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## Interview: Dr. Nabil Shaath

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# ‘There is no need for interim measures or confidence-building’

*Dr. Nabil Shaath is a member of the Palestine National Council and chairman of its Political Committee. A Wharton School graduate, he is also head of TEAM Corporation, based in Cairo. On numerous occasions, he has served as the official envoy of Yasser Arafat.*

*The interview was conducted by EIR reporter Scott Thompson and other journalists on March 12 at “The Road to Peace” conference in New York. Dr. Shaath was the head of the Palestinian delegation to that conference, and he was a keynote speaker.*

**Reporter:** What do you think about the proposal of the Bush administration for interim measures to be negotiated between the PLO and the Israelis, that was leaked to Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times* on March 12?

**Shaath:** They are solely concerned with delaying a solution. The PLO initiative is one that centers on a solution, not from a transitional period without any commitment to reach a permanent solution. You commit yourself to a future vision, then we can talk about interim measures. We are not against talking about interim measures. But, we are not willing to accept interim measures that are not connected to a future vision. This is suicide.

**Reporter:** So there is no significance to Mr. Bush meeting with either side?

**Shaath:** We want the meetings to continue. We want dialogues to be as direct as possible. But we are not content to read a proposition said today in the *New York Times* that will simply ask us to wait for a few years while confidence builds and while we accept the occupation as an answer. Not only that, but we are asked to stop our only pressure against the occupation, which is the resistance of the children of the *Intifada* [West Bank uprising].

We are willing to accept stopping military action across the border, through a mutually arranged ceasefire. We are willing to accept that. Chairman Arafat has indicated his willingness: his acceptance of the American goal for a ceasefire that recognizes mutual sovereignty.

But, for the Palestinians’ part, there is absolutely no

reason then to see why the Israelis shouldn’t withdraw. They have occupied the land for 22 years without any sign. And, the only hopeful sign we have now is the uprising in Palestine. To ask us to stop the *Intifada*, we ask: “For what?”

The *Intifada* has been our only means for combating the occupation. The *Intifada* has put pressure upon the Palestine National Council. The Palestine National Council has responded to this. It is the *Intifada* that really relieved a certain fear of unity. With the *Intifada* pushing, we were firmly able to vote upon a peace plan.

**Reporter:** Are there any conditions in which the PLO would try to stop the *Intifada*?

**Shaath:** That’s the question we have spoken about, the future vision. About the end result. We have spoken about interim measures. They’re talking to us about interim measures, when 20,000 of our people are in prison, when thousands are in hospitals with broken arms and legs. What kind of interim measures? You talk about the future, or you talk about the modality of negotiation. You talk about setting the rules for a peace plan, and then talk about interim measures. Interim measures become a step in the process of reaching a final solution, not an end result in themselves.

**Reporter:** What do you mean by “substance” being lacking in the U.S.-PLO dialogue?

**Shaath:** By substance I mean peace in the Middle East. I mean something of a Palestinian state, and a modality for self-determination for the Palestinians. I mean security for the state of Israel and Palestine. I mean border arrangements. I mean water and land questions. I really mean the matters that will really mean a lot in shaping the final peace in the Middle East, not confidence-building measures to take the occupation a few more years before deciding upon these issues.

**Reporter:** But, the question is, can you stop the *Intifada*? Is the PLO a worthy negotiating partner? Does it control anything?

**Shaath:** We can stop the *Intifada*, when we have achieved

a substantive form setting our minds toward the future and toward the final outcome of the negotiations. The *Intifada* cannot be stopped just because somebody wants to test our ability to stop it. It's much easier to stop the occupation, because stopping the occupation requires a simple order tomorrow from Mr. Rabin to have his forces move out of Nablus, for example. Nablus has been under siege and has been under a barbarous attack by his soldiers. If Mr. Rabin can, tomorrow he can make an order for people to lift the siege of Nablus and to lift the siege of the camps in Gaza, before asking us to stop our total national movement for the liberation in a land that has used as means raising of flags and throwing of stones.

**EIR:** Dr. Shaath, are you troubled that the number-two man at the State Department will be Lawrence Eagleburger, who's a protégé of the same Henry Kissinger who said, "No dialogue with the PLO, no Palestinian state, and crack down on the *Intifada*?"

**Shaath:** I'm troubled by any U.S. official who does not see the urgency of peace based on the rights of the Palestinian people and of Israel. Any U.S. official is playing with fire who thinks that we can be put on the back burner for a few years until they solve their problems of armaments and their problems in Central America and so on. We have an urgent problem at hand, and any U.S. official who does not realize how serious our problem is, I have fears about.

**Reporter:** What would be the conditions for winding down the *Intifada*, apart from a clear statement of a two-state solution?

**Shaath:** Withdraw Israeli forces from our cities and camps. If you want the murder to stop, you must withdraw your forces from our cities—we are not asking that you withdraw them from your cities—and sit at the negotiating table at an international conference to talk about it.

**Reporter:** Aren't you willing to make any concessions?

**Shaath:** Chairman Arafat has already made very clear, he is willing to discuss tomorrow—even with American assistance—a total military ceasefire in the south of Lebanon. And by that, we will have not only stopped totally our attacks against civilians, but even our attacks against military establishments, should the Israelis reciprocate in the south of Lebanon. We have then contained our activities to those of the *Intifada*, and therefore, if he withdraws his forces from cities and camps, there will be no confrontation with Israeli soldiers. And, since there are confrontations with civilians anyway, he will have reduced a lot of the need for any confidence-building measures.

