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The UN and Israel: Can They Cooperate?

Reflections From Over Ten Years Involvement in the Middle East Peace Process

Participants:

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Professor Yossi Shain, Head of the School of Government & Policy

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Dr. Avi Beker, Head of the UN-Israel Project

Keynote Address:

Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen, UN Special Coordinator to the Middle East Peace Process

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Mr. Shimon Peres MK, Member of Israeli Knesset

Professor Moshe Arens, former Minister of Defense and of Foreign Affairs

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Messrs Rød-Larsen, Peres, Arens, and Professor Shain. Moderated by **Professor Shimon Shamir**, Head of the University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation

Closing Remarks:

Professor Aharon Klieman, Director of the Abba Eban Program in Diplomatic Studies

A Note from the Head of the School

The Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy's UN-Israel Project has been developed in order to, for the first time in Israel, apply academic rigor to the analysis of United Nations conduct as it pertains to Israel, as well as to make policy recommendations with a view to encouraging a more creative approach to Israeli-UN diplomacy.

This booklet contains a transcript of one of our first initiatives, a public discussion evening with outgoing UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen, Mr. Shimon Peres MK, and Israel's former Minister of Defense and of Foreign Relations, Professor Moshe Arens. The evening was held both to honor Mr Rød-Larsen as he departed the Middle East, and just as importantly, to signal the School's intention to act as a facilitator of public dialogue between the UN, the Israeli political establishment, academia and the Israeli public at large. The evening was a remarkable success, being attended by many members of the diplomatic corps in Israel, as well as students, academia and the Israeli public.

Since this event, we have moved on to our next challenge. In a world first, the UN-Israel Project and the United Nations have jointly developed an academic course for students in the Abba Eban Graduate Program in Diplomatic Studies. The course – being taught during the Spring 2005 semester – sees officials from various international agencies of the UN, ranging from the World Food Program, UN Development Program, UN Relief and Work Agency, UNESCO, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Children's Fund, and many others, delivering weekly lecture presentations to our students on their activities, followed by a roundtable discussion. This innovative course heralds the UN-Israel Project's ambitious intentions for 2005 and beyond.

I would like to give special thanks to the local staff at the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who share in our belief of the benefits that can be gained by Israel and the United Nations from the development of joint efforts. We look forward to our continued cooperation with you.



Professor Yossi Shain

Head of the Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy

Terje Rød-Larsen



"The numerous General Assembly resolutions criticizing Israel reflect the fact that much of the world has been critical of Israel's actions, particularly the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Sometimes those criticisms have been put strongly by some member states and in ways that many have found offensive. But, the General Assembly is also the forum for Israel to engage with the rest of the world."

Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen taught sociology and philosophy at the Universities of Bergen and Oslo, before helping to establish a secret channel for negotiations between the PLO and the Government of Israel, which concluded with the signing of the Oslo Accords. After serving as Ambassador, Special Adviser to the Norwegian Foreign Minister for the Middle East Peace Process, he was appointed UN Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, a post which he held until December 2004. Following the end of his term in the Middle East, Mr. Rød-Larsen has been appointed President of the International Peace Academy.

Shimon Peres MK



"The United Nations has committed many mistakes, but the world without the United Nations would be a great mistake. The Charter of the United Nations legitimizes peace and clearly objects to aggression, discrimination, unfairness, and lack of understanding. The mistakes don't stem from the Charter but from the organization's members."

Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres has been a Member of the Knesset since 1959. Throughout this time, he has been appointed minister of various portfolios and twice served as Prime Minister, in 1984-6 and 1995-6. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994, following the signing of the Oslo Accords and founded the Peres Center for Peace in 1996. Mr. Peres is currently leader of the Labor Party.

Professor Moshe Arens



"Israel is a country, a member of the United Nations, that has continuously and consistently been attacked at the United Nations. In many ways it is not incorrect to say that the United Nations has been a major forum, maybe 'the' major forum, for Israel bashing."

Professor Moshe Arens has served as Israel's Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Born in 1925 in Lithuania, he spent his childhood in the United States, following which he immigrated to Israel in 1948. After studying mechanical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Aeronautical Engineering at the California Institute of Technology, he spent time as an associated professor of aeronautical engineering at the Technion and as vice-president for engineering at Israel Aircraft Industries. As well as his ministerial portfolios, he also served as a member of the Knesset Finance Committee, Chair of the Knesset Committee on Foreign Affairs and Security, and as Israel's Ambassador to the United States.

Introduction by Professor Yossi Shain:

On behalf of the Harold Hartog School of Government at Tel Aviv University, the University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation, the International Forum and the English Speaking Friends of Tel Aviv University, we are delighted and honored to have with us tonight Mr. Terje Larsen, Mr. Shimon Peres, and Professor Moshe Arens. We at the School of Government are working hard to provide not only excellence in study at Tel Aviv University, but also to provide a public podium to discuss and debate policy issues and international affairs. And tonight is one of such what we consider public service evenings, not only for our students, but for the public at large.

This evening represents the inauguration of the School of Government's 'United Nations-Israel Project', which will be enhanced and developed over time. We understand very well that, notwithstanding the difficult relations between Israel and the United Nations, this international body is important for many reasons which will be elaborated upon tonight. There is no better person to discuss these challenges than Mr. Terje Larsen, the United Nations Special Coordinator to the Middle East Peace Process, who has been in this region for so many years.

There is also little need to elaborate on the contribution of Shimon Peres and Moshe Arens to Israel's foreign relations, and we will no doubt hear from them some words of wisdom, as we always do when these elder statesmen attend events at our School.

Introducing tonight's topic is Dr. Avi Beker, who we are delighted has joined the School as Head of our UN-Israel Project. Dr. Beker has served as Secretary-General of the World Jewish Congress, as well as having had many years of experience in international diplomacy, including as a member of Israel's Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

Dr. Avi Beker:

In December 1991, the General Assembly of the United Nations made a decision previously unprecedented in its history: to revoke and reject its infamous resolution passed 16 years earlier, comparing Zionism to Racism. This was the first time in the annals of the United Nations that a resolution of its assembly was revoked. This was a clear admission of the embarrassment caused by the resolution to the international organization, which was referred to by many as the theater of the absurd. Today, 13 years later, the record is again not overly encouraging. Israel is a country systematically singled out in UN forums with hundreds of anti-Israeli resolutions, while nations who lead in their propensity to violate international law and human rights and have even engaged in recognized acts of genocide, are not even reprimanded by the UN.

With this background in mind, the title of this evening's discussion on the UN and Israel is naturally contentious: *Can they cooperate?*

We at the Harold Hartog School of Government and Policy have made a clear decision: we cannot and should not dismiss the United Nations and we must find new ways and explore new means to foster better communication and cooperation between the UN and Israel. The School's new UN-Israel Project will operate on two fronts: as a workshop for new initiatives and as a watch dog which follows the deficiencies and failures in the UN system. The project will function as a think-tank, offering new directions for Israeli Government policy toward the UN and as a research organ which considers options for UN reform.

In the coming semester we are commencing a new cooperative initiative with the United Nations by conducting, within the framework of our MA program in diplomacy, a special course and workshop with representatives of the different UN specialized agencies which deal with social and economic issues. This will be an attempt to show our graduate students that beyond the harsh and highly cynical political world of the UN, there is a lot of devotion, human care and humanitarian assistance which is provided by the UN around the globe.

It is in this positive light that we are particularly honored to launch our new UN-Israel Project in the presence of such an eminent guest of honor, an international statesman and a world-class diplomat, Terje Rød-Larsen. Terje Larsen has an outstanding record in formal and secret diplomacy. His relations with the Middle East started with a research project on the living conditions of the Palestinians. This project led to the famous secret channel of negotiations between the PLO and the Israeli Government which has become known as the Oslo Process and later the Oslo agreements which were concluded with the signing of the Declaration of Principles at the White House on 13 September 1993.

