

Symposium:

Israel at 60: Its Historical and Legal Rights Still Challenged?"

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Address by FM Livni:

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[Translated from Hebrew]

In order to understand the problems facing us, we need to speak about the legitimate rights of the State of Israel, and perhaps also of the State of Israel as the national home for the Jewish people. Because the problems we face relate not only to the State of Israel's existence, or the existence of the State of Israel as part of the international community, but also and primarily to the State of Israel's right to exist as the national home for the Jewish people.

It was clear even before the establishment of the State of Israel, and before its acceptance in the United Nations, that the Zionist movement and the international legitimacy it received - in the form of the Balfour Declaration - spoke of national rights and their expression through sovereignty. Similarly, in 1947 when the UN tried to find a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, the resolution

spoke in terms of resolving it by the establishment of two nation states, one a Jewish state and the other an Arab state. It was then clearly understood that the Jewish people have a right to self-determination in their own state. The place is the Land of Israel - the historical home of the Jewish people in which it has national, historical and other rights. Hence it was natural for the Jewish state to be established in the Land of Israel. This idea was further reinforced in Israel's Declaration of Independence.

Since then, after these obvious things were uttered, resolved and voted upon, what was obvious then is no longer obvious today. When speaking of the challenges with which we must cope, I think this is actually the most significant challenge the State of Israel is facing in the short term.

It is important that we as a society define what we are, because that is the message we need to communicate. It is important for us as a society within the State of Israel to constantly share the same supreme goal, which is the existence of the State of Israel as the national home for the Jewish people and a democratic state - a state in which the values of Judaism and democracy are intertwined and not in conflict, a state living in security and hopefully also in peace with its neighbors, in the Land of Israel.

I am restating what is an obvious premise for us, because there are also processes that we need to preserve at home, within Israeli society, in order to constantly safeguard the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. But this also has ramifications on our outward struggle.

We must be honest and tell ourselves what is happening on the outside. Even if things are not said aloud, a process is taking place below the surface that negates the State of Israel's legitimacy as a national home for the Jewish people. And if we don't say it aloud, we cannot deal with it.

In some cases, this happened through abstract discussions - academic discussions, theoretical discussions about what a nation state is and whether the State of Israel is a state which truly deserves to exist in safety and security - on this there is by the way no dispute; or perhaps the national issue can be one of the subjects or values deserving of international protection even in Israel's case.

This might just be from lack of knowledge. An interviewer might ask me in passing, towards the end of an interview, what the Jewish state means, since after all Judaism is a religion. How do you people suddenly bring in the national issue, and what is the connection between the State of Israel and this issue, since you can be a Jew anywhere in the world? People, at least in Europe,

undergo processes in which borders open and nationalities become blurred out of some sense of innovation, and this influences the attitude towards us as well.

I can give one very simple example for us to tell ourselves this truth. When the Hamas government came to power, and when the international Quartet set the conditions by which every Palestinian government needs to abide, demanding acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist - I'll put it with a question mark right now, but I ask myself whether the four words we would add to this sentence, namely: acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state - whether the world would really be willing to add these four words to the demand from any Palestinian government.

I pose this with a question mark right now, but this is one of the issues we need to address, because I think that besides fighting for the physical existence of the State of Israel and the need to fight for Israel's values as a democratic state - really the only democratic state in the Middle East - our existence as a national home for the Jewish people is actually the supreme goal that not only justifies Israel's cause, but also obliges us and is in fact also our central goal as a society, certainly as a government and a state.

Thus the State of Israel, the government of Israel, finds itself a partner in different struggles in this realm, in certain cases in order to strengthen Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish and democratic state; in other cases in order to fight along with the Jewish world against processes of anti-Semitism. These are in many senses connected to the other processes, in some kind of mix between illegitimate criticism (because there is also legitimate criticism against Israel) - and I hope we won't see at Durban II what we saw at Durban I - and a struggle together with the free world, of which we are a part, for the values we share.

But part of the problem we face, although it is clear to all of us citizens of the State of Israel - I'm not even talking about the government - what our values are and that we share the free world's values, is that we will put ourselves in a position in which there is a tremendous, insufferable discrepancy between Israel's nature and values, and its image beyond its borders, creating a situation of illegitimacy. And so we find ourselves in a situation which I believe must be addressed.

I am willing to be judged by the international community on any count, but I want the international community's judgment to be a legitimate judgment according to its own values and, just as every system of government is based on its society's values, according to the distinction between murder with malicious intent and unintentional killing by accident. Although the sorrow of the victims and their families is identical, this moral distinction is crucial.

Therefore, I expect the international community to differentiate between Israel and terror. When civilians are murdered by malicious intent, as opposed to cases in which we are forced to take action in order to protect civilians from terror and during these actions, civilians are killed as well, I expect the international community not to lump everything together in one package. Expressing condolences to everyone is fine, but the international community should make this distinction, because this is an expression of values.

