

CD-1024 Transcription

American Jewish Committee seminar-meeting [6]. 10 March 1980.

EVRON: Not necessarily what Ashraf has described, but something not too different. But there can be no doubt about its special, its unique relationship to us. And that is the point, which we're going to present and be firm on. Just as President Sadat was firm on his insistence that no inch of Egyptian territory would be surrendered to us, sovereignty. He accepted many compromises which would ensure our security. But under Egyptian sovereignty, I don't think that if we accept -- or rather, I do think that [01:000] if we accept this principle and apply it to Jerusalem, a solution would be found there too.

M1: Thank you. I should point out the person who asked the question was Grant Coopersmith of the AJC, Washington Office, and would appreciate it if hereafter you could identify yourselves as you ask your questions. I saw some other hands up before. Beg pardon?

TANENBAUM: I wanted to ask a question (inaudible).

M1: OK. I think this gentleman there had -- did you -- yes?

GOLINKIN: If I am not mistaken -- Rabbi Noah Golinkin. If I'm not mistaken, is that (inaudible) Mr. Ghorbal did express his sentiments in favor of peace with Israel prior to the

visit of Mr. Sadat in Jerusalem? [02:00] And you said it publicly in the United States on a number of occasions. And believe it that one such occasion in the audience, to the Jewish audience it was an expression that we hope will please come to Israel (inaudible) Egypt (inaudible). I am delighted to see under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee. It is possible to hold this kind of a dialogue between the ambassador of Israel, the ambassador of Egypt to the United States. And that the positions on Jerusalem, that seem so very much apart in the newspapers and in the negotiations, seem to be not so terribly remote when two ambassadors have a chance to dialogue with one another under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee.

(inaudible) from the ambassador from Egypt, what (inaudible) out there that any other Arab representatives from other nations [03:00] would be brought closer to the point of view that Mr. Ghorbal represents and has represented, even before November '77, to make possible a continued dialogue, because I believe that it's this kind of dialogue that eventually is going to lead to a solution that will be satisfactory both to Israel and to Egypt.

EVRON: You should have addressed that question to me, not to -- (inaudible, laughter) I would like Mr. Ghorbal -- (inaudible, background noise, laughter)

GHORBAL: As you see, Epi doesn't leave me a chance. He's always taking away all these possibilities. But I am very touched by your remembering these opportunities I had from way back [04:00] to speak and to convey my thoughts. Eleven years ago, Marvin, Cal, and I had a lunch together. That was the first time we met. And I told Marvin then, and it is my conviction. Jews and Arabs are on a renaissance today. They are; that is my belief. And I told them then I do not believe that the renaissance needs to take them into collision against each other, but need to bring them together. Where the combined forces can really turn [05:00] the Middle East into not an area of conflict, but an area of aggrandizement. We have taken the first steps, and thank God we reached what we reached between us and Israel. Is it going to be possible to do it with the rest of the Arabs? Yes, I so believe. But we need some help from Epi and from his government. I don't doubt for a minute the real, profound sentiment that he expresses about Jerusalem. If I doubt it, then forget it; we're not going to get there. I don't doubt it, and I feel very much what he says about [06:00] his country. That's nationalism. But when two nationalisms are fighting on the same land, what do you do? Either you let them kill each other, or you try to bring rationality to each of them, to both. I can assure Epi that

in many instances, there are Palestinians who are saying about Jerusalem the same thing. What do we do? Are we going to be the mother or the two mothers that are going to cut the child between them? And both of them are legitimate mothers. Or are we going really to find the solution in between, to help? Where it would safeguard again, as I say, [07:00] the combinedness, the unity of the city, and yet, the satisfaction of the two on the same place. But let me tell you that I feel that while the other Arabs who are very skeptical, very skeptical about [candy?], and nobody knows it more than we. We have been the ones to be boycotted, to be isolated, and to have had what we have received from our brothers. Yet, when you talk to them now, you feel -- they are asking continuously, are you honestly getting somewhere in the autonomy? [08:00] As if they are telling you, if you will get somewhere in the autonomy, than that will hit them in such a way as to make them rethink their policy. And this is why I say, the answer is not ours, because the answer is principally Israel's. If they would feel that the Palestinians are getting a real autonomy, and not just a semblance of one, then they will say, yes, we are on a right track. It will be long. It will be tedious. But it will be a process of co-living, where people instead of fighting each other will run through a

[bombenna?] in a marketplace, and [09:00] kill innocent children and women and others, and where a bomb fell on a camp and killed equally innocent refugees and children and whatnot, you will have a co-living of two people, and two nations, that have been living there before, and doing it beautifully, and could do it again. I am so convinced about it. And I believe we will reach there. And my only problem is instead of making it a long ride, can we make it a shorter ride? I hope we can do it.