Mr. Larsen has served as a Minister in the Norwegian government and since September 1999 he has served as the UN Special Coordinator to the Middle East Peace Process. After more than five years in a very sensitive position dealing with many crises and conflicts, Mr. Larsen is leaving the Middle East to what seems a sharp contrast to his experiences here, to serve as the President of the International Peace Academy in New York. Let us hope that the day will come when our region will serve as a living laboratory for the International Peace Academy.



Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen:

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends. I am very glad to be here. Today's event, and the UN-Israel Project that is starting here at the School of Government and Policy at Tel Aviv University, herald a new step in the relationship between Israel and the UN. I am especially happy to be here, a few days before I leave my post as the Secretary-General's representative in the region after more than 5 years. This is a special opportunity for me, for us all, to review the work of the UN in the Middle East and to reflect on the more than 10 years that we have been involved in the peace process.

The iconic and controversial Palestinian leader has left the stage. Prime Minister Sharon is pushing ahead full steam with his withdrawal initiative. We therefore have a timely opportunity here to look at the broader picture of peacemaking in the Middle East.

But let me perhaps say a few things first on the subject of Israel-UN relations. I think there has been tremendous progress in our relationship since we were once called *Um – shmum*. I'm not saying this to whitewash things. Clearly, the relationship between the United Nations and Israel has long and often been troubled. Many Israelis believe that the UN has failed to live up to its founding spirit and that it is biased against Israel.

True, the UN has many faults. But you know, Winston Churchill once said: "Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried." I think it is very similar with the United Nations. Israel's first ambassador to the UN, Abba Eban, realized this. He was always aware that even if things were far from perfect, Israel was far better off within the UN than without it. It was Abba Eban who set an example that inspired in me the wish to become a diplomat. And I am deeply convinced that the UN is much better off with Israel as one of its member states.

The UN is very diverse. It is, in fact, very fundamentally, three entirely different things, all of which contribute to shape relations between Israel and the organization. There is firstly the General Assembly, which acts as a kind of world parliament. It is one member state, one vote. The numerous General Assembly resolutions criticizing Israel reflect the fact that much of the world has been critical of Israel's actions, particularly the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Sometimes those criticisms have been put strongly by some member states and in ways that many have found offensive. But, the General Assembly is also the forum for Israel to engage with the rest of the world. It was the GA that gave legitimacy to Israel's creation through resolution 181 on 29 November 1947, even before David Ben-Gurion declared Israel's independence in May 1948.

The second body of the UN is the Security Council, which attempts to enforce the rules of the international system regarding peace and security. Its resolutions form the basis on which we are trying to build peace here in the Middle East. These include the famous – or maybe infamous – resolutions 242; 338; 1397 – which outline the two-state solution as the international community's blueprint for peace in the Middle East – and 1515, which endorses the Road Map.

The third branch of the UN is the Secretariat, under the Secretary-General who I represent here – well, am representing until the end of this month. And the Secretary-General himself actually wears three different "hats." Firstly, there is the cap of a pope, namely the secular pope of the world, who is the highest representative of international law. The Secretary-General then secondly wears the crown of a political prince, who deals with political processes and players in the effort to mediate and achieve international peace and security. And he thirdly wears the chapeau, as the CEO of a highly diverse conglomerate of diverse industries and operations. And to reconcile these three roles is not always easy. In fact, most of the times, it's actually outright impossible.

But I would also like to point out that the Secretariat does, quite often, chart an independent course. Our work through the Quartet and on the Road Map is one example of this. The Secretary-General's workshop on anti-Semitism last June in New York is another.

In fact, the UN and Israel have similar roots: fighting intolerance, fascism, anti-Semitism and genocide. The name "United Nations" was coined to describe the alliance fighting to end the barbarous Nazi regime. And the Organization came into being when the world had just learnt the full horror of the concentration and extermination camps. It is therefore rightly said that like Israel, the United Nations emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust. In the same year that Israel was born, the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of its most central guiding documents – and fundamentally shaped by the experience of the Holocaust.

The UN has often been accused of being anti-Israeli, even anti-Semitic. But the UN that I represent, the UN of the Secretariat and of the Secretary-General is not anti-Israeli. It is not anti-Jewish, and it is not anti-Semitic.

The Secretary-General has always been unequivocally clear in his position. As he has stated, and I quote, "in fighting anti-Semitism, we fight for the future of humanity". He has therefore wholeheartedly embraced the proposal to hold a special session of the General Assembly next month to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz extermination camp. And he has also always been very clear that Israel's existence must be safeguarded. Allow me to quote him again: "no matter how strongly some of us may feel about the actions of the State of Israel," he has said, "we should always show respect for the right of Israeli Jews

to live in safety within the borders of their own State, and for the right of Jews everywhere to cherish that State as an expression of their national identity and survival.”

This brings me back to the peace process, and the United Nations’ involvement in it over the past ten years – because our efforts are, at the most fundamental level, directed to ensure the safety, self-determination, and existence in dignity of the two peoples we are trying to help to settle their century-old conflict.

There exist four basic alternatives on how to settle the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. I would term these the “no-state” solution; the “multiple-state” solution; the “one-state” solution, and of course, the “two-state” solution.

What I call the no-state solution basically refers to the maintenance of the status quo. The West Bank and Gaza Strip would remain under occupation. The Palestinian Authority would remain partly destroyed, partly paralyzed. In essence, the parties would continue to muddle through into the foreseeable future, with more of the same, bloodshed, violence, terror, destruction. And the continuing loss of trust between both peoples as well as demographic developments will contribute to not just maintaining the status quo, but to actually worsening the situation in the medium and long run. Not much of a solution, therefore, this no-state solution.

The next alternative is what I term the multiple-state solution. Palestinians from the West Bank would move to Jordan, where residents of Palestinian origin already represent a majority of the population. The Gaza Strip would become a separate entity, closely linked with Egypt. The Golan Heights might be returned to Syria, which would in exchange see to the proper settlement and assimilation of Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon. But the multiple-state solution would also widen the struggle for Palestinian self-determination and independence throughout the region, destabilizing much of it. In addition, the notion of Palestinian identity as a people, and its longing to be a sovereign nation with its own state, has become so strong in the last few decades – it won’t just whither away. In many ways, as was the case with most other nations defining their collective identity, including the Jewish people, devastation and crisis only contribute to strengthen a society’s self-definition as a nation. My own nation, the Norwegians, is an example, defining themselves through the experience and historical memory of liberation from Danish and Swedish rule and German occupation. Herzl’s ideal of a *Judenstaat* was also born from the experience of alienation and rejection – and so the collective identity of the Palestinians has similarly grown stronger over the last few decades. And this is the reason why the multiple-state solution cannot work, neither now, nor in the future.

The third approach I would like to talk about here is the one-state solution, a bi-national state for Jews and Arabs alike. Like the two other “solutions,” this one is fundamentally bound

to fail. A single state would herald the end of the idea of Zionism and of Israel as a Jewish state – unless Israel becomes some sort of a non-democratic segregation state marginalizing a sizeable proportion of its population. A one-state solution would profoundly betray the ideals of Zionism, of the humanism inherent in Judaism, and of Israel’s character as a democracy. It is therefore unfeasible and unrealistic.

This leaves but one possible solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the two-state solution. In my view, this is the only viable way out of the conflict. The international community has long agreed that only the realization of this solution can achieve sustainable and enduring peace in the Middle East. Only the two-state solution offers both Israelis and Palestinians the satisfaction of their fundamental desire for self-determination, independence, and security within agreed upon and internationally recognized borders. Only if the occupation that began in 1967 ends and leads to the co-existence of two states, Israel and Palestine, side by side in peace and security, peace will be lasting. And this goal can be reached only through negotiations, not through acts of terror, violence or of subjugation.

