

Saban Forum 2007

Keynote Address by Foreign Minister of Israel Tzipi Livni November 3, 2007

(Communicated by the Foreign Minister's Bureau)

The fourth annual meeting of the Saban Forum is being held from November 3-5, 2007, in Jerusalem. The Saban Forum, organized by the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, brings a high-level, bipartisan U.S. delegation to Jerusalem for discussions with their Israeli counterparts on the theme of "War and Peace in the Middle East."

Following are the main points of Foreign Minister Livni's address to the Saban Forum (3 November):

This moment in time could definitely be called historic. As leaders, we have the responsibility of checking out all options, diagnosing the problems - and there are problems - and finding opportunities to advance the process.

The situation today is more complex than ever; we must recognize the reality on the ground. The bad news is - terrorism rules in Gaza. Hamas took advantage of the democratic process and is arming itself from the Philadelphi Corridor, while Israel is under attack daily. The good news is - there is a moderate Palestinian leadership that accepts the idea of peace, the vision of two states living in peace and security.

Today, the Palestinians understand that terrorism harms their own interests. At the same time, there are problems with implementing the vision, given the current situation. There are problems with their ability to deliver, and we must strengthen the moderate leadership in order to improve the situation on the ground - not only in the Gaza Strip but also in the West Bank. That is the reality.

We cannot turn a blind eye to the reality and the terrorism in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, we have decided to adopt a dual strategy - to isolate Hamas, to take steps against terrorism and, at the same time, to look for a vision and a common denominator with the Palestinian leadership and together to change the situation on the ground.

The change must be on the ground and not just in theory. I believe that we must send a message to the Palestinian people that the situation does not have to be this way, that there is a choice. The duality must become reality. However, as we try to find a common denominator, Israel's security needs and the reality on the ground must be addressed.

The formula we have chosen is the Roadmap. The Roadmap is based on the understanding that the path to establishing a Palestinian state passes through ensuring Israel's security. This formula was adopted by the entire international community, including Israel and the Palestinians. The original idea was to create a continuum of security - dialogue - permanent arrangement. We could have waited until the end of the first stage's implementation, but we chose not to, because we believe in dialogue with the Palestinians. However, we still have to provide a solution to the problems of security. Therefore, we decided to begin a dialogue now and to return to security before the agreements are implemented. Now the implementation of the first stage is beginning, by both sides. We are continuing the dialogue but must remember our security needs; we owe that to ourselves and to both peoples. This is not a zero-sum game.

We must find the way to agreements, but this will happen only when both sides understand that this demands compromise. It is not true that Israel is avoiding in advance discussion of the sensitive issues. We are not holding a dialogue for the sake of dialogue; we must learn from past experience, and it is our responsibility to draw conclusions and to do the right thing. We must see

if it is possible to reach understandings on these topics, to see if we can proceed; this is a process that we will understand in the near future. We have already experienced failure in the past and we don't want to go there again.

Learning from past experience brings us to the role of the Arab world, and it is crucial. The Arab world must lend its support to the process, without taking the place of the Palestinians in the negotiations. If a conference supporting the process is convened, they must go to it and support it, not place obstacles before it. They as well as the international community must help bridge the gap between the willingness and intentions of the Palestinian government and its ability on the ground.

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