Steve Dishler, director of international affairs for JUF's Jewish Community Relations Council, recently sat down with Gilead Sher, former Chief of Staff and Policy Coordinator for Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Co-chief Negotiator at the Camp David and Taba summits, to discuss the renewed talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Dishler: It's helpful when we look at the present negotiations to consider the previous attempts in 2000 and 2008. Where they succeeded and where they failed. What is different today that gives hope these negotiations will be any different?

Sher: It's more complicated now. I can say time does not work in Israel's favor. The fact is, on permanent status, we only had two serious negotiations. I believe that most of the Israelis and Palestinians do realize that the final endgame is going to be very much like the Clinton parameters, or Olmert's proposal to Abu Mazen in 2008. The lessons drawn from past experience is to follow it. First, you need to change the paradigm that was the negotiation for the basis of permanent status. It was "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed." I believe this has to be changed to "whatever is agreed or mutually coordinated should be immediately implemented" so that gradually, you get closer to the two-state reality. Even in the case that you do not reach final status. Through a series of interim agreements you gradually compose the broad picture of permanent status. If you ask me what should be the realistic aim and objective of the current negotiation I would say borders, security, economy, and statehood. This is achievable within the given timeline. Then in a state-to-state fashion, negotiations should proceed on Jerusalem, the holy sites, the Old City, the refugees. What is needed desperately is an American commitment to stay the whole course, to be hands-on for the whole course. To prepare a contingency plan for the deadlocks that lie ahead. This is extremely important for us to understand because I believe the respective leaderships should know there's no deviation from that course. You cannot just get up and walk away from the negotiation room, you will have to pay for that and the cost will be very high.

Dishler: The Israelis and the Palestinians entered into negotiations from different motivations. Israel is facing increased isolation and a growing threat from Iran. For the Palestinians I would say it's the breakdown of the Arab Spring and the current weakness of Hamas. The main motivation is not reaching a final status.

Sher: I think you're right, but I would like to rephrase your question if I may. I think that leadership is not about tactics, it's about national goals, national strategy. How could you make your people benefit from your decisions? That's precisely what I request – from my own leadership – to be doing. Not starting a negotiation process that leads nowhere, because the failure would be worse than not starting at all. I'm not that concerned with what made the respective leaders decide to say yes. I'm more concerned with the way to engage them in a candid, courageous and reliable process of negotiating a final status agreement.