This is our vision – agreed and embraced by as diverse actors as the Quartet, the Security Council, President Bush and the Arab League.

My dear friends, the Oslo Accords did not envisage the realization of the two-state solution – they were merely based on the possibility of a two-state solution emerging out of the original mutual recognition. The late Yitzhak Rabin did not want a Palestinian state. He favored a Palestinian “entity,” as he called it, which would be linked with Jordan in some form of confederation.

Of course, the Palestinians were pursuing their intention to have a full-fledged state. And because the parties started from such widely diverging perspectives, the Oslo process had to be underpinned by an approach of gradualism. The Oslo Accords were *not* a peace agreement. Rather, they were the first Road Map towards peace.

Back when the Oslo process started, it was simply not possible to define the end goal. Had we focused on that, we would not have achieved anything. But if we look at where we are today, then the emergence of the clear and shared vision of how to settle the conflict – namely through the realization of the two-state solution – would not have been possible without the gradualism of the Oslo process.

Continuous agreements followed the original Declaration of Principles of 1993. But both sides undermined this gradualist approach and the principles of non-violence and negotiations, particularly from 1996 onwards. On the Palestinian side, violence and terrorism, which had initially been curbed thanks to the cooperation between the two parties, started gaining the

upper hand. Israel, on the other hand, maintained its massive expansion drive of settlements, which ran counter to the agreements. Thus, both sides contributed to undermine the trust between them.

New hope emerged in 1999. Prime Minister Barak approached the peace process with courage. But there were some flaws in the political approach. One such flaw was the desire to do everything at once. Barak wanted to pull Israeli troops out of Lebanon, make peace with Syria, settle the conflict with the Palestinians- all at the same time. Unfortunately, the necessity to build trust between Israelis and Palestinians was partly neglected.

I personally believe, after countless conversations with Arafat and other Palestinian leaders, that Arafat's unwillingness to strike a deal with Barak at Camp David was partly the result of internal power struggles in the PA. It was also partly the product of the personal mutual distrust between Arafat and Barak. And Arafat was also unwilling because he did not believe that Ariel Sharon could ever become Israeli Prime Minister, and because he thought President Bush would give him a better deal than President Clinton. Later, another consideration of the late Palestinian leader was the belief that a revival of the so called "armed struggle", either by initiating it or by turning a blind eye, would produce a situation of parity between Palestinians and Israelis, which would bring him back to the table in a stronger position.

Arafat did not think he would defeat Israel on the battlefield. But he did want to create a situation, in which it was too painful for Israel to continue the armed confrontation. If this strategy had worked, Israel – and the United States – would have opted for a re-start of the negotiations, with probably improved terms for the Palestinians coming out of a deal. This was the way Arafat saw it.

But this was, of course, a totally misguided, flawed view, based on a fundamental misreading of reality – which led the Palestinians into a catastrophic situation.

Some of us in the international community worked very hard, in particular in the first two years of the *Intifada*, to convince the Palestinian leadership that it was pursuing the wrong strategy. I think it is fair to say that the leadership was split in half – half the Palestinian leaders believing that the so called "armed struggle" was the right way, while the other half believed that it was a colossal mistake. Abu Mazen has consistently been one of these.

But we continued to relate to President Arafat. He was elected in free and fair elections in 1996 as the leader of the Palestinian people. These elections were observed by the US and the EU, and deemed free and fair. Arafat was the legitimate leader – and we related to him as such. The Quartet, consisting of the United Nations, the European Union, Russia, and the United States, worked very hard with him. Many tough and very unpleasant conversations

took place, during which we sought to convince him that his path was catastrophic both for himself and for his people – morally repugnant and politically misguided.

In most of our efforts we failed, though in some we were successful. The acceptance to appoint a Prime Minister, the nomination of Abu Mazen, who had long opposed the violent struggle and also Arafat's acceptance of the Road Map and of the Quartet as the key political entity in the process: all these were important steps forward.

And these steps gave rise to a colossal new opportunity, which unfortunately was squandered again. All of us failed. President Arafat did not grant Abu Mazen the necessary prerogatives to fulfill his stated program of non-violence and compromise. And Israel failed to underpin this program. I remember well how one senior Israeli official asked me at the time, whether Abu Mazen would be empowered – I answered him, only *you* can empower him. But that didn't happen. Without Israeli and international support, he lost the power struggle with Arafat and was forced to step down.

In the relationship between the PA and the international community, this pushed the Palestinians further into political isolation and impotency. In the aftermath of Abu Mazen's demise, most players de facto disengaged themselves from Arafat. Heads of states, Foreign Ministers – everybody either totally distanced themselves from him or reduced interaction to an absolute minimum.

But I personally believe that in the last months of his life, he came to the realization that he had put himself into a corner. He was looking for a way out. Fate deprived him of the chance to make this change. I think that this was a real tragedy. Arafat had once led his people nobly and courageously towards the recognition of Israel. He then diverted tragically and catastrophically from this path. And it was tragic that he did not live to return to it and instead, ended his life as the isolated, disregarded leader to a close-to-lost cause.

On the Israeli side, a profound belief that military supremacy would force the Palestinians to their knees prevailed during the first two years of the *intifada*. A conviction dominated that the Palestinians could be ruled without a Palestinian Authority – which was being undermined so effectively.

Yet this was a road that did not work in the best interest of Israel. So Israeli leaders gradually came to understand that without any political progress, things would simply get worse and worse. In parallel, the Quartet was formed, and the Road Map was developed, over the course of a year. Recently, an understanding has broadened and broadened that building a bridge over the abyss of violence and blood only on a security pillar has failed consistently and will continue to fail equally. The quartet position is that the bridge must be based on three pillars:

security, politics and economics. This is precisely the political logic of the pullout initiative from Gaza.

The leading principle of the Road Map is also an approach of parallelism. The issues cannot be resolved in isolation from one another and in sequence, but have to be addressed in parallel.

The Road Map is also, and surprisingly few people realize that, a continuation of Oslo, in substance, shape, form, and logic. The Declaration of Principles of 1993 was actually Road Map number 1: it too designed a Road Map on how to move forward. More than that, the current Road Map does not just define the remainder of the road, but also the end goal. And that is, like I said earlier, the realization of the two-state solution. The end goal is to end the occupation that began in 1967 and to see the co-existence in peace and security of two states, Israel and Palestine, in agreed upon and secure borders.

In this sense, the Road Map represents a fundamental radicalization of the Oslo process, unifying Madrid, Oslo, and the Arab Peace Initiative by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah into one coherent and potent approach.

I should like to add at this point as a footnote that I was more than mildly surprised throughout the production process of the Road Map that Israel did not play a part. Instead of actively engaging in a dialogue about the emerging document, trying to influence, shape it in the best interest of the country, Israel more or less shrugged off the entire process as well as the document, calling it irrelevant.

A new political reality was being created – and Israel squandered its chances of influencing it by adopting what can be called the “policy of the empty chair,” that is believing that if Israel doesn’t take its chair in key international processes, then the processes will be isolated, and not Israel. But of course, the Roadmap process proved that just the opposite was actually the case. This was a sad chapter in the otherwise impressive diplomatic history of Israel.

This was, however, soon rectified politically by Israel’s embracing of the Road Map and by its acceptance of the document with a few reservations. Today, I am very pleased to hear Prime Minister Sharon and other key officials reciting the Road Map as a cornerstone for any future peace agreement.

And through the embrace of the Road Map, which explicitly builds on the Oslo Accords, the Government of Israel has chosen to continue to build on Oslo. The Government is planning a stunning and drastic move, which further radicalizes and speeds up the Oslo process. This step goes far beyond the “baby-steps” called for in the Road Map. In fact, it is envisaging a giant and heroic leap towards the realization of the Oslo vision.

