis of this article.
59. The work done by the committee shall form an integral part of the permanent status agreement.
60. The UNRWA records shall be the basis for implementing this article. Other relevant records shall be scrutinized and subject to approval by the committee.
61. Full implementation of this article and completion of the committee's mission as explained in clause [above] shall be a final and permanent solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, as an implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 194.

Article VIII (Economic Relations), **Article IX** (Water), **Article X** (Settlement of Disputes), **Article XI** were not discussed at this stage.

APPENDIX 4

TABA: THE MORATINOS NON-PAPER

Taba, January, 2001

INTRODUCTION

This EU non-paper has been prepared by the EU Special Representative to the Middle East Process, Ambassador Moratinos, and his team after consultations with the Israeli and Palestinian sides, present at Taba in January 2001. Although the paper has no official status, it has been acknowledged by the parties as being a relatively fair description of the outcome of the negotiations on the permanent status issues at Taba. It draws attention to the extensive work which has been undertaken on all permanent status issues like territory, Jerusalem, refugees and security in order to find ways to come to joint positions. At the same time it shows that there are serious gaps and differences between the two sides, which will have to be overcome in future negotiations. From that point of view, the paper reveals the challenging task ahead in terms of policy determination and legal work, but it also shows that both sides have traveled a long way to accommodate the views of the other side and that solutions are possible.

1. Territory

The two sides agreed that in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 242, the June 4 1967 lines would be the basis for the borders between Israel and the state of Palestine.

(a) West Bank

For the first time both sides presented their own maps over the West Bank. The maps served as a basis for the discussion on territory and settlements. The Israeli side presented two maps, and the Palestinian side engaged on this basis. The Palestinian side presented some

illustrative maps detailing its understanding of Israeli interests in the West Bank.

The negotiations tackled the various aspects of territory, which could include some of the settlements and how the needs of each party could be accommodated. The Clinton parameters served as a loose basis for the discussion, but differences of interpretations regarding the scope and meaning of the parameters emerged. The Palestinian side stated that it had accepted the Clinton proposals but with reservations.

The Israeli side stated that the Clinton proposals provide for annexation of settlement blocs. The Palestinian side did not agree that the parameters included blocs, and did not accept proposals to annex blocs. The Palestinian side stated that blocs would cause significant harm to the Palestinian interests and rights, particularly to the Palestinians residing in areas Israel seeks to annex.

The Israeli side maintained that it is entitled to contiguity between and among their settlements. The Palestinian side stated that Palestinian needs take priority over settlements. The Israeli maps included plans for future development of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The Palestinian side did not agree to the principle of allowing further development of settlements in the West Bank. Any growth must occur inside Israel.

The Palestinian side maintained that since Israel has needs in Palestinian territory, it is responsible for proposing the necessary border modifications. The Palestinian side reiterated that such proposals must not adversely affect the Palestinian needs and interests.

The Israeli side stated that it did not need to maintain settlements in the Jordan Valley for security purposes, and its proposed maps reflected this position.

The Israeli maps were principally based on a demographic concept of settlements blocs that would incorporate approximately 80 percent on the settlers. The Israeli side sketched a map presenting a 6 percent annexation, the outer limit of the Clinton proposal. The Palestinian illustrative map presented 3.1 percent in the context of a land swap.

Both sides accepted the principle of land swap but the proportionality of the swap remained under discussion. Both sides agreed that Israeli and Palestinian sovereign areas will have respective sovereign contiguity. The Israeli side wished to count 'assets' such as Israelis 'safe passage/corridor' proposal as being part of the land swap, even though

the proposal would not give Palestine sovereignty over these 'assets'. The Israeli side adhered to a maximum 3 percent land swap as per Clinton proposal.

The Palestinian maps had a similar conceptual point of reference stressing the importance of a non-annexation of any Palestinian villages and the contiguity of the West Bank and Jerusalem. They were predicated on the principle of a land swap that would be equitable in size and value and in areas adjacent to the border with Palestine, and in the same vicinity as the land annexed by Israel. The Palestinian side further maintained that land not under Palestinian sovereignty such as the Israeli proposal regarding a 'safe passage/corridor' as well as economic interests are not included in the calculation of the swap.

The Palestinian side maintained that the 'No-Man's-Land' (Latrun area) is part of the West Bank. The Israelis did not agree.

The Israeli side requested an additional 2 per cent of land under a lease arrangement to which the Palestinians responded that the subject of lease can only be discussed after the establishment of a Palestinian state and the transfer of land to Palestinian sovereignty.

(b) Gaza Strip

Neither side presented any maps over the Gaza Strip. It was implied that the Gaza Strip will be under total Palestinian sovereignty, but details have still to be worked out. All settlements will be evacuated. The Palestinian side claimed it could be arranged in 6 months, a timetable not agreed by the Israeli side.