When we place restrictions on ourselves, not because of international law but among other things because of our own values, I want the free world, of which we are voluntarily a part and whose values we share, to judge us - but to judge us precisely according to those values.

We are also facing a situation, for which I hope there is international understanding, in which conflicts today are actually less and less about borders, and less and less nationalist - and I will refer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - and more and more based on religion. Religious conflicts are not fought to gain rights for someone, but are illegitimate struggles to deny others their rights. Here Israel is on the front lines, but the reason for extremism is not Israel or the Israeli-Palestinian or Israeli-Arab conflict. We are paying the price for the extremists' unwillingness to accept our legitimate right to exist, not just as a state but as a state with the self-determination of a people.

Therefore, whoever claims or thinks that if we will manage to end the conflict here, then peace and quiet will come to the Middle East and the entire world is mistaken. I am saying this first so there will be no doubt: Israel has a clear interest in ending the conflict; we are not trying to buy time; time is working against us; we will do all we can to live in peace. I will address the parameters and milestones that any agreement must fulfill, but we also need to know that when we speak of the existing extremism, when we speak of a state like Iran that represents this kind of ideological system in a government - even if we succeed in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict tomorrow, Iran will not change its ideology.

All the countries in the region, especially the Arab and Muslim states with pragmatic leaders, clearly understand that Iran is not only Israel's problem, even though the leader of Iran speaks of eradicating Israel and denies the Holocaust. They in particular, being familiar with it up close, having radical elements in their own countries, know that their struggle is with the extremists at home, with a state like Iran that is trying to undermine their rule, and with an organization like Hamas that today serves as a very bad, very problematic model of a situation in which an extremist, radical,

religious Islamic movement, affiliated with the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt and other places, actually gained control. Today the entire world, especially the Arab world, and especially extremist Islamic elements, are watching to see whether for the first time a takeover by an organization of this kind can succeed. Hamas' success is a problem not just for Israel, not just for Abu Mazen and the pragmatic elements in the Palestinian Authority, but a problematic omen of all radical elements in the neighboring states who are awaiting an opportunity to exploit the democratic system, without accepting its values, and to impose their extremist ideology, denying others the right to live here in peace.

I know that this understanding exists among international leaders and the moderate Islamic leadership. The division between moderates and extremists spans religions, and I know that the pragmatic Arab leadership understands this. But the gap between the understanding and the willingness to take a stand is unfortunately very large.

So we have a situation in which the inciting, extremist elements, through the mass media, al-Qaeda websites, or radical elements, constitute a threat to leaderships that don't dare name the threat aloud, and don't tell the Western world what it half knows, half prefers not to hear - that we are in fact all in the same war. Iran is not just Israel's problem; it is the whole world's. Hizbullah and Lebanon are not just an internal Lebanese problem, but all of ours. And Hamas is not just a problem in Gaza and not just Israel's problem; it is all of ours.

If we manage to establish and reinforce this understanding among the international community, we will then see a willingness to take a stand - not for Israel's benefit but for the benefit of the international community, the free world, itself.

There is still a national conflict between two peoples between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we must find a solution to this conflict in order to serve Israel's supreme goal, namely the survival of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. This is our decision and our choice, which has been made by the Israeli public. It goes beyond political parties in the State of Israel, or even to its governments or political leaders. There is a very broad understanding among the Israeli public that the will and need to uphold the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, with these values intertwined, obliges us to make territorial compromises, to take action to end the conflict and achieve a situation of two separate national states, in which each nation - each people - fulfills its national aspirations in its own state. This is the first necessary basis of any settlement between the Palestinians and Israel.

I am stating the obvious, which is not always obvious to everyone. Any agreement needs to express the end of all national claims by establishing a nation state for the Palestinian people, alongside the State of Israel - the Jewish nation state. This state will be the Palestinian national solution for all Palestinians - those now living in the West Bank, in Gaza, and those who have been held in refugee camps for dozens of years, out of some politically-fed thought or dream that perhaps Israel, in fact the Jewish national state, would be the option [for their national aspirations]. We say that we want to find a solution to the conflict, but just as for the Jewish people, the establishment of the State of Israel was the national solution for the refugees from Europe and the Arab states, and part of the essence of the existence of the State of Israel is to be just that, so must the Arabs and Palestinians understand that the Palestinian state is the national solution for all Palestinians. Because without this we actually are not resolving the conflict.

The other part of any solution is of course security. We do not want to see the establishment of a terrorist state, an extremist Islamic state, or a failed state alongside Israel. Hizbullah in Lebanon has already shown us the result - a terrorist organization as an ineffective government and an armed militia that acts as it pleases against its neighbors. This is something we cannot afford. And that doesn't just mean Israel; the entire world cannot afford it. Because the goal is really to try and find an appropriate solution to the national conflict.