I recall with some amusement today my first meeting with Mr. Sharon as Prime Minister-elect in early 2001. Having just won the elections, Mr. Sharon asked me: “What would you do in my place?” – and I told him that if I was Israeli Prime Minister, the first thing I would do would be to pull out of Gaza.

In the spring of 2003, at a Quartet meeting in Paris, the United Nations put forward a plan envisaging just that – a pullout from Gaza as a big leap forward to restore confidence and get the process going again. Less than a year later, Mr. Sharon launched his initiative to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank.

In the immediate aftermath of his announcement, I heard many critical voices, from many parts on the international community. I didn’t understand them then, I don’t understand them now. I didn’t agree with them then, and I don’t agree with them now: Even if there were mistakes in the past, how can we criticize a leader who wants to leave occupied land? A man who wants to carry out the first-ever massive uprooting of settlements in the Palestinian territory? A man, who in the face of the strongest opposition from among his own goes far beyond any of his predecessors in implementing the Oslo Accords – to my mind, this is not only good, it’s brave. It is courageous.

And not just that: This is also a leader who not only in the realm of operational plans, but also in the realm of political symbolism goes far beyond the letters of previous agreements. Prime Minister Sharon has embraced the end of the occupation as his *leitmotif*.

In his speech preceding the historic Knesset vote on his initiative, Mr. Sharon stated clearly and unequivocally that he supported the end of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory. He also spoke of his support for “the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel.” He reiterated clearly that he remained “willing to make painful compromises in order to put an end to this ongoing and malignant conflict.” And he underlined his determination to do the “utmost in order to bring peace.”

And I find heavy symbolism in the fact – if it becomes a fact – that Shimon Peres, a courageous, historic and heroic leader, the father of Oslo, who is with us here this afternoon, should sit shoulder by shoulder with Prime Minister Sharon. And the two should walk together the last miles of the Oslo process and realize that spirit and those goals, which were born in 1993.

In this context, I should also like to emphasize that if you dig up the Accords, you will find that the pullout from Gaza fits, like hand in glove, into the framework of the Oslo Accords – it represents nothing but the third phase of the third further redeployment envisaged under the Oslo Accords.

My dear friends, the period from September 2000 until the first half of 2004 was a long, bloody, sad, and disastrous deviation from that path of Oslo. But there is now much hope that the Oslo process can and will be completed.

During my second tenure here as the Secretary-General's representative for the last 5½ years, I've had many ups and downs. I have experienced many disappointments, and many joys. There has been much bloodshed – too much.

And over that, it is all too easy to forget that the Oslo Accords paved the way to a standing and viable peace agreement with Jordan. They also provided the fundamentals for the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon. It is also too easy to forget that in this difficult period of transition, one essential reason why there is not total chaos and anarchy in the Palestinian areas is that there exist stable institutions in the Palestinian Authority, created by the Oslo Accords and the subsequent process – the PLC, the presidency, the Prime Minister, and others.

All this is easily forgotten. And I myself have felt the sadness, the despair, over the violence and bloodshed day after day after day. Like many of you, I have too many friends and acquaintances who have felt the loss of a mother, a father, a child, a friend, both Israelis and Palestinians.

Despite this, when I am now leaving my position as the Secretary-General's senior representative here, I am doing so on a positive note. The recent developments give me hope. A Palestinian leadership is commendably and in unity moving forward for once again going to the negotiating table. It is dropping the gun and raising the olive branch, beginning with an orderly, free, fair and transparent electoral process. This gives me hope.

An Israeli Prime Minister who so staunchly and so persistently is determined to push through what will hopefully become the end of the occupation of Gaza – that gives me much hope.

And the context of these moves are of course the Oslo Accords and their continuation and fulfillment, the Road Map. And that reinforces my hope that together, we can reach that ultimate goal: peace.

I remain firmly convinced that peace is possible. Two fundamental principles, and one unshakable idea, are my motivation.

First, I believe *fundamentally* in the right of Israel to exist and to exist in full and permanent security – free from attack, free from terrorism, free even from the threat of attack. No people

deserves that freedom more. I think there are few principles that so animate international diplomacy as the deep belief in the importance of a permanent and secure homeland for the Jewish people. In that sense, I am wholly and fundamentally pro-Israeli, without any qualification.

Second, and with equal passion, I believe *fundamentally* in the right of the Palestinians to their independence and self-determination. This population of millions, abused by both the international and Arab worlds, shaped by the experience of enduring exile as refugees – no people more deserves to see fulfilled their simple aspiration to live in freedom and dignity. There are few principles so commonly shared in international diplomacy as the right of the Palestinians to an independent state and a dignified future. And in that sense, I am also wholly and fundamentally pro-Palestinian.

Finally, I am motivated by an idea which is easy to scorn, easy to ridicule, easy to judge, easy to challenge – but which is unshakable, whatever people say or do, from whatever quarter. And that is that these two fundamental beliefs can be reconciled in one common vision, one common future. There are daily defeats in the struggle for that idea, daily proofs in its futility, daily reasons to give it up. But it will not be shaken. The principles of that common vision are known; the mechanisms for reaching it are available to us. We now need to seize the opportunities at hand and turn them into a concrete reality touching the deepest aspirations of both peoples. As we did in Oslo in 1993 we again need to animate the spirit of peace. Both peoples are right, have the right – to live in peace, security, self-determination, and prosperity.

There is much to do. It is my sincere hope – and my belief – that Israelis and Palestinians now have in front of them a perhaps unique opportunity. I hope it will not be squandered. Now is a moment for peace. It needs to be seized. Thank you.



Professor Yossi Shain welcomes the speakers and audience to the discussion evening



Professor Moshe Arens delivers his words in response.



Terje Rød-Larsen delivers his keynote address.



Shimon Peres MK delivers his address.



Dr. Avi Beker introduces Terje Rød-Larsen.



Professor Yossi Shain makes a point. Listening in, Professor Shimon Shamir and Terje Rød-Larsen.



Shimon Peres MK making a point during the roundtable discussion. To his right, Professor Moshe Arens and to his left, Professor Shimon Shamir, Terje Rød-Larsen and Professor Yossi Shain.



A full house for the discussion evening in the Smolarz Auditorium.

Professor Moshe Arens:

Good evening. First of all I would like to express my appreciation and I am sure the appreciation of all the people in this room to Terje Larsen for his strenuous and serious efforts during these past years to bring peace a little bit closer to the people of Israel and to the Palestinians. There are many in Israel who may not have agreed with all his views on how that process should proceed and how the crisis and the conflict should be resolved, but I think all have admiration for his good intentions and for the efforts that he invested in the process over so many years.

The theme of this discussion is, if I am not mistaken, can Israel cooperate with the United Nations? The short answer to that is 'yes'. Israel is a member of the United Nations, Israel cooperates with the United Nations, it takes part in United Nations assemblies. It cooperates with emissaries of the United Nations like Terje Larsen, and it is actively engaged with the United Nations. And yet it is no secret that many Israelis, maybe most Israelis, have some concern about the United Nations and its position and problems relating to Israel, and may even harbor some suspicions as to whether Israel can get a fair deal at the United Nations or its bodies. The reason is that Israel is seen as a second class and maybe even a third class member of the United Nations, and probably the only one that cannot and has never been a member of a number of United Nations bodies and committees.

Israel is a country, a member of the United Nations, that has continuously and consistently been attacked at the United Nations. In many ways it is not incorrect to say that the United Nations has been a major forum, maybe 'the' major forum, for Israel bashing. The number of resolutions adopted by the United Nations that condemn Israel, that attack Israel, is too long to count.