(c) Safe passage/corridor from Gaza to the West Bank

Both sides agreed that there is going to be a safe passage from the north of Gaza (Beit Hanun) to the Hebron district, and that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip must be territorially linked. The nature of the regime governing the territorial link and sovereignty over it was not agreed.

2. Jerusalem

(a) Sovereignty

Both sides accepted in principle the Clinton suggestion of having a Palestinian sovereignty over Arab neighborhoods and an Israeli

sovereignty over Jewish neighborhoods. The Palestinian side affirmed that it was ready to discuss Israeli request to have sovereignty over those Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem that were constructed after 1967, but not Jebel Abu Ghneim and Ras al-Amud. The Palestinian side rejected Israeli sovereignty over settlements in the Jerusalem Metropolitan Area, namely of Ma'ale Adumim and Givat Ze'ev.

The Palestinian side understood that Israel was ready to accept Palestinian sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, including part of Jerusalem's Old City. The Israeli side understood that the Palestinians were ready to accept Israeli sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and part of the American Quarter.

The Palestinian side understood that the Israeli side accepted to discuss Palestinian property claims in West Jerusalem.

(b) Open City

Both sides favored the idea of an Open City. The Israeli side suggested the establishment of an open city whose geographical scope encompasses the Old City of Jerusalem plus an area defined as the Holy Basin or Historical Basin.

The Palestinian side was in favor of an open city provided that continuity and contiguity were preserved. The Palestinians rejected the Israeli proposal regarding the geographic scope of an open city and asserted that the open city is only acceptable if its geographical scope encompasses the full municipal borders of both East and West Jerusalem.

The Israeli side raised the idea of establishing a mechanism of daily coordination and different models were suggested for municipal coordination and cooperation (dealing with infrastructure, roads, electricity, sewage, waste removal etc). Such arrangements could be formulated in a future detailed agreement. It proposed a 'soft border regime' within Jerusalem between Al-Quds and Yerushalaim that affords them 'soft border' privileges. Furthermore the Israeli side proposed a number of special arrangements for Palestinian and Israeli residents of the Open City to guarantee that the Open City arrangement neither adversely affect their daily lives nor compromise each party sovereignty over its section of the Open City.

(c) Capital for two states

The Israeli side accepted that the City of Jerusalem would be the

capital of the two states: Yerushalaim, capital of Israel and Al-Quds, capital of the state of Palestine. The Palestinian side expressed its only concern, namely that East Jerusalem is the capital of the state of Palestine.

(d) Holy/Historical Basin and the Old City

There was an attempt to develop an alternative concept that would relate to the Old City and its surroundings, and the Israeli side put forward several alternative models for discussion, for example, setting up a mechanism for close coordination and cooperation in the Old City. The idea of a special police force regime was discussed but not agreed upon.

The Israeli side expressed its interest and raised its concern regarding the area conceptualized as the Holy Basin (which includes the Jewish Cemetery on the Mount of Olives, the City of David and Kivron Valley). The Palestinian side confirmed that it was willing to take into account Israeli interests and concerns provided that these places remain under Palestinian sovereignty. Another option for the Holy Basin, suggested informally by the Israeli side, was to create a special regime or to suggest some form of internationalization for the entire area or a joint regime with special cooperation and coordination. The Palestinian side did not agree to pursue any of these ideas, although the discussion could continue.

(e) Holy Sites: Western Wall and the Wailing Wall

Both parties have accepted the principle of respective control over each side's respective holy sites (religious control and management). According to this principle, Israel's sovereignty over the Western Wall would be recognized although there remained a dispute regarding the delineation of the area covered by the Western Wall and especially the link to what is referred to in Clinton's ideas as the space sacred to Judaism of which it is part.

The Palestinian side acknowledged that Israel has requested to establish an affiliation to the holy parts of the Western Wall, but maintained that the question of the Wailing Wall and/or Western Wall has not been resolved. It maintained the importance of distinguishing between the Western Wall and the Wailing Wall segment thereof, recognized in the Islamic faith as the Buraq Wall.

(f) Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount

Both sides agreed that the question of Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount has not been resolved. However, both sides were close to accepting Clinton's ideas regarding Palestinian sovereignty over Haram al-Sharif notwithstanding Palestinian and Israeli reservations.

Both sides noted progress on practical arrangements regarding evacuations, building and public order in the area of the compound. An informal suggestion was raised that for an agreed period such as three years, Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount would be under international sovereignty of the P5 plus Morocco (or other Islamic presence), whereby the Palestinians would be the 'Guardian/Custodians' during this period. At the end of this period, either the parties would agree on a new solution or agree to extend the existing arrangement. In the absence of an agreement, the parties would return to implement the Clinton formulation. Neither party accepted or rejected the suggestion.

