



Address by FM Livni to INSS Conference: Security Challenges of the 21st Century

18 Dec 2008

Stagnating, standing in the corner, and not wanting to move things along first of all does not serve Israel's interests. They have a price. They strengthen those radical elements.

Address by Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni to the 2nd Annual International Conference of Tel-Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies

**Security Challenges of the 21st Century
"The US and Israeli Roles in the Middle East under Changing Political Circumstances"
December 18, 2008**

[translated from Hebrew]

Thank you and good afternoon to you all. I was asked to speak about the new administrations in the United States and Israel. We already know what the new administration will be in the United States; we don't yet know about Israel's. But there's no doubt that these changes will influence Israel and the United States' relationship, or ability to work together, on subjects that are important to the State of Israel. In the United States, the newly elected administration denotes the desire for change and hope, as well as a certain shift not only in domestic affairs but apparently also in American foreign policy.

Elections are coming up in Israel, and the relations between the two administrations will obviously be much more than the permanent relationship, which will not be altered by a different American administration. That relationship is based on friendship between the two countries, a profound grasp of global and regional interests, and a deep understanding of the play of interests in our region as well.

Still, I am positive that the identity of the next prime minister in the State of Israel will affect our ability to enlist the United States to safeguard Israel's interests and advance them jointly with the United States.

We need to understand a few points that certainly won't be new to most of you, but in order to work with the common challenges we have to indicate these points for ourselves in a changing world. In this changing world, today there is a clear understanding that the division is a real one between what we call "moderates" and "extremists."

Moderates are not always moderate in the sense that we understand moderation, but let's say they are more pragmatic in their understanding than the extremist elements. This differentiation has implications for the region and for the world's understanding of the region. In this context we can see extremist elements manifested as a state, Iran, which represents radical Islamic ideology that has absolutely no connection to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but rather to their faith. Their ideology constitutes a threat not only Israel but in fact to every state in the region, Iran's neighboring countries, Muslim Arab states, and the Gulf states.

This is clearly understood first of all by all of Iran's neighbors. Unfortunately, those who perceive that Iran is a threat do not always bother to utter it in public, too, after leaving the room when we've been speaking together, because part of the problem in this region is that

the more moderate elements are usually also weaker. They are coping with radical threats at home, extremist elements working with Iran, television and media that encourage and incite the masses and the extremist elements with pictures that are generally connected to our conflict here. So their ability to cope with the extremist elements, from within and from without, is very low. Their desire to make it a true and public confrontation is minimal.

So Israel needs to exploit this understanding, on one hand; and on the other hand, Israel is naturally on the frontlines, from which we must to recruit all the countries to fight against the same common threat. Of course, in Lebanon we see Hizbullah, which is the long arm of Iran, trying to undermine stability there in its own way. This has to do not only with the threat to Israel but of course also with the common interests of the more pragmatic elements. We see the same thing happening in the Palestinian Authority, represented by Hamas, which is creating a division between moderates and extremists, and a geographical division that developed over time. Hamas completely controls the Gaza Strip, and the pragmatic elements cannot get their foot in the door. Israel is working with the moderate elements in Judah and Samaria, in the West Bank, trying to effect the change with them.

The fact that the world is changing is also related to the United State's status or manner of conduct in the global context. If it once seemed to Israel that if we're all right with the United States, then everything is all right, we need to understand that this is also a somewhat outdated perception, because the US, in order to protect its own interests and to muster a consensus on the issues important to it, in some cases these being subjects no less important to us, needs the rest of the world as well. So we see some new forums such as the Quartet, which is a cooperation on everything related to the region and Israel-Palestinian relations, that includes the United States, Europe, Russia and the United Nations. And from that moment on – and no doubt we'll see a change or at least some different processes now with the new administration's relationship with Russia – either we'll see the United States in need of that same pragmatic Arab world I spoke of earlier, to enlist it in areas in which the US needs them. And if Israel doesn't understand that it can be an asset to the United States, in the sense of identifying common interests and enlisting all the elements that the United States needs as well, Israel can quickly turn into a burden.

The next administration of the State of Israel will have to be wise enough to identify these interests and provide the United States with the ability to work with the same system while identifying common interests and getting the world on board. I'm telling you outright, and I will also give you some examples, that this is entirely feasible.

At this point, Israel has to actually decide where it stands. There are two distinct possibilities here, two completely different paths. At this point in time Israel can go back to being the Israel it used to be, an Israel more like its former image, which I'm happy to say we managed to change in recent years. A state that speaks in passé terms, that instead of rallying the world around what is needed, warns the world against the extremists without defining the ability to provide joint solutions for the threats. An Israel that speaks in terms the world no longer holds valid, such as economic peace instead of political peace, hoping that no one will ask it to move on to other channels that would create peace with real substance. That way leads us into a corner and does not generate any kind of joint solution.

