

From: Yaser Dajani
Sent: Sunday, February 20, 2005 3:58 PM
To: nsu_staff
Cc: 'Maen Areikat'
Subject: Withdrawal: Tulkarem
Sensitivity: Confidential

I left this morning towards Tulkarem to first attend a preparatory meeting with the Palestinian team in charge of Tulkarem, including RSC commander, police commander, DCO commander, Preventive Security and Intelligence officers and second a meeting with the Israeli side to coordinate the handover of Tulkarem, both of which did not proceed as expected. I was with two senior officers from the Ramallah central command (the General's office).

The guidance from the political level for today's meeting was to ensure that the withdrawal from Tulkarem leads to the restoration of the conditions that existed prior to 28.9.2000. The internal meeting, from 7:30 until 8:30, took place at the offices of National Guard in Tulkarem. During this meeting, the Israeli side notified the Palestinian DCO that the delegation from Ramallah should not attend the meeting, and they are not welcome at this point because "there are no negotiations involved". According to the Israeli side, this meeting is "to meet and greet" and to discuss the "possible handover of Tulkarem. No decision has yet been taken to hand over the area." [Emphasis added]. The Palestinian side protested and some called for the cancellation of the meeting, but were overruled by the higher authorities.

As such, the Palestinian commander of Tulkarem, Brig. General Abu Fateh, along with the Police commander, Brig. General Abu Hamid, went to meet the Israelis at the Israeli DCO. The Israeli commander is Col. Tamir, who is in charge of Tulkarem, Qalqilya and Salfit. There were four Palestinians and 8 Israelis present in the meeting. Below are the main points of the meeting, followed by an analysis:

Minutes

-The Israeli side expressed the following principles:

- The purpose of this exercise is to ensure complete disengagement from the Palestinians
- There will be no joint patrols
- Fair amount of joint work on coordination, but only after demarcation of borders
- Security for both

-The objective of the handover is to address:

- Terror
- Weapons
- Incitement
- Money transfers to terror groups

-The Palestinian side said that the PA security forces are not entirely ready. This is a great responsibility and our capability now is very low.

-The Israeli side is willing to handover the town of Tulkarem plus surrounding areas. The Israeli side was seeking the following:

- Movement of PA forces through Area C in coordination with the Israelis
- In Area C Israeli forces will remain.
- All entry and exit points will be under the control of the PA
- Israel wants right of passage through Area A to reach Area C

- Hot pursuit rights
- Ticking bombs in coordination with the Palestinian side, but if no action Israel will deal with it separately.
- There should be weekly meetings.

-The Palestinian side did not respond to most of the points above except for hot pursuit by saying "we are against hot pursuit, coordination with us is better and we will deal with the source of danger."

-It was agreed that on Monday the two commanders, Palestinian and Israeli, will conduct a joint tour of the area to identify key areas, future Palestinian checkpoints and deployment of forces, etc.

-The transfer will happen on Tuesday, and the Palestinian delegation can bring "the media to document the handover."

Analysis

-Israel is using a tactic of vetoing and preventing the participation of committee members to which they object. The purpose of this is two-fold: 1. to fragment the Palestinian team and hence weaken its negotiating power and 2. to ensure that only security and intelligence officers participate to prevent the introduction of political and/or strategic issues into the agenda. If this continues unabated it could set a serious precedent. This must be addressed immediately by the political level.

-While the Israelis did indicate that they are willing to restore the situation on the ground to that of 28.9, there are obviously certain issues that can not be reversed and as such the Israelis can only restore what can be restored. The wall, closed areas, the gates are all issues that can not be restored, and are therefore inconsistent with the conditions that existed prior to 28.9, not to mention the land that has been confiscated, the loss of revenues, etc. The Israeli side refused to discuss the issue of the gates. To accept the transfer of Tulkarem without putting these issues on the agenda is tacit acceptance of the wall and its associated regime. If the handover does in fact happen, these issues will be buried and our position weakened, especially when we begin to deal with Bethlehem and other cities where the wall seriously impinges on Palestinian areas.

-The Palestinian team that met with the Israelis did not fully take into account the Palestinian requirements, such as the removal of two important checkpoints, 'Anab and Jabara. These two should be removed, otherwise the situation on the ground will not change and the population will not feel the effects of the transfer.

-A thorough analysis must be prepared before every meeting to identify Palestinian requirements, red-lines, positions, interests: in others words, the Palestinian proposal and fall-back positions.

-At this point, the General will review the Israeli proposal this evening and a decision will be made on whether to accept the above. However, time is of the essence. We only have 24 hours.

-The Palestinian team in Tulkarem must be reinforced with people that understand the situation on the ground and who can argue the case effectively.

Should you have any questions to the above or if you have any ideas please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best,

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