3. Refugees

Non-papers were exchanged, which were regarded as a good basis for the talks. Both sides stated that the issue of the Palestinian refugees is central to the Israeli-Palestinian relations and that a comprehensive and just solution is essential to creating a lasting and morally scrupulous peace. Both sides agreed to adopt the principles and references which could facilitate the adoption of an agreement.

Both sides suggested, as a basis, that the parties should agree that a just settlement of the refugee problem in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 242 must lead to the implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

(a) Narrative

The Israeli side put forward a suggested joint narrative for the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees. The Palestinian side discussed the proposed narrative and there was much progress, although no agreement was reached in an attempt to develop a historical narrative in the general text.

(b) Return, repatriation, relocation and rehabilitation

Both sides engaged in a discussion of the practicalities of resolving the refugee issue. The Palestinian side reiterated that the Palestinian refugees

should have the right of return to their homes in accordance with the interpretation of UNGAR 194. The Israeli side expressed its understanding that the wish to return as per wording of UNGAR 194 shall be implemented within the framework of one of the following programs:

A. Return and repatriation

1. to Israel
2. to Israel swapped territory
3. to the Palestine state.

B. Rehabilitation and relocation

1. Rehabilitation in host country.
2. Relocation to third country.

Preference in all these programs shall be accorded to the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon. The Palestinian side stressed that the above shall be subject to the individual free choice of the refugees, and shall not prejudice their right to their homes in accordance with its interpretation of UNGAR 194.

The Israeli side, informally, suggested a three-track 15-year absorption program, which was discussed but not agreed upon. The first track referred to the absorption to Israel. No numbers were agreed upon, but with a non-paper referring to 25,000 in the first three years of this program (40,000 in the first five years of this program did not appear in the non-paper but was raised verbally). The second track referred to the absorption of Palestinian refugees into the Israeli territory, that shall be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty, and the third track referring to the absorption of refugees in the context of family reunification scheme.

The Palestinian side did not present a number, but stated that the negotiations could not start without an Israeli opening position. It maintained that Israel's acceptance of the return of refugees should not prejudice existing programs within Israel such as family reunification.

(c) Compensation

Both sides agreed to the establishment of an International Commission

and an International Fund as a mechanism for dealing with compensation in all its aspects. Both sides agreed that 'small-sum' compensation shall be paid to the refugees in the 'fast-track' procedure, claims of compensation for property losses below certain amount shall be subject to 'fast-track' procedures.

There was also progress on Israeli compensation for material losses, land and assets expropriated, including agreement on a payment from an Israeli lump sum or proper amount to be agreed upon that would feed into the International Fund. According to the Israeli side the calculation of this payment would be based on a macro-economic survey to evaluate the assets in order to reach a fair value. The Palestinian side, however, said that this sum would be calculated on the records of the UNCCP, the Custodian for Absentee Property and other relevant data with a multiplier to reach a fair value.

(d) UNRWA

Both sides agreed that UNRWA should be phased out in accordance with an agreed timetable of five years, as a targeted period. The Palestinian side added a possible adjustment of that period to make sure that this will be subject to the implementation of the other aspects of the agreement dealing with refugees, and with termination of Palestinian refugee status in the various locations.

(e) Former Jewish refugees

The Israeli side requested that the issue of compensation to former Jewish refugees from Arab countries be recognized, while accepting that it was not a Palestinian responsibility or a bilateral issue. The Palestinian side maintained that this is not a subject for a bilateral Palestinian-Israeli agreement.

(f) Restitution

The Palestinian side raised the issue of restitution of refugee property. The Israeli side rejected this.

(g) End of claims

The issue of the end of claims was discussed, and it was suggested that the implementation of the agreement shall constitute a complete and final implementation of UNGAR 194 and therefore ends all claims.

4. Security

(a) Early warning stations

The Israeli side requested to have 3 early warning stations on Palestinian territory. The Palestinian side was prepared to accept the continued operations of early warning stations but subject to certain conditions. The exact mechanism has therefore to be detailed in further negotiations.

(b) Military capability of the state of Palestine

The Israeli side maintained that the state of Palestine would be non-militarized as per the Clinton proposals. The Palestinian side was prepared to accept limitation on its acquisition of arms, and be defined as a state with limited arms. The two sides have not yet agreed on the scope of arms limitations, but have begun exploring different options. Both sides agree that this issue has not been concluded.