EVRON: I'm sure that one thing we won't [10:00] have to worry about, Ashraf and I, is subject to talk about. He pointed out to several points. A, I want to share here, and express again admiration for the courage and the foresight of President Sadat in taking the steps that he had. He was far ahead of all the other Arab leaders. And I have no doubt that history, Arab history, in years to come, will prove him to have been right, and not those objectionists who have been fighting him along the way. And who are now fighting between themselves. So Egypt is going through a very difficult time right now. [11:00] In the Arab world. Do we know it; do we recognize it? They now feel a little what we have felt for 32 years? But I'm sure that before too long, others will join in the process, and certainly that the barriers around Egypt, which already show signs of

crumbling, will fall down. Now on the questions of -- he was referring to the Palestinians, of course, making the autonomy. I know it's not -- it doesn't serve too many purposes [12:00] harking back on things past. But you can't ignore it either. For 19 years, East Jerusalem was not in our hands. Never was there an effort made during this period by the Arab people who controlled East Jerusalem to turn it into a political capitol, or even into that kind of religious symbol that they are talking about today. I remember the late King Faisal of Saudi Arabia used to say that his great wish in life was to come [13:00] and be able to pray at the mosque on Temple Mount before he passed away. We checked. During the 19 years that he had the opportunity, A, he could have had that opportunity even when we were in control, because we didn't deny it to anybody. But when East Jerusalem and the Old City were under Arab control, King Faisal, or as he was before that, the Emir Faisal, visited the place once, I believe it was in 1949 or the early '50s. But even that's in doubt. That he hasn't there since is a fact of life. And I'm mentioning it not in order to score a point [14:00] but in order to underline the fact that there is a basic difference between what Jerusalem means to us and to others. With all due respect, and I'm not in any way trying to denigrate in any

way from its religious importance to others, about the Palestinians and their home, and their need to -- the refugee camps and so on. There are two different problems. The problem of the refugees will not be solved even if Israel agreed, which Shamir will not, to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state [15:00] in the West Bank. Because there's just no room for them there, and also, they never came from there. The refugees in the Lebanese camps, and in other areas, did not come from Judaea and Samaria. They came from Galilee, from the Haifa area, from other places. If they ever think about returning to someplace, it's to those places. I'm speaking frankly about it. We noticed it when we opened the refugee camps in Gaza. For 19 years, Gaza was separated with barbed wire from the West Bank. [16:00] And we weren't sure what would happen. And it was a debate within the government. Should we take the risk? No, they did not. Because the people who came to Gaza came from Ashkelon and from Jaffa, and from (inaudible). They did not look upon Hebron, and Nablus, and Ramallah as their homes. And they did not want to take the opportunity to go there.

So we do have a very serious refugee problem, but it's not insolvable. The world has solved, during the last few

decades, many more difficult refugee problems. All that is needed [17:00] is the will to solve it. But if the insistence is that they go back to where they had come from originally, and that means that Israel would accept a situation which would prove its eventually self-destruction, then that's not a solution. So we have to separate the two issues, the issue of the autonomy, which I think, and I hope, will be solved. At one of our previous dialogues together, Ashraf said -- he was asked why is it that nothing was done to give them autonomy or statehood during the 19 years of Jordanian and Arab occupation of the West Bank, and he said, well if you miss the bus once, you don't have to blame that person, [18:00] and give them an opportunity. He was right. But what I'm concerned about is that the Palestinians there will not miss the bus again, when they have the opportunity. If not the bus, maybe it's a coach. But it's something to travel along with. The opportunity is there. If you insist on all or nothing, you usually get nothing. We have agreed on a framework for five years' transition period. Things that we'll decide upon now do not have to be, at least according to the Camp David Agreement, permanent. And if we approach the problem with this attitude, then I think [19:00] we'll find a solution there too. Thank you.

M1: Did you have a question, Father Weiler? And then Rabbi Tanenbaum.

EVRON: What is your time schedule?

M1: Our time schedule is yours. Yeah.

EVRON: (inaudible) Four, because I (inaudible) --

M1: Why don't we take the next two questions --

EVRON: You know I am paid overtime -- you don't want to miss the opportunity.

M1: All right. I think we'll take these next two questions, and then we'll see where we stand at that point.