The distinction between moderates and extremists is also reflected in the Palestinian society and leadership. We see Gaza being controlled by a terrorist organization that used the democratic elections without paying any kind of "entry fee" - which by the way exists in all democracies, including Israel. If you want to participate in elections, as a fundamental matter of course you need to renounce violence and terror, and commit to the basic values of democracy. No government in the world would allow a terror organization to participate in elections. The only places in which this has happened are those places where this is most dangerous - Hamas in the Palestinian Authority, Hizbullah in Lebanon.

As a side remark, today I would also like to encourage international processes to set universal rules for participating in elections. It is part of the American constitution, and I think even the new laws in Iran and Afghanistan include this condition. Only we are paying the price now for the failure to impose this condition in the Palestinian Authority before the elections.

The distinction between moderates and extremists is also ideological. We have the Palestinian national movement on the one hand and the religious movement on the other. There is also a territorial distinction - Gaza is today being controlled by a terrorist

organization; while the West Bank has a legitimate government that committed to the Quartet's three conditions, namely acknowledging the State of Israel, honoring past agreements and renouncing violence and terror.

This situation is on one hand more complex and on the other hand enables us to move forward with the dual strategy we adopted - trying to reach agreements with the Palestinian national movement based on the principle of two nation states living in peace, with borders to be determined in the agreement; and on the other hand we have a movement with which it is almost impossible to achieve an end of the conflict, because this group is not willing to say the first requirement set by the Quartet - acknowledging the existence of the State of Israel.

So today we are conducting a dialogue with the more pragmatic group, in hope that it will be possible to reach an agreement with them. And we holding talks and demanding recognition of the Quartet's conditions, not in order to punish anyone for using terror but because if the Palestinian national movement gives in to the other group, the extremists, our capability of reaching overall agreements with them will decrease. There is no hope for the future with Hamas - hope for Israel as well as for the Palestinians who accept the two-state principle.

In the past there was a Palestinian leadership that really could make the necessary changes on the ground but did not always want to do so. Or sometimes there were elements with whom we could achieve an agreement, but their ability of implementing the agreement on the ground was very problematic. Today we have more or less both of these, but in two different parts.

So our strategy says: We will move ahead with the national group and try to reach agreements with them. At the same time, we have to try and make changes on the ground. Israel's ability to translate territorial compromise from theory to practice depends on there being an effective government on the other side, one which is legitimate because it will accept the Quartet's conditions, will provide an answer to terror, including security arrangements necessary for Israel, which are also part of the Roadmap, and will be party to the security conditions and the permanent settlement - only then can we really turn the agreements into a reality.

In order for this to happen, in parallel to the negotiations I am conducting with Abu Ala, changes need to take place that will strengthen this group in the West Bank. Subject of course to Israel's security requirements, there will be economic changes in the field in order to generate more trust in the peace process and the necessary distinction between the hope that emanates from the West Bank and the situation in Gaza, where the treatment will be

completely different. The distinction is not just between two theoretical groups; it is also physical, geographical. The fact that I am conducting negotiations with Abu Ala is not, unfortunately, going to change the situation in Gaza tomorrow morning. In Gaza we must provide answers to terror, and this means military answers.

At the moment our negotiating partners cannot provide us with answers in Gaza. But they also need to know, and I know that they share this understanding in principle, that if any internal dialogue will result in a government that does not accept the Quartet's conditions, this will affect our ability to make progress, not because we want to punish anyone but because there is no chance for progress of this kind.

So it's very important that as we work on one plane in negotiations with Abu Ala and the pragmatic group, trying to improve the situation on the ground both economically to benefit the Palestinians and security-wise to benefit Israel, and this is a common interest shared by Israel and the pragmatic elements, so Israel is also committed at the same time to act against terror in Gaza.

The fight against terror does not hamper the negotiations; it has consequences, but the negotiations continue in parallel. For the same reason we will continue to conduct negotiations even when Hamas tries to prevent it. I expect my partner on the Palestinian side to continue entering the negotiating room when Israel acts against terror, just as I expect them - during the any possible talks between Hamas and Fatah - not to surrender to the extremist Hamas ideology, but to insist on the three conditions which are not an Israeli invention, but a principle determined by the international community and rightfully so.

The last thing we want is to create legitimacy for an extremist Islamic organization, legitimacy for an extremist ideology. The last thing we want is an inability to achieve peace, perhaps through a commitment to a period of temporary calm. Israel must look not only at next week but at the coming years and choose the right strategy - one that will preserve the legitimate rights of the Jewish people in the State of Israel, and also enable our Palestinian neighbors to create a state for themselves or to realize their national rights in a state that is not the State of Israel.

Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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