(c) Air space control

The two sides recognized that the state of Palestine would have sovereignty over its airspace. The Israeli side agreed to accept and honor all of Palestine civil aviation rights according to international regulations, but sought a unified air control system under overriding Israel control. In addition, Israel requested access to Palestinian airspace for military operations and training.

The Palestinian side was interested in exploring models for broad cooperation and coordination in the civil aviation sphere, but unwilling to cede overriding control to Israel. As for Israeli military operations and training in Palestinian airspace, the Palestinian side rejected this request as inconsistent with the neutrality of the state of Palestine, saying that it cannot grant Israel these privileges while denying them to its Arab neighbors.

(d) Time table for withdrawal from the West Bank and Jordan Valley

Based on the Clinton proposal, the Israeli side agreed to a withdrawal from the West Bank over a 36-month period with an additional 36 months for the Jordan Valley in conjunction with an international force, maintaining that a distinction should be made between withdrawal in the Jordan Valley and elsewhere.

The Palestinian side rejected a 36-month withdrawal process from the West Bank expressing concern that a lengthy process would exacerbate Palestinian-Israeli tensions. The Palestinian side proposed an 18 months withdrawal under the supervision of international forces. As to the Jordan Valley the Palestinian side was prepared to consider the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces for an additional 10-month period. Although the Palestinian side was ready to consider the presence of international forces in the West Bank for a longer period, it refused to accept the ongoing presence of Israeli forces.

(e) Emergency deployment (or emergency locations)

The Israeli side requested to maintain and operate five emergency locations on Palestinian territory (in the Jordan Valley) with the Palestinian response allowing for maximum of two emergency locations conditional on a time limit for the dismantling. In addition, the Palestinian side considered that these two emergency locations be run by international presence and not by the Israelis. Informally, the Israeli side expressed willingness to explore ways that a multinational presence could provide a vehicle for addressing the parties' respective concerns.

The Palestinian side declined to agree to the deployment of Israeli armed forces on Palestinian territory during emergency situations, but was prepared to consider ways in which international forces might be used in that capacity, particularly within the context of regional security cooperation efforts.

(f) Security cooperation and fighting terror

Both sides were prepared to commit themselves to promoting security cooperation and fighting terror.

(g) Borders and international crossings

The Palestinian side was confident that Palestinian sovereignty over borders and international crossing points would be recognized in the agreement. The two sides had, however, not yet resolved this issue including the question of monitoring and verification at Palestine's international borders (Israeli or international presence).

(h) Electromagnetic sphere

The Israeli side recognized that the state of Palestine would have

sovereignty over the electromagnetic sphere, and acknowledged that it would not seek to constrain Palestinian commercial use of the sphere, but sought control over it for security purposes.

The Palestinian side sought full sovereign rights over the electromagnetic sphere, but was prepared to accommodate reasonable Israeli needs within a cooperative framework in accordance with international rules and regulations.

Dispute over Ma'aleh Adumim

The importance of Israel's recognition of the June 4, 1967 border is that since 1967 (and even today), Israel's official position has been that UN Security Council Resolution 242 mandates withdrawal from 'territories' conquered in the Six Day War. The Arab position, in contrast, is that the resolution requires withdrawal from 'the territories.' Israel's official refusal to recognize the June 4, 1967 borders is currently an obstacle to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in his efforts to reach an agreement with the chairman of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala). There is no Palestinian confirmation of Peres' claim that the Palestinians have accepted the formulation that a final-status agreement will be based on Resolution 242.

Israel agreed to recognize the June 4, 1967 border as the basis for the border between Israel and Palestine after the Palestinians agreed in principle to discuss territorial swaps in the West Bank, as proposed by Clinton, that would enable Israel to annex parts of the West Bank adjacent to the Green Line (but not parts of Gaza). The maps presented by the Palestinians at Taba gave Israel 3.1 percent of the West Bank. That is less than the lower limit proposed in the Clinton plan (under which the Palestinians would receive 94 to 96 percent of the West Bank). Israel demanded 6 percent - the upper boundary of the Clinton plan - plus an additional 2 percent in the context of a leasing agreement. The Palestinians also rejected Israel's demand that the 'no man's land' around Latrun not be considered part of the West Bank.

According to the document, Israel gave up all the Jordan Valley settlements, focusing instead on its security interests in that area. The dispute centered around the large stretch of territory between Ma'aleh Adumim and Givat Ze'ev, which contains both a fairly large Palestinian population and East Jerusalem's most important land reserves. The Palestinians retracted their earlier readiness to include these two settlements in the settlement

blocs to be annexed to Israel after realizing that Israel also insisted on annexing the large tract that joins them - which would mean that Palestinian citizens would suddenly find themselves in sovereign Israeli territory. Barak instructed his chief negotiator, Gilad Sher, to tell the Palestinians that the map presented by then foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, which reduced the area of the settlement bloc (including the Ma'aleh Adumim-Givat Ze'ev tract) to only 5 percent of the West Bank, had no validity.