**Reporter:** Could you repeat what your conditions were for the southern Lebanon ceasefire?

**Shaath:** It has to be mutual: that means they will have to

stop bombarding our Lebanese refugee camps, will stop military incursions into Lebanon, will stop attacking our boats on the high seas, will stop the blockade of our force. In return, we will stop all military incursions across the border.

**Reporter:** Could you comment more on why you oppose the conditions of the Bush administration in the *New York Times* today?

**Shaath:** What kind of confidence-building measure is it, when we are even forbidden to express sentiments against

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the occupation? We are not only asked to refrain from resisting the occupation, but even from talking about it, because talking about our occupation means "inflammatory material." I mean, this is really ridiculous. I don't know how the United States can do what it's doing in Afghanistan and other places in the world—supporting the mujahideen with arms—and denying our resistance people the right to publish pamphlets. This is really a double standard.

**EIR:** Dr. Shaath, is the international conference a non-negotiable demand of the PNC's peace program?

**Shaath:** What is not negotiable is the end result, namely of setting up an independent Palestinian state as a result of our expression of self-determination side by side with the state of Israel, and discussing all security arrangements for the two states. This is really the final result. But, there is a lot to negotiate the implementation of that and even the process to reach that. So far, we feel that the only way to have international guarantees of peace is to have an international conference. We are willing to have direct negotiations before the conference, as a preparation for the conference. We are willing to conduct direct negotiations through the conference, as the conference proceeds. But, so far, we have not been convinced that there is any better way than an international con-

ference to establish international guarantees of the peace that will ensue.

**EIR:** About two years ago, Chairman Arafat gave a speech warning about a “New Yalta” settlement, that was influenced by PLO official Hani Hasan. Basically, he said that there was a fear the superpowers would reach a condominium agreement over the heads of the participants who should have sovereign status. Is that still a concern?

**Shaath:** Well, we always are very jealous about reaching our goals through our own endeavors and those of the Israelis. We want the world to persuade the Israelis to sit down and deliberate about the substance and reach a peace settlement that’s satisfactory for both of us, and therefore, we need international support and persuasion. We don’t want the international powers to meet separately and decide for us what we ought to do. I don’t think any people in the world would want that, even the Israelis.

**EIR:** Eagleburger’s proposal in the Washington Institute for the Near East Policy presidential study, “Building for Peace,” was to continue the occupation, have elections under the occupation, and so forth.

**Shaath:** Yes, the thing is that many politicians really are slaves of defunct ideas. I mean these are defunct ideas. These are ideas that were developed during a time when the Palestinians were chased around the place, when we had no coherent peace plan, and when there was no *Intifada* and there was no international arrangement for the solution of regional problems as has happened after the Gorbachov approach. The world has changed. We have now a Soviet Union which is willing and desirous of joining with the United States and other powers to conclude an agreement. You have an *Intifada* in the occupied territory which says “No” to the occupation and makes its voice heard. And, you have a new Palestinian movement which sets its goals clearly on peace. Things have changed. So you cannot really just go back to old ideas which have become defunct, because the world has changed, and stick to them, and hope you can get any results out of them.

**EIR:** Dr. Kissinger is now reemerging through his surrogates in the Bush administration through Larry Eagleburger, Brent Scowcroft, and others. This is very troubling.

**Shaath:** I agree with you 100%. I agree with you. There are several people in that administration who have worked in Kissinger Associates, and Kissinger has been the most harmful to any real peace in the Middle East.

**EIR:** Do you see anyone in the Bush administration who might give cause for hope of a more balanced policy?

**Shaath:** Well, we really had hoped that Mr. Bush and Mr. Baker themselves might be susceptible to new ideas, to fresh approaches. We did not come with a negative mind about them, but they are not moving.

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## Interview: Gen. Mattityahu Peled

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### ‘Eagleburger report totally irrelevant’

*Gen. Matti Peled served in the Israel Defense Forces, retiring with the rank of major general. He was a member of the Knesset for the Progressive List for Peace until September 1988 upon his retirement from the IDF. Now, he is a professor of Arabic Studies at Tel Aviv University. The following excerpted interview was conducted by EIR correspondent Scott Thompson at “The Road to Peace” conference in New York on March 12.*

**EIR:** My first question is that I noticed you had the Washington Institute for Near East Policy report by Lawrence Eagleburger, which you criticized as disastrous. Could you elaborate?

**Peled:** Well, it is very narrow-minded, very superficial. It lacks even the smallest original ideas. What it really does is discuss the Middle East—apart from Iran-Iraq, which is a separate subject—from the standpoint of the traditional American attitude that Israel is the main concern and everything else should fall into line with this concern. So, they discuss the Palestinian problem, but they don’t even mention the refugees. They speak about Syria as a danger to peace without mentioning the Golan Heights. They speak about the threat of chemical weapons concentrated in Arab countries without mentioning the nuclear weapons in Israel. It is very, very one-sided.

And, the end result of their analysis is that the PLO should, in fact, be eliminated somehow or other, that Israel should make a Jordan deal and the deal would be that Israel retains part of the occupied territories—the other would be given over to Jordan—and the part which would remain in Israel, the population should be given some kind of autonomy without specifying which. It’s all, of course, just nonsense, complete nonsense. Everybody knows that King Hussein does not want anymore to be involved in that, that the PLO is not likely to be eliminated from the scene, and that the Palestinian population is not likely to participate in an election that will end up in their autonomy. But, all this doesn’t seem to bother Eagleburger’s group. They feel well with their own ideas, which are absolutely irrelevant to the present situation. And on that basis they are proposing a Middle East policy for the President. I think it’s really a very poor show