

**U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Briefing  
The Middle East: The Road to Peace**

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**Opening Statement: former British Prime Minister and current  
Middle East Quartet Envoy Tony Blair**

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and everyone. Thank you so much for making me feel welcome here today, and it's a very great honor and privilege to come before this most distinguished committee.

And as you know, I have submitted a short written statement, but now I'll speak and give an outline of how I see the situation. And first of all, just to say that I entirely agree with Senator Kerry that this is a moment of opportunity.

President Obama has made it very clear that this is a strategic priority for the United States to advance towards a negotiated two- state solution. This is an issue that Secretary of State Clinton is very familiar with and understands and knows deeply.

And the appointment of Senator Mitchell, who was my old collaborator from the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland, is, again, someone for whom I have the highest respect and highest regard for his ability.

And General Jones, of course, is somebody I've worked with specifically in and around the Jenin area in the northern part of the West Bank territory, and just a few months back.

So I think most people feel from the outside that this is an administration as well equipped as any possibly could be to take this issue forward.

And, also, what Senator Lugar was saying a moment or two ago about the -- quoting the opinion poll, the opinion both on the Palestinian and Israeli side.

There is absolutely no doubt at all, in my mind, as, indeed, the poll indicates, that if people thought it was possible to get a two- state solution, then certainly that is the desired outcome.

And I think the question really is very simple. Most people want the two-state solution. There's virtually a consensus across the international community. There are majorities in favor, in principal, in Israel and in the Palestine territory.

The question is how do we do it. How do we take this extraordinary, complex set of challenges and turn that opportunity into a credible negotiation for the two-state solution?

And the main thing that I would say to you today is that there are, of course, issues that have to be resolved in that negotiation for a final settlement, and those issues are very well

known to people, over territory, including barrier of land swaps, Jerusalem, refugees, security, water, many other issues.

My basic view is that those issues, although mentally challenging, are resolvable. People can see the way through to resolving them and over the years, many possible options have been canvassed as to how they're resolved.

The point that I would like to make to you today, however, is this. What is important is to pay attention not merely to the issues that will occur and have to be resolved in any final settlement negotiation, but also pay attention crucially to what actually happened on the ground.

And that's why I asked for these visual aids, much which will be very familiar to you, but I'd like to point out certain things about them.

And the first thing, to be clear, is when we actually see the territory that comprises what would be both the Israeli and the Palestinian state, it is a small bit of territory in a very large region and it's a territory in which, when you analyze the 1.5 million people, maybe, that live in Gaza, roughly 2.5 million that live in the West Bank, the just over seven million that live in the Israeli territory, you see that small bit of territory and those numbers of people and you realize there is no real alternative but for both to have the opportunity of statehood in order for them to live peacefully together.

And there is no way if there is not peace between people living in that close proximity on that small part of land. If it's not peace, it is conflict.

And so the question is how, as I say, do we get there and the on- the-ground reality that I think is important works in two ways. For the Israelis, they're on-the-ground reality is very simple. They have a major security issue.

If there are terrorists, as there are in Gaza, who are firing rockets into Israel, and, as Senator Kerry was saying, in Sderot, there are people there who live in daily fear of their lives, that is, obviously, an immensely serious security challenge for the Israelis.

And that is why the situation in Gaza has been so difficult and so fraught after the illegal coup by Hamas there.

But just take it to the West Bank and see the close proximity of the West Bank to the major centers of populations, Tel Aviv, and, obviously, of course, the shared space of Jerusalem, and you see that without proper security for the Israelis, a Palestinian state becomes, for them, a possible threat rather than a possible opportunity.

So my basic view is that for Israel to be able to accept a Palestinian state, they need to know not just the territory, not just what this map would look like and what it's called, they need to know what is happening inside that territory.

Is that Palestinian state a stable and secure neighbor and partner for enduring peace? That is, if you like, the Israeli on-the-ground reality concern.

Now, for the Palestinians, they have a different concern, but it is equally intimately related to what happens in reality on the ground.

For the Palestinians, as you see from this second map here, they have a certain amount of the territory, which are major urban centers. These are the darker areas here. And then, of course, they have a large part of the West Bank that is what we call Area C, which is under administrative control of the Israelis, but it's about 60 percent of the territory.

And throughout the part of the West Bank, there are settlements or outposts and, of course, because of the security threat that Israel perceives, there are also major restrictions on access and movement for the Palestinians.

So the Palestinian concern is really this. If they manage to negotiate their way towards a two-state solution, will there state be one in which they can genuinely take control of that territory and run it as an independent, viable state?

Will, in other words, the existence of settlements or outposts in this territory prevent the state being viable or will the existence of Israeli forces on the West Bank prevent it from being independent?