Another dispute that remained unresolved stemmed from Israel's refusal to accept the Palestinian demand for a 1:1 ratio between the area of the West Bank annexed to Israel and the parts of Israel that would be given to the Palestinians in exchange. Israel proposed a ratio of 1:2, in its favor. In addition, the Palestinians rejected Israel's proposal that the Halutza Dunes in the Negev, the area of the 'safe passage' between the West Bank and Gaza, and the part of Ashdod Port that would be set aside for Palestinian use all be considered part of the land swap. They insisted that the land they received be contiguous with either the West Bank or Gaza, and that it not include any land that was merely set aside for their use, over which they would not have sovereignty. (Akiva Eldar)

How long is the Western Wall?

The Clinton proposal paved the way for understandings in Jerusalem, but it also created the principal dispute between the two parties.

An agreement was reached that East Jerusalem, which would be called Al-Quds, would be the capital of Palestine. Understandings were also reached regarding a division of East Jerusalem's neighborhoods such that Jewish neighborhoods would remain under Israeli sovereignty (other than Har Homa, which the first Jewish families are just moving into now, and Ras al-Amud), while Arab neighborhoods would be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty. In addition, it was agreed that parts of the Old City - the Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter and part of the Armenian Quarter - would be to the Palestinians.

But the Clinton proposal did not help the parties to draw mutually accepted borders between the Open City - to which both sides agreed - and the surrounding Palestinian areas, on one side, and Israeli areas, on the other. The Open City is territory that citizens of both countries can enter without passing through any checkpoints. The Palestinians wanted it to encompass all of Jerusalem, while the Israelis wanted it limited to the Old City only.

And the Clinton proposal complicated negotiations on the most sensitive issue: the Western Wall. Clinton had referred to 'the holy parts' of the Wall, thereby creating an opening for the Palestinian claim that only the exposed part of the Wall (the Wailing Wall) is considered holy to the Jews, and therefore only this part should be left under Israeli sovereignty. Palestinians claimed the Western Wall tunnels were part of Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount).

Since the Taba talks ended, many meetings and seminars have taken place in an effort to close the gaps, attended by politicians and experts from both sides and from other countries as well.

Symbols of sovereignty

Israel insisted that it retain sovereignty over the 'safe passage' between Gaza and the West Bank, with the Palestinians receiving only usage rights to the land. With respect to air space, however, Israel adopted a more generous approach to the sovereignty issue. Nevertheless, it demanded rights to the use of Palestinian air space, including for air force training exercises.

The document reveals that the Palestinians expressed a willingness to accept the principle of limitations on their armaments and even took Israel's security needs into account (they agreed to three early warning stations and two 'emergency locations,' compared to the five 'emergency locations' Israel had sought in addition to the early warning stations).

But in all matters relating to the symbols of sovereignty, the Palestinians took a harder line. They therefore insisted that an international force man the 'emergency locations,' rather than an Israeli one. And the issue of control over Palestine's international border remained unresolved for the same reason: the question of who would man the border control posts.

INDEX

- Abbas, Mahmoud (Abu Mazen) 2, 33, 50, 74, 89, 98, 116, 130, 149, 181, 248
- Abdullah II, King of Jordan 88, 128, 277
- Al-Abed, Samih 223, 279, 295, 298, 299, 305
- Abed Rabbo, Yasser 74, 115, 198, 279, 295, 298, 299, 303, 304, 307, 312
- Abu Ali, Jamal 142
- Abu Ammar. *see* Arafat, Yassar
- Abu Dis 42
- Abu Ghneim 52, 75
- Abu Mazen. *see* Abbas, Mahmoud
- Abu Mazen-Beilin document 129–30
- Agha, Hussain 267
- air space 219, 221, 224, 229–30, 358–9
- Albright, Madeleine 24, 63, 64, 65, 71, 74, 88, 92–8, 123, 139–40, 170, 171, 172–3, 182–5, 187–8, 190, 203, 206–7, 211, 213, 222, 223, 243, 245, 277, 279
- American Letter of Guarantee 1–2
- Amir, Yigal 2
- Andersson, Sten 109
- Andrews Air Force Base meeting 139–41
- Annan, Kofi 277
- Al-Aqqad, Omar 312
- Aqsa Intifada 263–4
- Aqsa Mosque 22, 52
- Arafat, Yasser (Abu Ammar) 2, 4, 5, 15, 33, 37, 39, 63, 65, 67, 68–9, 70, 73, 74, 86, 87–8, 88, 91, 98–0, 108, 116, 139, 140, 148–52, 153, 161–2, 162, 215–16, 294–5, 296–7, 327; at Camp David 177–8, 180, 181, 187, 188–90, 199, 201–3, 207–8, 212–14, 216–17, 241–4, 246–7, 263; letter to President Clinton 162–70; meeting with Albright Nov 1999 92–8; meeting with Netanyahu and Clinton 24; meetings following Camp David 277–9; meetings with Netanyahu 22, 24, 50; response to Clinton's proposals 284–5
- Asfour, Hassan 110, 114, 122, 125, 142, 295, 299, 303, 312
- back channel meetings 91, 101–7
- Barak, Ehud 88, 89, 91, 98–100, 116, 121, 133, 149, 161, 162, 294, 297, 308, 325, 326; background 83; at Camp David

