



DEBATE

Nelson CUNNINGHAM, President, McLarty Associates; former Special Advisor to President Clinton

I am Nelson Cunningham, with McLarty Associates. First I have a comment and then a question. The comment is that very few people in Washington today would agree with the notion that this administration would be too much in favour of Israel. This is in brokering any discussions between Israel and Palestine. In fact, it is quite the contrary. My question is this. Prime Minister was in Washington last week and met with President Obama. Just yesterday, Jonathan Pollard was released. This has been a very difficult issue in Israeli-US relations for years. Suddenly, he is released. Ambassador Rabinovich, what was the deal here?

Itamar RABINOVICH, President of the Israel Institute, Distinguished Global Professor at New York University (NYU) and Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution

There was no deal. He served his 30 years. It was an awkward moment, or 30 years, in our relationship. I myself as Ambassador had to deal with it several times. However, it is a peripheral issue and it is not a core issue in the relationship between the United States and Israel. Unfortunately, it became a little bit of a right-wing issue in my country and fortunately, it is over. However, as they say in the movie *Casablanca*, it is just a coincidence. He served his 30 years and it was time to go home.

Miguel Ángel MORATINOS, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain

As you know, I myself feel so engaged and committed. I reassure the audience that Itamar and Manuel are excellent ambassadors and if we allow them to make peace, they will succeed. Even with these divergences in your statements, there is a wish to make a final effort to make peace. Itamar, you said at the beginning, in your introductory remark, that you are afraid to go for a one-state solution, because for you it would be a catastrophe. I fully agree with you, so let us go for the two-state solution.

Manuel said that the situation today is because of the Oslo agreement and this incremental and gradual approach. This has caused the process to fail. In Oslo, everything was well defined, regarding the final status issue, but there was one missing target, the end of the tunnel. What would be the final goal? You rightly say, Itamar, that in this fantastic ceremony in September 1993, President Clinton took the hand of President Arafat and Prime Minister Rabin. They said, 'We recognise the PLO,' and the Palestinians recognised the state of Israel.

However, there was an asymmetry in this recognition. Israel recognised the PLO, but even there, to put in the final status issue, at the endgame, there was the Palestinian state. Do you not think the time has come? For God's sake, why is there this attitude in Israel and the United States to have this absolute obsession with not recognising the Palestinian state? If you want a two-state solution, you negotiate in equal terms what the territories and boundaries, security and the settlements and Jerusalem will be.

Why is there this paralysis, that causes the US administration and the Israelis not to take this step forward? This has caused this asymmetry that was created in 1993. We need to say the time has come for a bit of recognition. Israel will be recognised by the whole of the Arab League and the Islamic State and Palestine will be recognised by Israel, the United States and the whole European Union. Then you start to negotiate. The time has come for this extra effort to get out of the box. It is not Kerry. There must be a way to bring out new formulas in order to get the process going.

Itamar RABINOVICH, President of the Israel Institute, Distinguished Global Professor at New York University (NYU) and Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution

The answer is very short and there are three words: forward, finality and no more claims. Once the Palestinian leadership announces that any agreement will be final and the end of claims, there will be sweeping support in Israel in recognising Palestinian statehood. The principle of statehood has been recognised even by the right-wing Prime



Minister Netanyahu and it has definitely been recognised by the Obama administration. These four magic words of no more claims and finality are the key to resolving that particular issue.

Manuel HASSASSIAN, Ambassador from Palestine to the United Kingdom; former representative at the Ministry of Higher Education and at the Association of Arab Universities

I believe there is a reason why the Palestinian leadership today has been adamantly, with strenuous resilience, going to the international organisations and to the United Nation. This is to get recognition of the State. I cannot believe that the international community has shouldered the responsibility of a two-state solution. When you talk about a two-state solution, why do you not recognise the Palestinian side on the borders of 1967? Leave the negotiation for the contours of that state to the Palestinians and the Israelis.

