

## **The Saban Forum 2010**

### **U.S.-Israeli Relations: Facing Hard Choices**

**December 10, 2010**

*Remarks as prepared for delivery*

Defense Minister Ehud Barak's Speech at the Saban Forum

Secretary Clinton, Haim Saban, distinguished guests, good evening.

Last week, members of the Jewish people throughout the world came together in their homes to mark the holiday of Hanukkah. Candles were lit, and their light filled the hearts and streets with the glow of hope and brotherhood.

Beginning with Judah Maccabee, each year the candles of Hanukah signify a struggle for the spiritual freedom, that resonates from antiquity to our own day, celebrating the triumph of the “spirit” over sheer force, of the idea over the sword.

The wars of the Maccabees changed history. Unexpectedly, the world witnessed the rebirth of an independent sovereign Jewish state.

The Maccabeans' victory instilled hope in our people that even after two thousand years of exile, one day Jewish sovereignty would be re-established in the land of our forefathers.

We are fortunate to live in a generation that witnessed the miracle of Israel's revival in its homeland.

Israel's existence is a fact. It is strong, vibrant, prosperous, evolving and striving toward new horizons. Nevertheless, bearing in mind our painful history (old as well as recent) we have the obligation to assure our safety and strength vis a vis any looming threat.

The United States is Israel's leading strategic partner, strongest ally and best friend. And the US is committed to preserving Israel's character as a Jewish state, as well as its Qualitative Military Edge.

A sophisticated and thoughtful American approach to Middle East issues is essential, but not enough. America has to demonstrate its determination to stand up to the enemies of peace, of Israel and of our moderate neighbors.

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, understood and recognized the great importance of nurturing a strategic relationship with a major power. This, if you will, is one of the foundations of our national security doctrine.

The founders of the Zionist Movement were people of both vision and action. They left behind them the “old order” with a single aim: To create a model society, “AM SEGULA” as B.G. put it, in the historic land of their forefathers.

They strove to create an open and modern society that would serve as the vanguard for progressive societies the world over. Their state would be Zionist, Jewish, and above all, democratic, in the spirit of principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence of May 14, 1948.

Theirs would be an exemplary society in which young Israelis would *choose* to build their lives and with which Jews around the world would be proud to associate.

It would be a country that leads in the fields of science and technology, education and culture, social solidarity, integration and equality for all, human dignity and quality of life.

We can indeed all be proud of the achievements that the State of Israel has accomplished until now, emanating from a combination of “Jewish ingenuity” and “Israeli chutzpah.”

Day by day, Israelis are "pushing the frontiers" and turning the impossible into the possible.

From the flash memory to cherry tomatoes. From effective extraction of solar energy to water

desalination, from Copaxon to Cardiac Stents – The “start up nation” is erupting with talent and entrepreneurial spirit.

As 2011 approaches, we find ourselves once again at a critical juncture of opportunity and challenges. The opportunity is the dialogue toward apolitical agreement with our neighbors. The challenges come from the radical camp: Hezbollah, Hamas, and global terror networks, with Iran looming strong in the background.

We cannot ignore the new realities of the global flow of information. The leaks from Wikileaks will badly affect diplomatic dialogue. And it is another indication of an era in which the few can threaten to destabilize main elements of the current world order – in terror, nuclear proliferation as well as information distribution. Facing these new realities will require both thoughtful planning and the combined action of all leading members of the world community.

I hope this cooperation will materialize. The sooner, the better.

For the last two thousand years, three times each day, Jews have prayed and raised their eyes toward Zion saying: “May He, who makes peace in his heavens, bring peace upon us.”

Peace is something that is made, not just talked about or prayed for. Peace is not a religion; but a means to realize and maintain the Zionist vision, and should be pursued with a strong sense of urgency and purpose.

There is no vacuum in the Middle East. Without peace and the peace process, both Israelis and Palestinians will ultimately continue to perpetuate the cycle of violence and bloodshed between them. Israel will grow further from its goal of becoming “a light unto the nations,” a society worthy of emulation.

The alternatives are far worse (be it Belfast, the Balkans, or chaos) and their nature dictates the need for tough decisions.

Hovering over all these alternatives, however, is the immediate and clear danger of delegitimization of Israel as a Jewish state with the right to self-defense — a challenge that threatens the country’s future and undermines its security no less than Hamas and Hezbollah.

Our supreme responsibility is to ensure Israel’s security, safety and future, in a tough and unpredictable environment. And we will accomplish this thanks to the military might of the Israel Defense Forces, the vigor of Israeli society, and the unity of the Jewish people throughout its Diaspora.

But in addition to strength and the justice of our cause, we also need political wisdom. The world is changing before our eyes and is no longer willing to accept, even temporarily, our continued control over another people. Two states for two peoples is the only true path of Zionism today.