I don't for a moment and I am sure Israelis do not for a moment forget the United Nations partition resolution of November 1947, which was one of the building blocks for the establishment of the State of Israel. I do not forget the sterling service of Ralph Bunche, the UN emissary that oversaw the negotiations of armistice agreements after the War of Independence. But ever since then, I think as far as the relationship between the United Nations and Israel is concerned, it has been pretty much downwards. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 calling for the return of Palestinian refugees has been and continues to be a major stumbling block in the negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The right of return, as all Israelis know, and I think probably as most objective observers know, would spell the end of the State of Israel. And Palestinian spokesmen, not only Arafat, but I think also Abu Mazen just recently, continue to refer to Resolution 194 as a fundamental part of their demands in negotiations with Israel.

Israelis have not forgotten the withdrawal of United Nations forces from the Sinai prior to the Six Day War, which opened the road to Egyptian aggression against Israel. Israelis have not forgotten the appearance of Arafat at the United Nations in 1974 with a gun in his holster, to which no objections were raised, except by Israel, of course. We have had very considerable difficulty with United Nations forces in southern Lebanon and with UNIFIL. They did not replace Hezbollah when Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon. They did not achieve the quiet on that border that we expected and I think had a right to expect. There are considerable doubts and concerns about the part that was played by United Nations forces when three Israeli soldiers were abducted by Hezbollah fighters dressed in United Nations uniforms and using United Nations vehicles.

I think many Israelis – and certainly I - have considerable doubts about the functioning of UNRWA, the United Nations refugee agency for Palestinian refugees. Just recently Peter Hansen, who heads UNRWA, said that he had no doubt that Hamas people were among the employees of UNRWA. And that is unlikely to bring about positive developments in terms of resolving the refugee problem, which is one of the cruxes of the problem between Israel and the Palestinians.

So can Israel and the United Nations cooperate? No doubt, but I think that an essential step to improve the degree of cooperation between Israel and the United Nations is to improve the standing of Israel to that of a proper first class member in the United Nations, just like all the other members of the United Nations, with the right to participate in the committees of the United Nations, including the right to participate in the Security Council. I think that changes would be very important steps towards extending the legitimacy of the United Nations as a body dedicated to peacemaking and to the safeguarding of the peace.

Let me now make a few comments regarding the development of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship ever since the Oslo agreements. I think it is generally recognized that Yasser Arafat was not a partner for peace, I guess it is correct to say he was an obstacle to peace. And if that is correct, then I think we cannot help but conclude that bringing Yasser Arafat here from Tunis in the wake of the Oslo agreements was a mistake and possibly a serious mistake that set back the possibility of arriving at an agreement, of arriving at a resolution between Israel and the Palestinians. In my view this should have been clear right from the beginning, not only because Arafat had a long history of leading a terrorist organization, but more importantly, because Arafat insisted that he was the representative not only of the Palestinian population living here in the West Bank and Gaza, but that he was the representative of the Palestinian Diaspora, another two or three million Palestinians, refugees from the war of 1948, their descendants and the descendants of their descendants, and that he for them insisted and claimed the right of return. And that claim or the insistence on that claim in effect made it impossible to arrive at any agreement between us and the Palestinians.

I can only hope that Abu Mazen, who seems most likely to be elected, probably by a very large majority, although he just again the other day referred to UN Resolution 194 as one of his basic claims, I hope that he as well understands that insisting on that claim and sticking to the call for the right of return, will make a resolution of the conflict, the arrival of an agreement, in effect an impossibility.

And lastly, what Terje Larsen called the withdrawal from Gaza. We in Israel tend to use that terminology, the withdrawal from Gaza, but actually what is being considered, what has been decided by the Israeli Government, is a withdrawal from Gush Katif and the uprooting of Israeli settlements in that area, and the withdrawal from the settlements at the northern end of the Gaza Strip, as well as uprooting the settlements in the northern part of Sinai.

It is possible that, after Arafat's demise, this will not turn out to be a unilateral step. And I think to the extent that we can arrive at a negotiated agreement on whether to proceed in this direction or how to proceed in that direction, so much the better. But if it does continue to be a unilateral step, then whether it has turned out to be the right move or not, courageous or not, will really be determined by what happens thereafter. If the withdrawal, the uprooting of settlements, difficult as that is for all Israelis, is followed by quiet in and around the Gaza Strip, that is, the end of the launching of rockets and mortar shells against Israeli towns and villages outside the Gaza Strip, I suppose most Israelis will say it was the proper thing to do.

If it turns out that this withdrawal will serve as encouragement for further acts of terror, if this will bring into range additional Israeli settlements and towns to attacks by mortars and Kassam rockets, I think in retrospect we will say it may have been the wrong thing to do.

Mr. Shimon Peres:

Thank you very much. My dear friend Terje Larsen, Moshe Arens, ladies and gentlemen. I was listening and thinking, what would happen if Terje Larsen would have started at the United Nations? We wouldn't have Oslo and we wouldn't have the Quartet. Luckily enough, we started with Oslo and then we moved to the Quartet. And in all of it Terje was a key player. It is also a pleasure to debate with my good friend Misha Arens, but first, I want to make one or two remarks about the United Nations.

The United Nations has committed many mistakes, but the world without the United Nations would be a great mistake. Let's not forget that. The Charter of the United Nations legitimizes peace and clearly objects to aggression, discrimination, unfairness, and lack of understanding. The mistakes don't stem from the Charter but from the organization's members. Under different memberships the United Nations acted differently, for example, General de Gaulle used to call the body the 'Disunited Nations'. When the United Nations was made of three or four blocs – the Soviet bloc, the Western bloc (which was more a group of nations than a bloc) and the non-aligned nations – and Israel didn't seem to have a chance of obtaining majority support, it nevertheless recognized the State of Israel. This was a historic act and we shouldn't forget it. The UN also brought about the cease-fire between us and the Arab world, and today it is part of the Quartet and the Road Map.

But look what happened to the members, which is clearly reflected in the United Nations. Nothing is left of the non-aligned movement. China is a different country since Chou En-lai went to Bandung. Yugoslavia doesn't exist after Tito. Egypt is different after Nasser. The only old friend that remains is Cuba, Fidel Castro. All the others disappeared or changed or don't exist. There is no longer a Soviet bloc, there is no longer a non-allied bloc, and even the Arab world has changed since they gave up on the hope of destroying us.

Israel too has had two parts to its history. The first is when we had to defend our basic existence. Then, once we learned that the Arabs had begun to understand that this was not an easy objective, we started to search for peace. And all of us became doves, and strangely enough I would include Misha Arens, who now belongs to a dovish party. It is quite a change. They are for dismantling settlements, they are for a Palestinian state. Had you told me twenty or thirty years ago that the Likud would support the creation of a Palestinian state, I would have said, what are you talking about?

Being a gradualist is not a choice. Gradualness is needed in international negotiations, and as importantly, it is needed at home. What we can say today we couldn't say ten years ago. Sharon would never have dreamed that he would support a Palestinian state. And when you negotiate you must also be careful of two things – not to lose your own people and not to

win too much from your opponent. If you win too much you will lose your opponent. If you give up too much you will lose your people. So peace negotiation is a domestic process, not an international one. You know, at the time, for Rabin and myself to speak to the PLO was considered a revolution, because the PLO was a criminal organization. And Misha, I don't understand, why you care if Arafat was in Tunisia or in Ramallah? What is the difference? On the contrary, at least in Ramallah he was partly under our control. In Tunisia he could do anything. Most of the terror was done from Tunisia.

