

# SAEB EREKAT

Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Palestine

**Jim HOAGLAND**

Thank you. I would now like to introduce Saeb Erekat, who I think just about everybody here already knows, so I will not take any time to introduce him anymore. Saeb, please take this.

**Saeb EREKAT**

Thank you, Jim. Good morning everyone and thanks to the organisers, the Qatari Foreign Minister and Thierry for this kind invitation. I think that as of 12 days ago, Arab countries were asking themselves one question; they were trying to assess the impact of Trump's victory – the impact of his election on countries and policies, Muslim brotherhood, Egypt, Syria. At the same time, as Trump is forming his administration, I am sure that they will be asking themselves the question of how their election will impact on Arabs and assist and change their situation. To both, I would say that we have four years of uncertainty.

The question that the Trump administration and the Arab leaders should ask themselves every morning is how to defeat ISIS. ISIS, it is 803 years in Islamic history since my Prophet, God bless him, died. As Muslims, we are supposed to go to mosques to worship God, not to use God. The minute we go to mosques to use God we have always had bloodshed. As Arabs, we have tens of thousands of universities, hundreds of thousands of intellectuals, writers, authors; we have been cowards in facing such threats in our own households and neighbourhoods. We need to assess the situation very carefully, and to you, Jim, in the US and in Europe, since you have not developed the techniques to kill ideas with bullets – and let me know if you have done so I can change my thinking – ideas cannot be killed with bullets and ideas cannot be prevented from travelling without visas. Today, what we have is the jihad in Damascus, Moscow, Washington, Paris, London, Berlin, and they are not on a picnic there; they know that something went down at the Sikes-Picot agreement and a new map is being formulated, whether we, as Arabs, like it or not.

Going back to the question, two things are needed to defeat ISIS. The first one is to look at the real threat to us as Arabs today, which is demography; 50% of Arabs are under 20 years of age. No Arab leader, no Arab thinker can compete with the one called Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi. This man promises our desperate, unemployed youth 70 virgins, heaven and so on. In Palestine, we have a 26% unemployment rate; we cannot even promise a one-bedroom apartment and a job. We cannot compete. So we need to revisit our educational system. Maybe we should ask why we teach our children at kindergarten to die for Allah. Our Koran says we should teach our children to live for Allah. We should revisit our education, our economies, structures, accountability, women's rights, human rights, the rules of law, without waiting for you to tell us what to do, or assessing the situation.

Mark my words very carefully; what is going on in the Arab world is exactly what Europe went through on 15 March 1848, when Chancellor Metternich had to flee his palace after three weeks of peaceful demonstrations in Vienna. The dust has still not settled and has taken Europe, a Bismarck, a Berlin Conference, World War I, and World War II, and now Britain is leaving/not leaving. Today, the Arabs are going through a major transformation to take us, depending on what we do, three, four, five, six decades of bloodshed, and no one is immune.

However, the answers are very clear; the world has changed on us. Today, in each household in the Arab world there are six to seven chief editors: our wives, children or grandchildren on Facebook or Twitter. Everything is seen



worldwide; our children, our youth, and our students can no longer see with the eyes of their rulers, listen through their ears, and then speak through their tongues. This must stop.

The second thing that is needed here is peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Here you do not need to reinvent the wheel; there is a two-state solution on the 1967 line; a state of Palestine to live side by side with a state of Israel. We have recognised the right of Israel to exist but then we are confronted by an Israeli government today with an Education Minister who celebrated the victory of Trump by saying that it marked an end of the era of a two-state solution. If that is what they anticipate, then I can ask you a question, Jim, and you can answer it in Washington; 'What is the difference between a thug and a murderer who slit the throat of an Australian journalist in Iraq and Syria in the name of ISIS, and a thug and a murderer who burned an 18-month old toddler, Ali Dawabsheh, with his mother, father and brother, simply because they were not Jewish?' We face here a culture of thinking, a culture of hate, a culture of bigotry.

It is your choice to continue not to define your relationships with the Arabs, because, personally speaking, I do not think that the West has defined its relationship with the Arabs since the year 1683, when some Muslim soldiers seized Vienna. We have never been forgiven for that. Saddam Hussein is a good dictator when he wages a crazy war against Iran, but a bad one when he attacks Kuwait. Assad is a good dictator when he fights with you in some battles, but today he is a bad dictator, and so on. Gaddafi is Mother Theresa and then we kill him. This must stop. A definition of Arab-Western relations is a must and it is based on interests, the values of interests. See us. You do not see us other than in how you define your interests and then you play games with our rulers about how to sustain themselves or not.

I believe that the French have grasped the idea and, as the Foreign Minister Monsieur Ayrault said this morning about terrorism in Nice and Paris and Brussels, you should keep in mind that 99% of those fighting ISIS are Sunni Arab Muslims and 99% of those being killed by ISIS are Sunni Arab Muslims. That is the truth. The French found the balance between defeating ISIS and inviting an international conference in Paris, to solve the Palestinian Israeli problem, and here war is being waged against them by Netanyahu. The fact is that, in Netanyahu's dictionary, if anyone mentions two states and 1967, they become the enemy of peace, stability, and a relative of Bin Laden. If we are going to wait for things, in terms of Obama's administration, in terms of threats and opportunities, then we are going to have to wait a long, long time. How you define threats and how you define opportunities is another story.

Trump's election is a major earthquake that will change things. We have to keep an eye on elections in Europe and see the rise in the nationalist extreme movements. This is very serious. I do not have time to go into the details of this but all I can do now is say that if we do not understand the threats facing us, irrespective of the consequence of this or that or our relations with the Trump administration, as Arabs we need to define what we want. What we want is a better future based on peace, democracy, women's rights, human rights, accountability, transparency, and the rule of law. If we do not help ourselves in this, nobody else can.

Thank you very much.

### **Jim HOAGLAND**

Thank you for that very sobering statement, which deserves great attention. There have been forces in Israel for a long time that have been against the two-state solution. More recently, it has been Palestinian moderates who have been saying that there is no longer a hope for a two-state solution. You danced on the edge of saying that. If there is no two-state solution, what is the alternative? What is the future?

**Saeb EREKAT**

Jim, Israel is a country with 3,000 fighting planes, 5,000 tanks, nuclear weapons; if it is my word against theirs, and with the Congress and the Senate, I do not stand a chance. Who said that life was about fairness and justice? Having said all of this, Israel has three options. One is my option and the only option, which is a two-state solution. Live and let live. Secondly, there are some among my people who say there should be a one-state solution. There is no such thing as a one-state solution. By definition, a solution requires two parties and Israel will never be party to a one-state solution, a democratic, secular state, where Jews, Muslims, and Christians live together. We offered this 40, 50, or 60 years ago. Netanyahu is now trying to institutionalise the third option, which is what I call the “one state, two systems” option: that is apartheid. No one will have the stomach for it.

I did not wake up one morning and feel my conscience aching for the suffering of the Israelis, but I recognise them and I sit with them. At the end of the day, this is what is needed. I can promise you Jim, after 5,700 years, Jews are not going to convert to Christianity and Islam and become Palestinians and Palestinian Christians and Muslims are not going to convert to Judaism and become Israelis. As I speak to you today, from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean, 50.9% of the population are non-Jews; 49.1% are Jews. What are they going to do with me? The only option is a two-state solution. The Republican administration headed by George W. Bush and the Democrats headed by Obama have both said that the 1967 two-state solution is in the national American interest. Let us translate this into a reality and stop treating Israel as a country above the laws of man and stop dealing with the Arabs in terms of undefined relations. This is the combination for a future, stable Middle East.