- 177–8, 180, 223, 226–7, 246,
266, 273–5; election of 26, 82;
“good will gesture” of 139, 141;
meetings following Camp David
277–9; negotiating stance 84–7,
89, 91–2; opposition to Oslo
Agreement 90–1
- Beilin, Yossi 6, 279, 295, 307
- Ben Ami, Shlomo 91, 101, 110–14,
117, 122, 123–4, 125–6, 128–31,
132, 137–9, 140, 141, 148–53,
172–3, 174, 184–5, 191, 193–6,
200, 229, 244–5, 266, 274, 276,
278, 279, 294, 295, 296–7, 298,
299, 300–3, 303, 304, 309,
312–16
- Berger, Sandy 71, 74, 187, 203,
244–5, 246, 279
- Bethlehem 74
- Al-Biheiri, Mustafa 308
- Bolling Air Force Base talks 279
- borders. *see* frontiers
- Bronfman, Charles 49
- Burj Al-Laqlaq 20, 22
- Bush, President George 15
- Camp David 174–5
- Camp David summit: allegations
concerning Palestinians 262, 267;
answers to Israeli accusations
268–72; appraisals of by American
negotiators 262; benefits from
261–2; blame for failure of
264–7; day 1 176–81; day 2
182–7; day 3 187–90; day 4
190–4; day 5 194–201; day 6
201–4; day 8 210–16; day 9
216–22; day 10 222–5; day 11
225–6; day 12 226–7; day 13
227–35; day 14 235–40; day 15
– last day 240–9; diaries of 170;
evaluation of 257–61, 325–6;
Israel’s opening assumptions
274–5; preliminary talks 170–4;
preparation for 161–75; rejection
of American paper 188–90;
report to Palestinian Legislative
Council 276; resumption of talks
following 276–9; summary
following 250–60
- Carlton Hotel, Tel Aviv, meeting at
298
- cessation of conflict 252, 344–5
- Chirac, President Jacques 277
- Christopher, Warren 1, 2
- Clinton, Chelsea 208
- Clinton, President Bill 4, 22, 23,
24, 25, 63, 65, 67, 69, 70,
72–5, 91, 139, 161, 162,
176–81, 186–90, 192–4, 194,
196–201, 206, 208–9, 211–12,
213–14, 216–17, 229, 230,
232–5, 236–46, 241–7,
264–6, 277, 278, 300–1;
Palestinian response to proposals
of 285–93, 295–6; proposals
from 280–5
- compensation 287, 293, 350–1; *see*
also refugees
- conflict, cessation of 252, 344–5
- curtailment of hatred 254
- Dahlan, Mohammed 199, 200, 220,
223, 224, 229, 231–3, 248, 279,
295, 299, 304, 305, 308, 312
- Dajani, Omar 142
- Declaration of Principles 46–7;
Sharon’s opposition to 31
- defence of Palestine 230–1
- demilitarisation 234