WEILER: I would just like to say how meaningful it is for me, and I'm sure to other people here, to have the reality of Israel's ambassador and Egypt's ambassador with us for this kind of a dialogue. It's a tremendously moving experience for all of us. I'd like to address my question to Mr. Ghorbal, who mentioned in his initial remarks his hope for a Palestinian state, and in your later [20:00] remarks, sir, you talked about reaching for a solution. Is that the only solution that you can see to the problems of your mutual countries, or do you find that a possibility among other solutions? And could you share those with us?

GHORBAL: We've turn it into a political one.

WEILER: But on a reasonable basis.

GHORBAL: Well let me say this. I always reiterate that point of view wherever I go. If I were to make the decision for Israel, some quite a remarkable undertaking that the ambassador of Egypt would take the decision for Israel, but I say if I put myself in their shoes, and in order to achieve the peace, we had to do that, [21:00] we had to sit down and say, what would really make the impact on our Israeli partners in peace, in order that we come and clinch it -- and I'm sure they have done the same. And I say, if I were them, trying to find a solution to the problem of their relations with the Palestinians, I would say yes, I will accept a Palestinian state. I would even say I would accept that they become independent Palestinian state, and the one who would sign it is Yasser Arafat. And I say that in all candor, because why? Because the most important and effective way to get people to respect a law is to have them become [22:00] partners in making the law. You want to have the rules of the club respected, get people to join the club. Don't keep them out, and kick them out, and tell them, you abide by the laws of the club. You are talking in two diametrically opposed logical points. But if you ask me what will then be the reality, let me tell you. If the Palestinians are given the self-determination right, and told, "Choose," they will automatically choose, when they

think of a federation with Jordan, why? Because Israel, if I put myself in her shoes, will never accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Jordan, unless it is a totally demilitarized Palestinian [23:00] state. She would fear about her security. She'll be anxious to protect herself, and thus the only way a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and then Gaza, how would that demilitarized Palestinian state be able itself to sleep nights, because they will have also problems vis-à-vis their neighbor Israel, having the F-15s, the F-16s, the M-60 tanks, and probably also the F-18s that are still on the drawing board. And they will then require a federation, an association with Jordan that would give them at least a relative security. But all of that is what you would call [24:00] the political solutions. Talk about the realities, and if anyone can talk about realities, it's Epi and I. And you people, because you've gone from Cairo to Israel through Sinai, where the border now is open; where people are traveling back and forth. And that is the security. That is the normalization. And that is the real beauty of it, providing the security for everybody concerned. Where the commonality between the three areas -- Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan -- and the trade and the movement of goods and services, the movement equally through Gaza and into

Egypt, [25:00] where there is the project, and Epi and I, we are going to Minnesota in April to participate in a conference on economic joint projects between the United States, Israel, and us. In all your dreams, five years ago, could you have believed it? And it is happen today. Why can't it happen between Palestinian and Israeli, between Syria and Israel? Sure, I know about the high ground of the Golan and the low ground of the Valley, but also one knows about the high ground of the Golan, if it is in the hands of Israelis, because it is higher than Damascus. Where do you draw the security line? It's only in the commonality. That is where the other day, I said we missed the bus [26:00] at the certain instance. Do we have to continue to miss the bus forever? Or can't we rationalize with ourselves and say I'm not going to miss this coming bus? So let's all get on it now. And beautiful as it is, in terms of objective, but it is not only enough to so describe it. One must work for it.

EVRON: Well, you can now judge for yourselves why Ashraf Ghorbal is not the Prime Minister of Israel. Because he said, if he were an Israeli, this is what he would do, or what he would suggest. I suppose I have a few ideas in my mind to suggest [27:00] to President Sadat also, as to what he should or should not do. But no, this is not exactly so.

We cannot. It's true that the past is probably -- I think Mr. Eban once wrote it -- that the past is the worst enemy of the future. In many ways, it's true. But it is also unrealistic and untrue to look into the future without any reference to the past. Certainly we cannot do that. And in all the debates and the arguments that are going on these days, a little fact is forgotten somehow: that we all [28:00] would not have had this problem to deal with today, of the future of the West Bank, even including East Jerusalem, had King Hussein listened to our pleading in June '67 and stayed out of the war at that time. Just think of it for a moment. Only he thought, he played the Mussolini role. He thought that Israel was really -- has been brought down to its knees, and it's just a matter of dividing the spoils. And he didn't want to avoid his share of it. So there in spite of our pleadings, and this has been documented by General Bull [29:00] who was the head of the United Nations Forces then, by the American ambassador [in Oman?], by King Hussein himself. He chose to go to war. It's easy sometimes to start a war. You don't know how it will end. And it ended the way it did. We cannot forget it. And we cannot put ourselves once again -- it's our responsibility to ourselves and to the future of our children, not to create a situation that would be as