You know, the Likud from the beginning wanted to have the 'Greater Israel'. Not that I am against the Greater Israel, but the Likud would have the Greater Israel without a Jewish majority. And you cannot talk all the time in terms of dreams and visions. We have the demographic issue, and we always knew that if the country is not divided, in the way it is now being divided, we would lose our status as a Jewish state. Not that we ever wanted to give back part of the land, but we did want to save the Jewish majority. What is a Jewish state? It is a state where the Jews are a majority. If there won't be a Jewish majority there won't be a Jewish state. That has been the great historic mistake of the rightist groups in Israel.

But there is something else that explains and defends Oslo from a different point of view. At the time we thought about what used to be called the Jordanian option. We thought that we can reach an agreement where the Jordanian king would be able to represent not only the Jordanian people but the Palestinian people as well, and actually this could have been the best solution. Contrary again to some ideas in the Right, that say Jordan is Palestine, we said, Palestine is Jordan. And then in 1987 we reached one of the best agreements with King Hussein about how to divide the land without dividing or cutting too deep into the flesh of our peoples. But they torpedoed the London Agreement with Jordan. Now, once the London agreement was torpedoed, and we began thinking what could be done next, we needed two things, a partner and a map. If you don't have a partner, how can you make peace? You cannot make peace with gangs of terrorists, you cannot negotiate with the wind or the mood, or fear or incitement. Who was our partner? Because once the London Agreement was torpedoed, King Hussein divorced the Palestinian side. He said "I am no longer going to play any role in peacemaking between you and the Palestinians".

So then we were in search of a partner, and I want to tell you very frankly, I know what the feelings are both among Israelis and Palestinians. The Israelis would like to wake up one morning and see Norwegians instead of Palestinians, for example. The Palestinians would like to wake up one morning and see Danes instead of Jews. But the true story that we are not going to become either Norwegians or Danes in the foreseeable future. If you want to make peace, make it with the people as they are. The Palestinians are Palestinians and the punishment of the Palestinians is that we are Israelis and we shall remain Israelis. So we have to negotiate with the realistic partner.

Who was the partner on the Palestinian side? We could have chosen either the PLO or Hamas or Jihad, and I think we were right in choosing the PLO although most of the Israeli people had a very negative view about the PLO, and rightly so because they were a terrorist organization. The question was, did the PLO have the potential to make peace or not? And I think very much, again Terje played a great role in trying to analyze carefully the psychology of the PLO and tell us what were its limits and its dangers. So in Oslo we created a Palestinian partner with which to negotiate. I don't think we could have negotiated with Hamas, and if we wouldn't have negotiated with the PLO, Hamas would have become stronger and stronger. I know we can criticize the PLO for continued terror, though for at least at a given period of time it stopped it.

And there is another area in which I understand the role of Arafat, and I am not afraid to be honest about it, although I criticized him later on. Arafat did something that no other person in the Arab world or amongst the Palestinian people had done, that is, he moved from the map of 1947 to the map of 1967. The map of 1947 is the map of the United Nations, according to which the Palestinian state, or the Arab state as it was called then, was supposed to get 45% of the West Bank. According to the 1967 map, Arafat agreed to 24%. If Arafat didn't agree to the 1967 border in principle, we would never have peace. We would have conflict forever. I remember how difficult it was to settle two or three hundred dunams of land with Egypt in Taba, almost impossible. So Oslo was the beginning and the foundation of having a partner and a map.

Had we announced more than that, we wouldn't have carried our people. You know, Terje, we won the support for the Oslo agreement by one vote. We were considering the dismantling of settlements from Gaza, but we felt that we were already on the edge of our capacity to carry a majority in Israel. So gradualness is required not just in the negotiations between the two parties, but in the additional negotiations of each of us with its own people. And that is why in my judgement Camp David collapsed, because in politics you can select one of two tactics, either to jump high or to jump long. If you jump high you may fall down and nothing will remain. If you jump long, or walk long, you can continue going. Because I think the problem really for Arafat and others in Camp David were the issues of refugees, the right of return, and the Jerusalem problem.

So in Oslo we laid the foundation for peace. Terje, don't you think that Rabin and I knew what were doing, or where we were aiming? We started with Gaza and Jericho because at that time we thought that was the maximum that our people will permit us to do. The opposition was very strong, not only among the Rightist parties but also in the Labor camp. The world masters the leaders not less than the leaders master the world, and it is all the time changing demographically, politically, internationally, economically. I think Oslo was the real first step towards a two state solution. I mean, it was obvious by the declarations of the Palestinians. The

name that Rabin used, the Palestinian entity, was the beginning of a flirt with our own people. And I think that was and remains the fundamental foundation for peacemaking in the future.

And finally, Sharon can't do otherwise. Even if you overcome terror, you cannot overcome demography. So that even if we won the battle against terror, we would lose our majority in the land. And again, you cannot do it alone. Sharon understood that we have to work with the United States and then with the Quartet and the Road Map. I don't blame him. I think he looked at things with open eyes. And as he said himself "From here you can see things that you cannot see from there". And I'm not sure that Sharon thinks in terms of 'Gaza first and Gaza last'. He has committed himself to two states, to the vision of the American President which clearly speaks about the nature of the solution, and we have to move ahead.

Now, the United Nations can legitimise the arrangements. But it cannot replace us. There are two things which I do not believe can be imposed – peace or democracy. This must be done by the peoples themselves. Even the United Nations, with the best of its wishes and strength, cannot replace Israel or the Palestinians. We have to play our major part in changing the policies from belligerency to partnership, from a dictatorial system to demographic processes. And again, here I think the Quartet, the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, has played a very important role. And it is not over. We are now in the middle of the road, because if we have two states with hostile relations, we haven't achieved much. If we have two states with modern relations, then the Middle East will change and Israel will change, because in modern terms there is no national economy. Economies today are global, and people don't live off the land. Rather, they live in the mind, which doesn't have borders. And borders were usually the reasons for war. Agricultural land today has gone down to under 2%, economically it is unimportant. Hi-tech trots around without any control. So we can and we should remain nations politically, but we must become a region economically, or a global economy. So it is a process and I think that the development and direction of Oslo was a great and courageous move, and we can say thank heaven that Terje Larsen wasn't at the United Nations but was at Oslo. Thank you.

Round Table Discussion

Participants: **Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen, Mr. Shimon Peres,
Professor Moshe Arens, Professor Yossi Shain**

Moderator: **Professor Shimon Shamir**

Professor Shimon Shamir:

Ladies and gentlemen, I am honored and delighted to be moderating this panel with such distinguished participants. I represent here the University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation, which is one of the partners in this joint venture that initiated this evening. I would like also to mention that this University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation was founded jointly by the university itself, of course, and by the Peres Center for Peace, which is an additional reason why I am delighted to have Mr. Peres with us this evening.

I would like to focus our discussion on the theme as it was defined this evening: Israel and the United Nations: Can They Cooperate? Much of what we heard up to this point, and all of it was very interesting and illuminating, dealt with the relations between Israel and the Palestinians, can they cooperate? I suggest that in this part of the evening we should really focus on relations between Israel and the United Nations.

Needless to say, Israel's experience with the United Nations left it with many scars. Professor Arens mentioned some of the grievances that Israelis have vis-a-vis the United Nations, and actually the list is much longer, but I don't think that in this forum we have to mention all the elements. We started actually on a positive note, with the 1947 United Nations partition, which was responsible for the establishment of the State of Israel. True, this was a great contribution, we shall never forget it. But let us remember, as Mr. Peres said, it was a different United Nations. The United Nations has been changing all the time. I have here the figures and that illustrate how different the United Nations is today from the United Nations of past years. Among the fifty-six nations who participated in the vote on the partition plan, there were fifteen Western countries, twenty from Latin America, only ten Arab and Muslim countries and five more from Africa and Asia. This bloc, if you want to regard them as such, with fifteen Afro-Asian Arab Muslims, meant that there is a minority in the United Nations at that time. I don't have to tell you how different the situation is today, with all the grievances that were mentioned and the endless condemnations of Israel over and over again in a very one-sided manner. I don't have

up to date figures but I did manage to find figures up to 1989. In those decades the Security Council passed 175 resolutions. Ninety-seven of them criticized Israel. Only four criticized in some way any Arab partner.