- demonstration against settlement expansion 21–2
- early warning posts 229, 251, 281, 292, 322, 358
- economic development 335–6
- Egypt 46, 48, 299
- emergency deployment 125–6, 127–8, 221, 224, 230, 234, 281, 304, 322, 359–60, 361, 364
- Eran, Oded 101, 236
- Erekat, Sa'eb 74, 149, 173, 189, 198, 199, 243, 248, 279, 295, 298, 299, 303, 304, 312, 313–15
- Erez checkpoint meetings 22, 24, 74, 295–6
- European Union 19–20
- Fahd, King of Saudi Arabia 37
- Fatah 37
- final status negotiations 90, 102–5
- Framework Agreement of the Permanent Status (FAPS)* 118–21
- frontiers 102, 104, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133–5, 142–3, 150, 166, 169, 179, 182–5, 191, 192–3, 194, 198, 202–3, 217–22, 223–5, 226, 228, 231–3, 251–2, 269, 280, 321, 345–7, 360–1
- Gaza Airport 73
- Gaza-Jericho agreement 1
- Gaza Sea Port 340–1
- Gil, Avi 297
- Ginossar, Yossi 4–5, 98, 149, 150
- Golan Lobby 50
- Gorbachev, President Mikhail 15
- Gore, Al 71
- Grinstein, Gidi 123, 279, 298, 299
- Hagard, John 114
- Haniyyeh, Akram 248
- Haram al-Sharif 22
- Harpsund meetings 114–22
- Hasmonean tunnel 22, 52
- Hassoon, Israel 223, 224, 299, 308
- Hebron 57–8, 341
- Hebron Protocol 24
- Hilal, Jamal 142, 146, 279
- Al-Hussaini, Hibah 114, 142
- Hussein, King of Jordan 4, 37, 65
- Indyk, Martin 203, 211, 279
- Interim agreement (Oslo 2) 1–2, 41, 43, 44
- Intifada 277–9
- Iraq 48–9
- Ishaq, Jad 299
- Is'haq, Jad 295
- Israel: coalition government of 1999
 - 84; need for negotiation with 27;
 - negotiation with PLO 9–10;
 - nuclear project at Dimona 8;
 - opening assumptions at Camp David 274–5; peace movement in 7, 8–9; prejudices regards Palestinians 273; reaction to Clinton's visit to Palestine 73–4; right-wing government, ideas of 32–3
- Jaffa 4
- Jerusalem 104–5, 106, 129, 130, 131, 132, 143, 146–7, 151–2, 166–7, 169–70, 179–80, 198, 199, 204–5, 207–8, 211–13, 214, 216–17, 226, 228–9, 235, 241–7, 254–6, 269–70, 281–2, 288–9, 297–8, 310, 312–16, 319, 322, 353–6, 361–2

- Jerusalem Hilton meeting 141–8
 Jordan 37, 234–5
 Juma'a, Bashar 299

 Kahalani, Avigdor 50
 King David Intercontinental Hotel
 meeting, June 2000 122–36

 Levy, David 21, 89, 98
 Likud Party 70
 Lipkin-Shahak, Amnon 4, 91, 194,
 294, 295, 299, 303, 304, 312

 Madrid Peace Conference 18, 37
 Malley, Robert 142, 198, 236, 267,
 279
 Meidan-Shani, Pini 279, 298, 299,
 307, 308
 Meretz Party 99
 Miller, Aaron 142, 146, 147, 236,
 279
 Mish'al, Khaled 24
 Molho, Yitzik 49, 50
 Moratinos, Miguel 324
 Moratinos's non-paper on Taba 299,
 351–63
 Mordechai, Yitzhak 49, 50
 Mubarak, President Hosni 4, 88, 277

 Nablus meeting 148–54
 Netanyahu, Binyamin 74; aggressive
 actions of 22; background 18;
 compared to Sharon 31;
 diminishing support for 26–7;
 election of in 1996 12, 19;
 international isolation of 19–20;
 meeting with Arafat and Clinton
 24; meetings with 49–52;
 meetings with Arafat 22, 24, 50;
 opposition to Oslo Agreement
 18–21, 25–6; pressure put on
 Palestinian population 23;
 prevarication of 22–3; at Wye
 63, 65, 66–7, 68, 69, 71–2, 72;
 and the Wye River Agreement
 25–6
 Netanyahu, Yonatan 51
 New Middle East, *The* (Peres) 12
 Nuder, Pär 114

 Orni, Tomer 75–6
 Oslo Agreement 39, 40–1, 46–7, 83;
 Sharon's opposition to 31
 Oslo Declaration of Principles (DOP)
 14; Netanyahu's opposition to
 18–21
 Oslo talks 6, 37–8; success of 1, 41

 Palestine Liberation Organisation
 (PLO) 9–10, 21, 37, 38
 Palestinian Legislative Council 21
 Palestinian National Authority 22,
 38–9
 Palestinian National Charter 21, 24,
 59, 334; amendments to 14–17,
 25, 68, 74
 Palestinian National Council 15–16,
 24, 25, 68, 74
 Palestinians, change in attitude of 11
 Palme, Olof 108
 Paris meetings 277
 partitioning 40
 peace movement in Israel 7, 8–9
 Pelletreau, Robert 109
 Peres, Shimon 6, 7, 8, 9–13, 278,
 279, 294, 296–7, 298
 Permanent Status Agreement 344
 permanent status negotiations 336,
 338–9
 Persson, Göran 118