So these are the two realities. And my view, therefore, is this. If we are to succeed in achieving this two-state solution, it's true that we have to negotiate these difficult and complex issues, if you like, from the top down.

But we also have to deal with the on-the-ground problems from the bottom up.

So what I see is a simultaneous process where we try and negotiate from the top down with a credible political negotiation, but at the same time, we make the changes necessary to meet the Israeli security concerns and the Palestinian concern as to whether they will get the freedom to run their own territory.

Now, what does that, therefore, mean? And as has been rightly pointed out, my office works specifically on economic development on the Palestinian side and, also, capacity building for them.

What this means, first of all, obviously, is a proper political negotiation, with the declared and clear and credible objective of ending up with two states, a state of Israel, a state of Palestine.

Secondly, however, we need economic development that really starts to change the perception of the Palestinians that they are going to have the run of their territory on the West Bank and they'll be able to make an economic future for themselves, with rising living standards and prosperity.

So we are working on a series of measures, industrial parks, both up in the north there of the Palestinian territory on the West Bank, down in the south, near Hebron, in and around Jericho in the Jordan Valley, and, also, there are housing projects near Ramallah.

Tourism is a major area of potential activity for the Palestinians. The numbers of tourists actually in Bethlehem in the last year have trebled. Hotel occupancy, when I first went to Bethlehem, was about 10 percent, 18 months ago. It's now around about 70 or 80 percent. I mean, there are some signs of change and improvement.

But basically, this is an area where there should be fantastic opportunities for the tourist industry to develop.

Then, of course, as part of the economic development, you need, as well as the major economic projects, you need the gradual step-by-step lifting of the access and movement restrictions.

Some of those around Nablus and around Hebron have been eased in recent times, but we need to go much further so that the Palestinian industry is able to move around the territory, import and export its goods.

And then, of course, we have the issues to do with Area C that I say is 60 percent of the territory and where the Palestinians at the moment find it very difficult to develop their land properly.

So alongside the political negotiation should come the measures that help the Palestinians gain control of their own territory. However, that has to come alongside the measures to improve the Palestinian security capacity and their capability, showing and demonstrating their capability to run their state properly.

Here is where the work that General Dayton has done to support Prime Minister Fayyad has been immensely important.

There are forces that have been trained in Jordan that have come back and are now working in the Palestinian territory, and that is changing significantly and dramatically the capacity of the Palestinians to run their own security affairs.

However, security isn't just about force. It's about courts and prisons and the judicial system and prosecution, and there is a whole series of proposals there that the European Union has put together on the rule of law, which, again, we can support.

And in combination with the measures that General Dayton is taking and, of course, under the leadership of Prime Minister Fayyad, you can start to see how, over time, we can create a viable Palestinian security capability.

If that happens and as it happens, then the Israeli security concern is diminished.

Now, one final point I would make by way of introduction. All of this has largely been focused on the West Bank, and that's for very obvious reasons.

But one thing I'm absolutely sure of is that for the Palestinians, the only state that is acceptable is a state that comprises West Bank and Gaza.

And we know what the problem has been in Gaza with the takeover by Hamas. Nonetheless, I believe it is important, particularly after the recent operation and conflict in Gaza, that we demonstrate that we are doing everything we can to meet the genuine humanitarian concerns of the people in Gaza; that we are, for example, allowing their housing and their infrastructure to be repaired; and, that we are showing to the people in Gaza, not all of whom, by any means, are supporters of Hamas, that there is a prospect, that there is some hope; that potentially, if we can get things really moving on this part of the West Bank, then the pressure will come from within Gaza to join the train of moderation, if you like, and modernization that we hope the West Bank can become and make sure that we have one unified process of peace leading to that two-state solution.

But it's important, in my view, that we have a strategy towards Gaza that helps the people and isolates the extremists and not the other way around.

So that, in summary, is what I would say by way of an opening statement.

I think this is, as you rightly pointed out, Mr. Chairman, a moment of opportunity. I think it's a moment of decision. I think, in some senses, it's a moment of truth, actually, as to whether all of us, the international community, Palestinians, Israelis, are prepared to do what is necessary to realize the objective we say is our stated objective for the future.

I believe it is possible. I don't suppose you mentioning that my whole time is doing question time period in the House of Commons. I don't suppose you could do that for 10 years and survive it without being an optimist.

So I am, by nature, an optimist.

KERRY:

Either that or a masochist.

BLAIR:

And sometimes the two actually go in combination.

But it does occasionally challenge even my deeply ingrained optimism, this situation. But on the other hand, to return to what the chairman said, Senator Kerry said right at the very outset, there isn't, in my view, anything more important in terms of the wider security of this region and the world than making sure we have progress on this issue.

And that's why, however challenging it may be, the challenge and overcoming it is worth it.