

# Palestinians to Proceed With UN Recognition Bid

The Palestinians will move ahead with their quest to win UN recognition of a state in the West Bank, Gaza and East Beit-ul-Moqaddas, an aide to Palestinian Authority Chief Mahmoud Abbas said, rebuffing US President Barack Obama's warning that such a move would be pointless.

The aide, Nabil Shaath, spoke after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a White House meeting Friday, rejected Obama's call to use the pre-1967 war lines as the basis for border talks with the Palestinians. In that war, Israel captured the territories the Palestinians want for their state, AP reported.

Shaath and another Abbas aide, Saeb Erekat, said late Friday that Netanyahu's statements make it clear the Israeli leader is not a partner for peace, suggesting there is no point in returning to negotiations.

"I don't think we can talk about a peace process with a man who says the 1967 lines are an illusion, that Beit-ul-Moqaddas will be the capital of Israel, undivided, and he does not want a single (Palestinian) refugee to go back," Erekat said. "What is left to negotiate about?"

Abbas has not given a formal response to the parameters for



a peace deal Obama laid out in a Mideast speech on Thursday. He is consulting by phone with Arab leaders, plans to meet with Jordan's King Abdullah II later Saturday and then convene the leaders of the PLO and his Fatah movement later in the week before giving a response, Erekat said.

Abbas has instructed aides not to comment.

Erekat said it's too soon to say whether the Palestinians will continue with their quest for UN recognition in September. A bid to become a UN member requires approval not just from the General Assembly, where the Palestinians might win the

needed majority, but also from the UN Security Council where the US might veto such a step.

In his speech Thursday, Obama warned that 'symbolic actions to isolate Israel at the United Nations in September won't create an independent state'.

However, Shaath said after the

Netanyahu-Obama meeting that "we will escalate our diplomatic efforts to get the recognition of the Palestinian state."

Shaath noted that Obama didn't threaten a veto.

"We still hope that he will not do so, and that he will not stand in our way to freedom and independence, which he called for all the Arab nations," Shaath said.

Obama has also demanded answers from Abbas about his reconciliation deal with the Hamas, which controls Gaza. Hamas refuses to recognize Israel, and has not softened its stance as part of the reconciliation.

Netanyahu said Friday that Abbas would have to choose between Hamas and a peace deal with Israel.

Shaath said reconciliation is an internal Palestinian issue and that the efforts by Hamas and Abbas' Fatah movement to form a joint transition government would continue.

"We will form a technocrat government which we said will not include either Fatah or Hamas, and will have specific duties, which are preparing for elections and rebuilding Gaza," Shaath said.

Abbas has argued that he, not Hamas, would represent Palestinians in negotiations.

## News in Brief

### PGCC Official Back in Yemen

An official from the six-nation Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) bloc confirmed its secretary general will head to Yemen on Saturday ahead of the planned signing of a deal it brokered aimed at ending months of deadly protests.

The council's secretary general, Abdullah Al-Zayani 'will travel to Sana'a on Saturday' and 'the signature of the plan will take place in his presence on Sunday,' said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, AFP reported.

"He will then return to Riyadh with the signed document, which will be submitted to an extraordinary meeting of PGCC foreign ministers" that is to be held in the Saudi capital on Sunday, he added.

Zayani has been attempting to broker an end to a bloody standoff between Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and protesters calling for his ouster, which has continued



since January.

The PGCC chief flew out of Sana'a on Wednesday after sources close to the negotiations said the government and the opposition again failed to ink the proposed deal.

Saleh on Saturday denounced the PGCC initiative as a 'coup' but said he accepted it for the sake of the country.

In a televised speech, Saleh lashed out at so-called "world superpowers" as well as Yemen's Arab Persian Gulf neighbors, accusing them of funneling cash to youth protesters to hold sit-ins and challenge his rule.

"The initiative is in fact purely a coup operation but we will deal positively with it for the sake of the motherland," Saleh said.

Under the terms of the proposal, Saleh would hand power to the vice president 30 days after the agreement is signed, and he and his aides would be granted immunity from prosecution by parliament.