- Podesta, John 279
- Pollard, Jonathan 68, 71
- prisoners 76, 120, 339, 348
- Rabin, Leah 4–7
- Rabin, Yitzhak 2–7, 7–8, 11
- Ras Al-Amoud 20, 22, 75
- Rashid, Mohammed 248
- Reagan, President Ronald 37
- reciprocity of land exchange 156,
202–3, 251, 269, 287, 296
- redeployment 56, 103
- refugees 106, 120–1, 129, 132,
136, 144, 150–1, 165, 167–9,
179, 181, 198–9, 228, 236–40,
252–4, 272, 282–4, 289–91, 310,
322, 323, 348–50, 356–8
- resignation 154–60
- Rød-Larsen, Terje 324
- Ross, Dennis 24, 63, 71, 74, 96–7,
115, 139, 141–8, 172, 181,
182–3, 184–5, 196, 203, 223,
231, 236, 238, 240, 279
- Rubenstein, Elyakim 236, 237–9
- rule of law 97–8
- Rydal, Bruce 279
- safe passage routes 340
- Sarid, Yossi 295, 309, 312, 313,
315, 320–1
- Savir, Uri 36, 49
- Schwartz, Jonathan 142, 144, 146,
147, 148
- security issues 133–5, 217–22,
229–30, 281, 291–2, 302–3,
304–5, 307–8, 310–11, 330–4,
341–2, 347, 358–60; *see also*
frontiers
- security zones 44–5, 47, 56
- settlements 20, 21–2, 23, 39–40,
51–2, 57–8, 75–6, 90, 94–5,
96–7, 145–6, 150, 166, 287,
302, 303–4, 306, 346–7, 352
- Sha'ath, Nabil 236, 239, 295, 299,
307
- Al-Shakaa, Ghassan 149
- Shamir, Yitzhak 18
- Shapira, Elan 114
- Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement 86,
88–9, 89, 338–42
- Sharm el-Sheikh Summit (2000)
277
- Sharon, Ariel 23; background of 29;
compared to Netanyahu 31;
group meeting with, June 1997
28; meeting, Feb 1998 29–49;
meeting, Oct 1998 53–62;
meeting at ranch Jan 1999
77–81; opposition to Oslo
Agreement 31; as real power in
Israel 52; reasons for meetings
with 26–8; refuses to shake
hands with Arafat 74; at Wye
65–6, 67
- Sher, Gilad 114, 122, 132, 149, 184,
200, 224–5, 228, 229–30, 231,
232–4, 278, 279, 294, 295, 298,
299, 303, 304, 306, 308, 312
- Shultz, George 109
- Solana, Javier 277
- Stockholm Document 109
- Stockholm talks, paper summarising
343–50
- Sweden: first major contribution
109; Harpsund meetings 114–22;
invitation re. back channel talks
109–10; origin of involvement
108–9
- Taba talks: day 1 299–303; day 2

- 303–5; day 3 305–8; day 5
312–16; day 6 316; day 7 316;
letter to Arafat 309–312;
Moratinos's non-paper on
351–63; Palestinian delegation at
324; preparations for 294–9;
press conference 316–20;
progress made at 323–4;
proposed joint communiqué
311–12; summary of 321–2
- Tafakji, Khalil 295, 312
- Temple Mount 22
- Tenet, George 71, 229, 278
- territory 32, 35, 43, 70, 102,
126–7, 130–1, 142–4, 156–7,
163–4, 169, 179, 191, 193–7,
201–3, 212, 224, 228, 253–5,
286–8, 301–4, 305–8, 309, 310,
321, 323, 329–30, 339, 345–7,
351–3
- terrorism 43, 48, 53, 55–6, 59,
60–1, 78–9, 302, 330–2, 341–2
- tunnel uprising 22, 52
- Al-Umari, Ghaith 279
- United Nations Security Council:
Resolution 194 228, 285,
289, 290; Resolution 242 37,
102–3, 106, 120, 163, 180, 182,
186–7, 270–1, 284, 285;
Resolution 338 102–3, 106, 120,
180, 270–1, 284, 285; Resolution
425 124
- United States 86, 136–7; and
Netanyhahu 20; *see also* Clinton,
President Bill
- Wahbeh, Michael 75
- war, 1973 9
- water rights 61, 228, 286, 293
- Wicander, Carl August 114
- Willard Hotel meeting 137–9
- Wye River: conference centre 64–5;
involvement of the Americans
70–1; Memorandum 25, 64,
77–9, 79–80, 87, 329–37; origin
of 63; significance of summit
69–70; summit 24, 65–72
- Yanai, Shlomo 122, 124–8, 184,
191, 218–20, 221–2, 223, 230–1,
232, 279, 298, 299, 304
- Yassin, Sheikh Ahmed 24
- Yatom, Dani 98