What is to be done? It is essential that Israel will have a comprehensive strategy in which we take the initiative and advance Israel's goals, and I will count them one by one:

- #1: First and foremost – Maintaining our "special relationship" with the United States of America: in order to strengthen our defense and assure our QME, as well as protecting our posture in the world and restraining the isolation and de-legitimatization of IL.
- #2: Increasing cooperation and deepen the common interests with the "moderate" Arab leaderships.
- #3: Creating, in a Bottom Up fashion, a political horizon in the Palestinian arena while continuing to isolate the Hamas in Gaza.
- #4: Establish the foundation for peace and security based on clear and daring political initiative which will encompass all the core issues, finalize all claims, and bring an end to the conflict.
- #5: Carrying out proactive attempt to peacefully remove Syria from the radical axis.
- #6: Building a Multi Layer interception system against rockets & missiles of all sorts.

An operationally deployed interception system can significantly reduce the damage from a future attack, shorten a war and even deter future aggressors.

- #7: Last but not least: Prevent a nuclear Iran. Iran, led by the Mullahs, has become the world's ultimate sponsor of terror – arming, training and financing it. And Iran is determined to reach nuclear weapons and to hegemonize the Islamic world and the oil interests of the Gulf. Diplomacy should remain the first tool of choice. Sanctions are a step in the right direction, but they cannot prove effective on their own. Thus, it remains necessary not to remove any option from the table.

What guides us in the peace process?

The nature of the challenge is sharp, painful but simple – 43 years ago, in a war forced upon us, we took over land and territories with great emotional significance to the Jewish people. But another people is there, one that numbers in millions and has its own aspirations and rights.

The painful truth requires decisions & answers: 11 million people live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. Seven and a half million Israelis and three and half million Palestinians.

- If there is only one political entity, named Israel controlling all this area, it will become inevitably, a non-Jewish or a non-democratic state:
- If this Palestinian block would vote – it is a bi-national state par excellence.
- If the Palestinian block would not vote –that's a non democratic state.

- Neither of these is the Zionist dream.

By pursuing peace with security – we are not doing the Palestinians a favor. We are simply working toward assuring the future, identity and success of the Zionist Project.

Reality is shaped by the factual essence not by sound bites and slogans.

The outline and the principles of an agreement are clear, known, and quite widely agreed upon:

- a) Two states for two peoples.
- b) Delineating a border within the land of Israel that will assure a solid Jewish majority for generations to come, and on the other side a viable demilitarized Palestinian state.
- c) Holding the major "settlement blocks" under Israeli sovereignty, and bringing the isolated settlement back home.
- d) Solving the refugee problem within the Palestinian state.
- e) Jerusalem will be discussed at the end of the negotiations, with reference to the Clinton parameters, namely: Western Jerusalem and the Jewish suburbs for us, the heavily populated Arab neighborhoods for them, and an agreed upon solution in the "Holy Basin".
- f) Signing an agreement which declares: End of conflict and finality of mutual claims.
- g) The agreement must, of course, be based upon strict security arrangements.



The Middle East is a tough neighborhood. There is no mercy for the weak. An agreement will only be reached from a position of strength and self confidence. Our rivals must acknowledge that they have no chance of defeating Israel or weakening it through terror.

Our experience in the second intifada and in the pullout from Lebanon and Gaza dictates that security arrangements must include three compelling elements:

- Preventing rockets and missiles from entering the West Bank.
- Preventing an outbreak of terror similar to the terror wave we faced in 2001 - 2003.
- Providing effective operational answer for future potential of a conventional attack on our narrow eastern border.

Having spent most of my adult life fighting for IL in uniform, and as Israel's minister of defense today, I allow myself to state, loud and clear, that there is no contradiction — professional or otherwise — between the two state solution, and the security of Israel. On the contrary, two states for two peoples is a key condition for enabling Israel, now and in the future, to continue developing the Zionist dream of a true model society.

Churchill once said: “The pessimist sees a difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees an opportunity in every difficulty”.

I am open-eyed and realistic and am aware of the difficulties, but I am also optimistic and believe it can be done. This critical hour may also be the finest hour for the leaders and for the peoples on both sides.

In spite good faith efforts, together with the Administration we were unable to launch the second moratorium for ninety days.

That shouldn't cause us losing sight of what needs to be done.

We, together with an assertive US administration, must find a way to renew serious negotiations with the PA leadership, headed by president Abbas and PM Fayad.

We ought to resume trust and overcome suspicion and inhibitions on all sides. In IL we have to go beyond personal and partisan interests and egos, expand the IL government if needed, and brace ourselves for the immediate task of moving decisively forward.

I believe that the coming few weeks can enable us to find the way to make it happen.

Millions of eyes, all around the ME and the world, are looking at us, expecting us to do just that.

I acknowledge this and am doing everything in my power to ensure that this historic opportunity will not be missed.

In these demanding days we must live up to our responsibility. To provide leadership that does not lose touch with reality and is capable of farsightedness and of action.

Paraphrasing on President Kennedy I would say: “The path we have to choose is full of hazards as all paths are. But it is the one most consistent with our character and courage”.

I pledge to you that we will continue to struggle for Israel’s security, while working determinedly, to achieve peace, till we manifest the blessing envisioned by our tradition:

בשלום עמו את יברך ה', ייתן לעמו עוז ה'

“The Lord will give his people strength; the Lord will bless his people with peace.”

Amen. Thank you very much and Shabat Shalom.