The second possibility, which we've already begun to implement lately, is to identify common interests and enlist the world in joint processes, in which Israel is just a part, sometimes leading them, and the result serves both global interests and our own interests.

Now some examples from recent years to understand how this is plausible and can be done. The first example is after the year 2000, when Israel and the Palestinians did not succeed in reaching an agreement at Camp David. A dialogue took place; it failed; and we entered an intifada in which Israel was sure it was in the right – it's not us; it's them – and everything was okay. It worked for a certain amount of time, but Israel's fundamental positions in every aspect of the conflict start eroding away. Israel put everything on the table and reached a certain point, and then an Israeli prime minister said, "If there's no agreement, then it's off the table." And even if Clinton said, "It's true; it no longer exists," it was there. As soon as it was there, you couldn't turn back the wheels of time and erase it.

Israel began to discuss one subject, in what I think was an historic mistake: the subject of refugees including the question of how many refugees would be allowed in Israel. What was spoken about then was five options, including the future Palestine, the states where Palestinians are currently living, the exchange of territories, and host countries, one of them being Israel, thinking that if Israel is the one to determine the number it would be all right. I find this very wrong.

With this understanding, I went with the same principle accepted by the world that says that the solution, and I deem it to be the right one, is two national states. Only some of the political leadership in the State of Israel is unwilling to say the words "two national states," or was unwilling to say them back then. And we did not fully utilize our ability to convince first the United States and then the entire world that we want to go with this principle and fulfill it, but there are some interests we have to protect along the way. In contrast, when I said that the principle is two national states; I'm for it; Israel will do this.

The meaning of two national states is that Israel is the national home for the Jewish people and the sanctuary given to all Jewish refugees who arrived from Europe and the Arab states, and likewise, the future Palestinian state is the complete and full national solution for the entire Palestinian people, including the refugees who are today being held as bargaining chips in Arab countries.

This is the meaning of your vision, of President Bush's vision, of two national states. So suddenly you can see how you can recruit the world, for the sake of interests that I consider to be international, but in any case are certainly Israeli interests. The outcome was given in a letter from President Bush to Israel, but not only there, and it is a process where we go along, saying, "Yes, Israel wants to get there." Israel is not the uncooperative phenomenon it used to be, but we have points on which we cannot compromise or points that represent your interests as well, because without them there will be no end to the conflict. Then we can recruit the world.

Just to dispel all doubt, the national solution for the members of the entire Palestinian people includes the refugees. The attitude toward the Arab citizens of Israel is that they can certainly remain Israeli citizens with equal rights. Israel is at its very core a democratic state, a democracy with all the ensuing obligations. We are undergoing this process in order to uphold the Jewish and democratic values of the State of Israel. The national solution in another place means that the idea of a homeland has been fulfilled, but the Palestinians who are citizens of Israel are naturally welcome to remain here as citizens with equal rights, while their nationalistic aspirations are expressed elsewhere. And that is the only way we can really achieve it – if we end the conflict; otherwise we remain in an unresolved conflict.

This open conflict is no longer just contrary to Israel's interests; it is contrary to the entire world's interests. If we work correctly, we can enlist the world as well. It won't work, by the way, if you say "no." When you enter the room and start the conversation with "it won't happen" and "Israel will not give in," you lose your audience in 20 seconds flat. If Israel only knows how to say no to the right of return without yes to a Palestinian state, we've lost the case. That's one example.

A second example, UNSC Resolution 1701. Israel, in a war situation, worked with the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution to change the reality in southern Lebanon, to enable Israel to leave and, for the first time with Israeli agreement, to bring international forces to the area. We worked towards an outcome that would not only make it possible for us to exit, not only for there to be a cease-fire – which is usually the dream and it's understandable considering the situation in the region was starting to deteriorate – but also to create something that hadn't been there before. This can only be done if you know how to identify the joint interests at the time: Israel's interests along with those of the Siniora government and of the international community.

Iran is another example. Israel managed to turn, and rightly so, the Iranian subject into an international problem. Israel is a partner in the processes but the sanctions were imposed by the entire world. They're not enough; they should be made more severe, but the process

is an international one.

The last example is from this week. Resolution 1850 that was passed by the UN Security Council represents the interests of Israel and I would say of the international community. We need to recall that the Security Council is usually a place we try to avoid lest they see us and happen to pass a resolution related to us. When you hear the words Security Council, someone immediately calls the Americans to say "please veto it" before we even hear what the subject is. And this week a resolution was passed that precisely represents the State of Israel's interests. It also represents the interests of the pragmatic elements in the Palestinian Authority, because we managed to identify the common interest.

For the first time there is a resolution that does not go into contents or suggest to us or force us into content of how to end the conflict with the Palestinians, but accepts the principles we set with the moderate Palestinian elements. The negotiations are bilateral; stay out of it. The Security Council accepts this principle and supports the bilateral negotiations without intervening in their contents. The negotiations are secret; we will not come from time to time to tell you what's going on there. Not until it's all done, and nothing is done. If we haven't finished, don't come demanding parts or agreeing to part of it, because we understand and the pragmatic Palestinian elements understand and the whole world understands that in the end there needs to be a deal here which is comprehensive. Only if it's the kind that expresses the interests of both sides will it be possible to sign it. And if someone tries to extract part of it and create a solution out of only that, we won't agree and it wouldn't work anyway.