A national unity government led by a prime minister from the opposition would be formed, and a presidential election would follow 60 days after his departure.

Security forces have mounted a bloody crackdown on the protests, leaving at least 180 people dead, according to a toll compiled from reports by activists and medics.

## Interview

### Part 2

Interview with Phillip F. Tourney, USS Liberty Survivor  
Interviewer: Ali A. Jafari  
alajafari369@yahoo.com

Q: And now could you please speak about the most terrible incident of your life. I mean the actual attack on USS Liberty?

PT--Our Captain, McGonagle, was a stickler about drilling, and so, typical for him, he ordered a preparedness drill for washing down the ship in the event of an attack. After the drill was over I remained on deck to do some repairs as ordered by my superior officer. I stood on deck next to one of our only 4 guns designed to repel pirates talking with a friend of mine, David Skollack. We both remarked how this would be the one place we wouldn't want to be in an attack. I left and stepped inside the ship. As soon as I closed the hatch door I heard a huge explosion just a few feet from me on the other side. I figured that an accident had taken place. Little did I know that we were under attack.

I thought we must be in the middle of World War III. The bombardment was relentless. It seemed that our attackers would never run out of ammo. It was like being in a rainstorm and trying not to get hit by drops of water. Rockets, bullets, napalm, they threw everything they had at us in a hurry. Remember, as I said, they wanted this to be a quick job so that they could get out of there with no witnesses to tell any tales.

I had seen war films when I was a kid but they are nothing like the real thing. No matter how hard Hollywood tries to capture the terror of being in combat--and worse, not being able to fight back--there is no way to describe what it is like.

Being a stupid 20 year old, the first thing I did upon realizing we were under attack was to open the hatch door and run out on deck to see if any of my shipmates were hurt and needed help. I was joined by my good friend Rick Ainetti who obviously was just as dumb as I was, and so we darted out in between volleys to grab an arm, a leg, or whatever we could and drag a wounded servicemen someplace where he could get at least a little bit of protection from the hell that was raining down on all of us. I was sure we had recovered everyone off deck. I went below to see what I could do in keeping the ship afloat and helping the wounded.

Remember at this time we thought it must be the Arabs who were attacking us, since the planes were unmarked and there was no way that Israel would do something like this. Once the planes had done everything they could and had failed in sinking us, we then saw a team of torpedo boats steaming in our direction at a high rate of speed, proudly flying their Star of David flag. We breathed a sigh of relief, thinking that our dear friend and ally Israel had scared off our attackers and was now coming to assist us. All of this changed however when we saw the torpedoes being dropped into the water and heading in our direction.

At that point we knew we were dead, because no ship survives a torpedo blast. The captain's voice came over the loudspeaker telling us to prepare for torpedo explosion. In total, 5 torpedoes had been launched. 4 passed us by and had missed the ship, which I account as being an act of God. The last one however hit us.

Again, it is nothing like the movies. I was inside when the torpedo hit, just one deck above the point of impact, as a matter of fact. The noise from the explosion was like nothing I had ever experienced. My eardrums were immediately blown out, leaving me almost permanently deaf to this day. The blast completely picked the ship up out of the water and threw it in the air like a child's toy. When it landed back on the water, it landed HARD.

Next, with what hearing I still had, was the sound of metal creaking, ripping and folding, as the rush of sea water poured into the gaping hole in our side. Then came the vertigo of feeling the ship turning towards the side of the blast as if it

## Israeli Attack on American Ship

# The Forgotten Crisis



were about to roll over and sink. Finally, it settled, listing considerably, but still afloat, thank God. Having run out of torpedoes, the Israeli torpedo boats then circled the wounded and dying ship like vultures, firing at anything that moved, including the firefighters and those trying to retrieve wounded men from the deck. We lowered the 3 remaining life rafts we had into the water in order to put our most seriously wounded in them, since it appeared we were going to sink. The gunners in the Israeli boats shot them out of the water, a war crime. Once they ran out of ammo and left, an Israeli helicopter approached the ship. It was loaded with commandos armed with submachine guns. They hovered above the ship for a minute, preparing to rappel down and kill us all off one by one. Then, for whatever reason, they took off in a hurry, another miracle that day.