tempting as that one was, on June 6th or 7th to King Hussein -- June 6th, I think it was, 1967. If it shows that we are blind, [30:00] then we are blind. I think it on the contrary. And we have been searching and racking our brains for solutions that would take care of our security needs, and take care into consideration the realities, the demographical and others, of the area. For years, and Mr. Ball's account in foreign affairs is not the correct account of what happened. And I'm a little surprised that Mr. Ball would do that. We pleaded -- previous governments, that is, in which I had served -- with King Hussein to do the kind of thing that Ashraf Ghorbal has just talked about: to [31:00] create a joint Palestinian-Jordanian entity. But with the territorial compromises that were needed to ensure our minimal security needs. King Hussein here made the second mistake. The first mistake was to go to war. The second mistake was not to accept a compromise for peace. You cannot have it both ways. So that has been rejected for ten years. In many ways, this rejection was responsible for the changes in Israel. [32:00] There were many reasons why the Likud won the elections in 1977, but one of the reasons was that the Labor government was accused by Mr. Begin, and rightly so, that its proposal for a compromise with Jordan, that would hand back all or most

of the inhabited areas, didn't have a chance. King Hussein didn't want it. He wasn't ready to accept it. What was suggested was eventually a PLO state. You know, Ashraf, my friend, nothing is very [33:00] definitive. Or very few things are definitive in life. But one thing I can assure you. If there's one thing that all Israelis are united about, it's the rejection of the idea that national suicide is an international obligation. And that's Mr. Abba Eban's phrase. He's certainly not a hawk. Mr. Yasser Arafat is committed to the elimination of the State of Israel. So are his associates in his organization. To ask us to agree to sit with them in the hope that eventually, [34:00] maybe he will join the club, this is too much to ask of a people like ours, with our history and with our experiences. But we believe that the solution that we suggested, of full autonomy, is something that the Palestinians, if they really want to begin to assume a role in the determination of their future -- and here I believe I'm quoting from the language of Camp David, which is something that they should take it on right now, or else, as I said before, they'll miss the second bus too. Thanks.

M1: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. There are so many questions, and so little time, and I know that both of the ambassadors [35:00] are under time limitations. Since Ambassador

Ghorbal was our first speaker and invited guest, I wondered if you would like to close out the session this afternoon with any final comments.

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

GHORBAL: Well this has been, I think, a very useful experience for myself, I'm sure as it is for my colleague Epi Evron. I hope it has been so for you. We have not dealt very deeply with religious matters, but I think we have been motivated by very much of religious desire to [36:00] find solution between people, and that is a common element of all of us. I do not think the purpose of Epi, as I'm sure it is not my purpose, that we score against each other. As I said, there is a time to score, and there is a time to solve. We are at the solving period. And to do so, we need the element of commonality to really put the limelight on it. And element of commonality tonight was the last words of EVRON: make what Camp David achieved work, and be implemented, and give the Palestinians their full autonomy. [37:00] And that will be the first step on a long road, but I'm sure a positive road, to a happy solution in our area. Thank you. Good night. (applause)

M1: Well, gentlemen, we thank both of you. I think this has been a proud moment in the history of AJC to have this kind of a discussion of this intellectual caliber. We can be

proud of having had it, and we're particularly grateful for joining us, and for making this the afternoon that it has been. Thank you both very much.

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

M1: Thank you very much. Careful of the wires. Marc, the reason I got (inaudible, background noise). Do you have any other questions, or should we just -- I think on that basis, we'll adjourn [38:00] and have informal discussions. Thank you all.

(multiple conversations; inaudible)

M2: -- doing a masterful job in running this meeting, really fine.

M1: Thank you.

M2: And a pleasure to be with you.

M1: Oh I'm glad you were here.

M3: I made that comment about nothing political. I knew that we'd get into politics, but I wanted to set a tone.

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

M1: And it was not.

M3: No, not in the least. We can be very proud of ourselves.

M1: Well if all goes well, I'll see you in May, when you're --

M2: At the annual meeting in New York.

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

M2: Thanks again for the invitation.

(multiple conversations; inaudible)

M1: It was a great feedback (multiple conversations; inaudible)
with real feeling too. Marc, great -- [39:00]

(multiple conversations; inaudible)

M4: -- oh yeah, I've got plenty of time to --

(multiple conversations; inaudible)

M1: I want to say goodbye to some people. Marc, you and --

TANENBAUM: I'm going to say goodbye to some people first,
but I have to call my office.

F1: Where shall we meet?

(multiple conversations; inaudible) [40:00-42:00]

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