We heard from Mr. Larsen the fact that Israel keeps being condemned in the United Nations is a result of the reality that the nations of the world are critical of Israel. They vote against because they are critical, and while this is a truism, I am not sure it is the whole truth. Because when it is said that United Nations members are critical of Israel, it sounds as though it is assumed that there is a process of evaluation in these countries, that they weigh the positive sides and the negative sides of Israeli behavior and they reach a conclusion and they come with these conclusions to the United Nations. This is not the reality. We know that United Nations members vote according to different considerations. And Mr. Larsen, you spoke so much about Abba Eban, whose memory we all cherish, but it was also Abba Eban who said that if an Arab country would propose in the United Nations that the earth was flat and not round, it would gain a majority.

Let me put a question to this forum. Should we regard this as a deterministic reality? Is our relationship with the United Nations really hopeless? Can it improve in some way? You mentioned some progress recently – is it serious? Does the United Nations have a role or could it have a role in the process, a peacekeeping force perhaps in Gaza or in any other way? Could we point out also positive aspects of this relationship? Did Israel benefit also from its place in the United Nations and from the activities of these nations? I address these questions to the four members of the panel.

Mr. Shimon Peres:

I think that if the Palestinians and us go for peace, the United Nations will not disturb us. We are quite a topic at the United Nations. The Palestinian-Israeli or Middle Eastern conflict plays a major role all over the world. Even though its size may not be great, the intensity of focus on the conflict is profound.

Furthermore, whilst I wouldn't go to any extremes, I can think of many occasions when the United Nations has played a positive role. Also, politics is a matter of legitimacy and it would be very difficult to have a state without the legitimization of the United Nations. The armistice agreements under Ralph Bunche, for example were a very positive move. Or UNRWA, which takes care of the refugees...[A disparaging remark from the audience]...look, I think that if you provide food to starving people, it is not negative. One shouldn't be too heroic. There are hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza. I care very much what happens to them. And UNRWA

provides them with food and provides education to the children. Let's be fair, even when we criticize. In the West Bank and in Gaza, even in Jordan, with all the refugee camps, even if we are not responsible for them, we cannot ignore them. I think they played an important role in Lebanon. And by the way, I think Terje Larsen himself contributed very much to legitimize the Israeli position after the withdrawal from Lebanon, which was not a simple matter.

I also think the flexibility and structure of having the Quartet, so that for the first time it is not the United Nations alone, neither is it America alone or Europe alone or Russia alone, but a combination of these powerful and the legitimizing parties. That is of importance. I know there are problems, that there is still an Arab bloc, and you mentioned the figures. There is a Muslim bloc, fifty-six members who a priori will vote against us, but I cannot blame Kofi Annan for that.

So I would say that there are occasions where the United Nations can contribute to and support all parties. On other occasions when we are criticized at the United Nations, at least we have the right to reply, and we do so quite clearly and in very strong language. So my approach would be balanced, and I think the best policy is to not nominate enemies but to convert enemies into friends, and the United Nations is not a bad channel for doing so.

Professor Yossi Shain:

I beg to differ. I think that in order to be an effective player, the United Nations must be completely reformed. I believe that the United Nations as it is, with fifty-three members on its Commission on Human Rights, including Algeria, Cuba, Iran, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, and Libya as chair is untenable. I believe that the events of September 11 provided a unique opportunity for clarity, which requires from us to establish a new United Nations in which democratic states and their values dominate, not those of theocratic and shabby states. I don't see any logic for France to be on the Security Council with a veto, but not to have India and others.

On the other hand, we should not be overly quick to dismantle the United Nations, but really think about an overhaul. And in this regard, I think Israel can play a major role. Given that Israel has been over the years the number one victim of the United Nations, in many ways, debased, delegitimized, sometimes even with anti-Semitic overtones, it is time that Israel be embraced as one of the players. This could even encourage a change in the psyche of Israelis regarding the United Nations. That is, it could create greater level trust, because Israelis love to be hugged. And such a changed dynamic may see Israel become a vehicle for a democratic transformation of the United Nations. And I believe Terje Larsen should stay around and push such a program through.

Professor Moshe Arens:

Well, if we try to extrapolate from previous performances and ask whether the United Nations has a role to play, or will have a role to play in the future in Israel's relations with the Palestinians and with its Arab neighbors, it certainly seems that the answer to that is no. Whatever has been achieved, the peace treaty with Egypt, the peace treaty with Jordan, was not achieved with the assistance of the United Nations, but directly with the assistance of the United States. If I am not mistaken, even the agreement with the PLO, of which I am not one of the admirers, was not achieved with the help of the United Nations, but again by direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

I think the essential requirement, at least from the Israeli point of view, in relation to the United Nations playing a useful role in monitoring and diffusing conflict in this area, is that there be trust. Israelis have to trust the United Nations as being a fair broker. And in the light of some of the things that have been said here regarding the past history of Israel in the United Nations, the very fact that Israel is not an equal member of the United Nations, that it is probably the only country in the United Nations that is an unequal member of that body, it is most unlikely that, unless that changes, Israelis will have trust in the United Nations as a body that could broker fairly between us and our neighbors.

My feeling is that the lack of usefulness of the United Nations as a broker for peace, for negotiations in the area, is not a question that is limited only to Israeli-Arabs relations. I don't know that we can point to any single achievement of the United Nations in other areas of the world in ensuring peace or bringing about peace. We know the great difficulty that the United States faced just recently in undertaking an operation against Saddam Hussein and the troubles it had at the United Nations, and the fact that finally that operation had to be undertaken not within the framework of the United Nations. And so I think that unless and until there is a basic restructuring of the United Nations, I don't know that the United Nations will go down in history as a body that has been effective in achieving its goals to ensure peace and to bring about peace.

I know that Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, has recently appointed a committee to recommend restructuring the United Nations. I think that Israel has not really appeared in those recommendations. So from our point of view, we don't see even in those recommendations any suggestion that the anomalous situation of Israel at the United Nations will be rectified. And in many ways, I think that this is the litmus test for the entire United Nations, not just for relations between Israel and the United Nations.

Mr. Shimon Peres:

I want to make one comment because I think there may be a misunderstanding. I am for reform of the United Nations, undoubtedly. But I ask myself, can the United Nations reform nations, or will reformed nations reform the United Nations? I mean, to be fair, it is a matter of membership. I am pro having a more united world. Why wouldn't I be? But the problem is, until then, should we give up on the United Nations? So I am for reform, but I also believe that you shouldn't kill whatever you have before you have something better.

Prof. Shimon Shamir:

From some of the reactions of the audience, I think it is very clear that, with all the merit that the United Nations and our participation in the United Nations has, and Mr. Peres pointed out some of these merits, the United Nations has a popularity problem in this country, there is no question about that. I think, and correct me if I am wrong, this is recognized in the United Nations itself and its leadership. I found a quotation from Kofi Annan who said in a speech to the American Jewish Congress the following words: "I know that for the Jewish community at large, it sometimes seems that the United Nations serves all the world as equals but one, the Jews". And of course he went on to refute this image, and I understand that there are many things that can be said also to support the other view. Mr. Larsen, you will have a bit of a job responding to all the things that have been said here, but I am sure you will do so brilliantly.

Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. Let me start by telling you a story. In September-October 1993 I was in New York at UN Headquarters, together with Israel's then Foreign Minister, and I had a very interesting experience. Because what I saw firsthand was that the most popular man in the UN was the Foreign Minister of Israel. He was invited to every possible dinner party, to every possible reception, and people, Arabs, Jews, from whatever nation all over the world, competed to shake his hand. That man was Shimon Peres. And why was the Foreign Minister of Israel and its Ambassador so incredibly popular? They were both rock stars of the UN in that year. Why was that so? Because Mr. Peres just came from the White House lawn where he had signed the Oslo accords. Why am I telling this story? It is because the criticism of Israel, while some of it is totally unfair and totally unfounded, some of it is actually related to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. This is a fundamental fact and this is what much of the criticism is about. And the reason why Mr. Peres was so popular was that he had started a

peace process. He had presented a map, he had found a partner and he moved forward. That is why Israel was so popular. That is why the Foreign Minister was the rock star of the UN General Assembly that year. And this was why nation after nation recognized Israel as a state. It was a cultural revolution at the UN, and there was a reason. And what I hope is that we shall see such a reason once again, and that once again Israeli ministers, maybe Mr. Peres, will again come to New York and be applauded. But that has something to do with the state of the peace process.

Let me say that in Israel there is an obsession about the UN. And if the position here was not to have anything to do with the UN, then why would we be here? I mean, the UN matters. And let me also ask another much more fundamental question. If it is so that the UN is only horrible, why then does Israel continue being a member of the United Nations? Why not leave? Israel doesn't do that, because it is in the deep interest of Israel to be a member. And Israel has skillful ministers and ambassadors who fight for Israel in the Security Council, in the General Assembly, for your issues, because this is the only forum. It is by far the best possible thinkable forum – well, perhaps I could think of better forums, but this is the only one we have. And it is actually a fact that the current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has actually put into motion a vast reform program of the UN which will have greatest effect on the way the organization functions, and I think that is also in the best interests of Israel.

Dialogue – yes, I think there is a dialogue, and the very fact that we are sitting here is a proof that there is a dialogue, and it should be a critical dialogue, and our goal should be to improve that dialogue. But the first step in my opinion should be to have a hard look at the facts once again, and that may strengthen some of the points that have been mentioned here.

[And as for resolution] 194 – yes, I take all the arguments, but there have been some recent developments which have changed the facts, namely the Road Map. Because in the Road Map, in the preamble, it says, and I am quoting: "Initiative as endorsed by the Arab League that should be negotiated". That is a complete change, and this is endorsed by the Security Council resolution. So you have to watch the facts and this is a difference from 194 unnegotiated. So be fair, let's look at the facts. I mean, this is playing to the advantage of Israel. It has to be a negotiated solution, and this is a fact, endorsed in a Security Council resolution.

Further, let's use a couple of examples, such as UNIFIL. UNIFIL has never had the goal or mandate of taking the place of Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon – never, ever. And actually it doesn't have the mandate to operate with enforcement. Fundamentally it is basically, not in name but in reality, an observer force, and you can criticize that. But every six months Israel renews the mandate of UNIFIL. Why does Israel do that? If it didn't like UNIFIL, it wouldn't renew its mandate. And I know why Israel renews the mandate, because UNIFIL is in Israel's interests.

And then there are also Security Council resolutions which are very good for you. Can I quote 1559, which calls for the disbanding and the disarming of Hezbollah. I mean, take that into account. I mean, don't be one-eyed, don't be blindfolded. There actually are resolutions which are consistent with Israel's interests.

Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, the fact that Israel had ended its occupation of Southern Lebanon, was endorsed unanimously by the Security Council, in spite of the fact that the government in Lebanon and Hezbollah took the opposite position. What the Security Council did was consistent with Israel's decision. Don't forget it. This is also a very important part of Israel's recent history.

And that is why I pray for my friends because through this existing forum we can have the opportunity of speaking to each other. Maybe there are some misunderstandings, I think there are actually, but there are also some fundamental differences of interest. Let's look at them and see what we can do about it. And I agree fully that the UN needs an overhaul, a fundamental overhaul. Let's work together on that.

I will also make two more comments, one on the Quartet and one on the Road Map. As I said in my main talk, the Quartet developed the Road Map without a dialogue with Israel, simply because Israel at the time saw the Road Map and the Quartet as irrelevant. That is why Israel's chair was empty. That was Israel's own choice. And this is the difference between Oslo, the first Road Map and the second Road Map. It is that it was third parties that developed the current Road Map, while it was Israelis and Palestinians who negotiated bilaterally to facilitate the first Road Map. That is the difference. But if Israel had chosen to have had an impact, Israel would have had an impact. Secondly, I understand your frustration and anger about certain things which happen in the UN, but actually there is no distinction between members, everybody is a full member. It is like the Knesset, where there are some positions voiced by some Knesset members that I assume some of you don't like, and others that you do like. But you can't expel from the Knesset those who have different opinions than the ones you like. And this is the problem, that the UN is a democratic organization which has basically all states of the world as its members. And the Secretary-General can't say, I don't like the opinion of this and that country, and unfortunately you will have to go. He can't say that, it's impossible. And this is why a forum like the United Nations will always be imperfect, because it reflects opinions and institutional structures throughout the world, and there will always be some things we like and some things we don't like. And what you have to do within that forum is to make alliances, voice your opinion, take care of your interests. And your ambassadors are always doing that in the best possible way, in an imperfect world and in an imperfect organization, which is the UN. And this is why the reform methods which are now under way initiated by Kofi Annan are so important, and it is important that Israel plays a significant role in that process. And I do hope that this forum will also impact Israel's position in that process. Thank you.

Closing Remarks

Prof. Aharon Klieman:

In attempting to summarize the proceedings this evening, I find multilateralism perhaps as the overarching theme, at both levels. In the instance of Israel and the UN, I don't think it is coincidental that in the 1950s, both the international organization and Israel found themselves pushed to the margins of international life. And I would merely suggest that in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century there is a need to reverse that process, bringing the UN back into the center of international life, and I think linked to that, of course, Israel as well.

You mentioned that the UN matters. I don't think that anyone in this audience would take issue with that. I think that Israel is there despite the odds, despite the discomfoting moments. It is because for Israelis and for the Jewish people the UN matters, and if given the opportunity for greater receptivity and a leveling of the playing field, I think we are looking for that opportunity to make a positive contribution.

Moving multilateralism to the level of the peace process, Israel, the UN and the peace process, I cannot help but note within the period of simply one decade how our thinking of diplomacy has shifted from the model or the paradigm of direct bilateral negotiations, the Oslo model, to the increasing reliance, even to the point of dependency, on the part of the parties, to an international role which can help mediate, moderate and bridge the gap. But this also indirectly and perhaps unintentionally allows the two sides to disengage and move further apart. And bringing in all sorts of outside actors, each one of them with an interest of its own, and of course being indirectly concerned parties rather than we and the Palestinians, the directly concerned parties. And that gives us some cause to think about whether the present trend towards bringing in additional actors really will contribute to the meeting of the minds, the understanding and the accommodation between us and the Palestinians.

It is only left for me as well, having the last word, in reverse order, to express our thanks, and that includes the School of Government and Policy, the University Institute for Diplomacy, the Political Science Department, and the English Speaking Friends of Tel Aviv University, who sponsor the International Forum. Secondly to the distinguished panel, Moshe Arens and Mr. Peres, to my colleagues Shimon Shamir, Yossi Shain and Avi Beker. And last of course but not least to the guest speaker, Terje Rød-Larsen.

Abba Eban has been quoted, I believe several times this evening. I too as head of the Abba Eban Graduate Program in Diplomatic Studies, would like to rely upon the eminently quotable

Abba Eban in sending you off as you are about to close your stint in the Middle East, for the moment at least. I hope you can appreciate his remark, that diplomacy, that much of it, is a holding action designed to avoid explosion until the unifying forces take humanity into their embrace. For your contribution in this holding action but also in nudging us forward, I think we all owe you a very sincere debt of gratitude.