I will start with the notion that Israel is there and exists as a democracy and that the Palestinians are still struggling for the basic human rights and self-determination. If we do not put them in the context of a state-to-state relationship in any negotiations, it will be a total failure. For that reason, we went to the United Nations to establish that the 1967 lines would be for the state of Palestine. These are not disputed territories, but are territories under occupation. Since they are under occupation, we have to end the claim and to resolve this conflict. We have to recognise each other, not de facto but *de jure*, and have that vision of coordination and coexistence for the future. That is the approach that we should have if we have the actual state of mind of resolving this conflict. The problem today is with the mindsets in leaderships.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

Your colleague has just proposed a step that he says will change the Israeli mindset, finality.

Manuel HASSASSIAN, Ambassador from Palestine to the United Kingdom; former representative at the Ministry of Higher Education and at the Association of Arab Universities

Finality is totally accepted by us.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

You have got the statement.

Meir SHEETRIT, Member of the Israeli Knesset

I would like to make a comment. One of the biggest mistakes made in Oslo centres on the fact that Oslo was agreed in stages. In my opinion, this is the main obstacle on the way to peace. If we were to deliver peace in Oslo in advance, concluding everything and then applying over 5-10 years, every side would try to keep all points of agreement. That is exactly what happened in Egypt. We made a peace agreement with Egypt and then during five years of implementation, we withdrew from Sinai. Every side was doing everything to keep every point of the agreement.

In Oslo, the thought was that in going by stages, we could first solve the simple problems, and over the years, maybe we would be so friendly that we would solve the problems of borders in Jerusalem etc. It was the worst mistake because during the process of going by stages, each side tried to score points on the way. Therefore, they fought like hell on every small point instead of doing it vice versa. I agree with Mr Hassassian that the problem today is that there is no room for more stages. Either we have a final peace agreement, final demands and final claims or nothing. There is no other way.

Secondly, it is impossible to make peace with a broken phone. That was the reason why Thierry could not make peace and it was a failure, because he was speaking to Israelis on one side and then to Palestinians on the other side. During all the negotiations, there was not even one meeting between Netanyahu and Abu Mazen. How could you make peace with somebody without meeting him? I believe that the United States should withdraw from this process



and I believe that Israelis and Palestinians should deal with it themselves. It is an Israeli-Palestinian problem and we should negotiate it ourselves.

I would prefer to do it with the Arab League. The Arab initiative has created something that has never happened before. It has been suggested to make a general peace with all the Islamic countries, 57 countries, if we solve the problem with the Palestinians. The Arab League could be very helpful to bring us to an agreement. There are parts, even if the Prime Minister of Israel would say what Hassassian and Abu Mazen said.

It is about the '67 borders, not literally, but the same territory. All the neighbourhoods in Jerusalem would go back to Palestine for your capital. Palestinians still would not sign it and that is why Abu Mazen, Olmert or Arafat did not sign it. Barak did not sign it, even though he signed just about everything. This is because the Palestinian leader cannot take a decision by himself. Every Arab leader knows that we cannot accept the return of refugees into the state of Israel. That can be done only by the Arab League. The way to circumvent the situation in my opinion is through direct negotiation between Israel and Palestinians, with the support of the Arab League.

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

We have had some exciting proposals, but we have also run out of time. I just want to allow for some very brief comments, and we will start with Mr Hassassian.

Manuel HASSASSIAN, Ambassador from Palestine to the United Kingdom; former representative at the Ministry of Higher Education and at the Association of Arab Universities

I could have paid Meir Sheerit to say what he has said. He just made my conclusion.

Itamar RABINOVICH, President of the Israel Institute, Distinguished Global Professor at New York University (NYU) and Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution

I have two points. One is that because I have heard Mr Hassassian say the words, 'We accept finality,' it has been worth my trip to Switzerland. Secondly, we cannot conclude the discussion without a Henry Kissinger story. Mr Hassassian, Professor Hassassian, Ambassador Hassassian, Kissinger was once asked, 'What do I call you? Is it Dr Kissinger, Professor Kissinger or Mr Kissinger?' He said, 'Your Majesty will do.'

Jim HOAGLAND, Contributing Editor to *The Washington Post*

On that remark, we will close this conversation, which in the end was very constructive. I appreciate all the audience's interest and I apologise for not having more chances to get questions.