Estimates vary as to the length of the attack, but in general it was about 90 minutes, the same length of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 that brought America into World War II.

Q: Several Israeli motivations for their attack on USS Liberty have been discussed over the years. The British said that, at least one Israeli objective was to keep the US from warning off Jordan, which in those days was the only Arab country that had reasonably good relations with the US, and the Israelis dearly wanted to sucker Jordan into the war so they could more easily take the West Bank and East Jerusalem. (The Brits thought the Israelis would have attacked Jordan anyway, but they wanted it the other way around if they could manage it.) The French said it was to impress on all Arab countries that even then, only a decade after their decision to put AIPAC & company into high gear, Israel had the US (or at least its government) so firmly under its influence that it could even attack a US Navy ship and kill Americans, and get away with it. There is an incentive behind any crime that a criminal commits. In your opinion could it be that Israel really wanted to instill fear in the hearts of Arabs that 'we are who we are and we even have the audacity to attack our ally's ship', knowing that they could get away with it? What do you believe was their incentive for attacking USS Liberty, knowing full well, as you claim, that this was an American ship?

PT--I have heard all the theories concerning the 'why' of Israel's attack, and all of them are very plausible. However, today we know a lot more than we did when we were just beginning to piece together exactly what took place that day, and one of the things we know beyond any doubt is that Israel did not act alone, but rather with the assistance of the US government, going all the way up to the President. We now know from having spoken to people who were in various positions of authority that in the early part of our attack when we were able to get a distress signal out and US rescue planes were launched in order to save us that they were then recalled by then-President Johnson who justified his decision by saying 'I will not embarrass our ally'.

Remember, this was in the early part of the attack when even we did not know it was Israel, so how would Johnson have known unless it was with pre-planning and collusion?

My personal feeling is that the attack on the USS LIBERTY was meant to be blamed on Egypt, an ally of the Soviet Union at the time, that would then lead to the situation that took place following 9/11--meaning a permanent American military presence in the Middle East on behalf of Israel. The Soviets would have been driven out of the Middle East and America would remain as the sole protector of the region for the foreseeable future.

Q: Generally speaking, as the recent history of the Middle East has shown, Israelis will not own up to anything unless they absolutely have to or there are absolutely undeniable or unassailable evidence linking them to their wrongdoing or crime. Likewise, in the case involving their attack on the USS Liberty, despite all the testimony of you and your shipmates to the contrary, they have claimed that attack on USS Liberty was a case of 'friendly fire', and that they misidentified Liberty for an Egyptian horse carrier EL Quesir. One of the reasons that they present for their argument is that, the attacking jets circled the ship three times looking for a flag, but no flag was flown. What is your answer to such claim?

PT--The first thing we have to keep in mind when considering anything that Israel says is that it is the motto of her intelligence agency Mossad that 'By way of deception, thou shalt do war'. With Israel, the very first order of business is to lie, lie, and then lie again. She understands the value of blinding your enemy by throwing sand in his eyes so that he cannot see the picture before him clearly.

Our flag was as clear as day. It was literally as big as a truck. It was flying in the breeze. In fact, Israel made sure to shoot it down in the initial seconds of the attack. We replaced it, and that one was shot up as well. Furthermore, the El Quesir, a horse transport vessel, was 1/4 the size and antiquated. The LIBERTY was the most sophisticated ship sailing on the seas at that time. We used to joke about the ship's appearance, that it looked like a giant lobster with antennae everywhere. Mistaking the El Quesir for the LIBERTY is like confusing a donkey for a race car.

We had English letters 10 feet tall on the ship's hull. These words were written in the Latin alphabet, not Arabic, something the troops onboard the torpedo boats could see up close, as they were a mere 50 feet away at times. More than this though, I now know from personal experience that the 'flag' story just does not hold water because of personal testimony I received recently. I recently had a conversation with a gentleman who was in a US submarine very close to us when we were being attacked. The submarine's job was to film the attack and our sinking so that the video footage could then be played on American news media to whip the American people up into going to war against Israel's enemies. He told me, personally and specifically, that the flag was clearly visible through the periscope.