That was the first time it was said that the contents need to represent the interests of both parties. In fact, we have agreements on what Israel discussed with Abu Ala in the closed room, what Abu Mazen and I said about the Quartet in Sharm el Sheikh a couple of months ago, and the whole world heard that we are speaking the same language. Almost the exact same words. They understand that this is in the common interest of Israel and pragmatic Palestinian elements. They can let us continue doing it our way. And instead of the world imposing things on us, we created a world that supports us. Instead of the world forcing us to take action against our interests, we enlisted the world to support our interests.

Two more resolutions were passed yesterday as part of 1850. The Security Council has determined that recognizing a Palestinian government depends on accepting the Quartet's three conditions. The UN Security Council says that recognition of the Palestinian government depends on recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and terror, and honoring of previous agreements. Does this serve Israel's interests? Of course it does. Does it serve only Israel's interests? No. It serves the interests of all the moderate elements in the region, all those fearfully watching how Hamas is taking over the Gaza strip, all those who do not wish to see such elements in their home, taking advantage of democratic or other processes in order to take control. And when we identify the common interests then the whole world is with us on the same page. And the way to do it is not by standing in the corner and yelling that they're terrorist organizations and you should support us, but by saying that it's a common interest.

For the first time, the United Nations Security Council, with this resolution, is adopting the Israeli position that is somewhat different than what was presented in the Arab League's plan, and I'll say a couple of words about that. Because the Arab Initiative speaks of the need to reach a comprehensive arrangement in the Middle East, and at the end of the process the Arab world says, "If you reach a total peace, we will come and normalize relations with you."

Throughout all the recent years I have been telling the Arab world, those whom I meet – and I meet those who have relations with us as well as with those with whom we don't have diplomatic relations – I say, "Look, we want to make peace with our neighbors and with the Palestinians for the sake of peace. We are not doing it for you to come later. Don't wait for the end, come now to support the moderate elements here in the region, so in your countries they'll also see that whoever handles things right receives support from you, and the citizens of Israel will also see that when Israel takes a proper step even when the pragmatic other side is weak, even when we have our justifiable frustrations with terror, and

even when Gaza is controlled by Hamas, there is some kind of gain to this process coming from the Arab side." And so the Security Council has determined there's no need to wait for the end but that the states should already start moving towards cooperation between them and according to the progress of the process.

Gaza is still being controlled by Hamas, and Hamas is that extremist Islamic factor which does not represent the Palestinians' nationalist interests. Hamas is a threat to Israel and to the region. So no less important in this matter, ever since Hamas came to power, is our ability to receive the entire world along with the members of the Quartet, which says it will not recognize Hamas and not legitimize it as long as it fails to recognize the terms, and our ability to maintain this boycott for a few years already.

Now I remember the cynicism, which I can understand, in Israel when it accepted the Quartet's terms. They said a matter of days, weeks, a couple months, tops, and then it will be over, since things there can't be solved. The world will have to talk to them and embrace them. You'll stand and shout and they will stop listening. Yet it's a fact that the world is listening. And it's happening for one simple reason, not because I'm shouting louder, not because I'm explaining to them why terror is bad, not because they understand that you have to take forcible action against terror. But because we worked together on a strategy that relates not only to the here and now but to the long run. And we told them that the ability to bring about a change in the region is if we hit the extremists and act against them with force and if we enact a boycott and not give them legitimacy.

So far this is the part that all of Israel can relate to, but the other part required of the leadership in Israel is to take another step and to come and say that in order for this to work we are taking another step that represents our interests – we are taking action to advance the process with the pragmatic elements. If anyone thinks that just saying that the threat comes from terror so we need to fight it, then the whole world will be with us, half an answer is wrong.

Our ability to enlist the world stems from Israel being the first to lead and initiate processes with the Palestinians, creating a prospect first of all for Israel's own people but also for the Palestinians and the international community. Together we can work with that strategy which is based on initiative, and the entire world shares with us, in advancing processes with the moderate elements and continuing the war and boycott against the extreme elements.

So Israel needs to work with the new administration with the understanding, first of all that the new American administration, before it comes here, is going to tackle the complex economic problems that it needs to provide a response to. Understanding that the administration will rightfully expect Israel to be a partner and not to need to start persuading in order get the processes moving. And in this context, there's no doubt that stagnating, standing in the corner, and not wanting to move things along first of all does not serve Israel's interests. They have a price. They strengthen those radical elements; they will not let us fight them in the future, and will cause us to lose our main asset of recent years, which is the international understanding that Israel is taking the initiative, Israel is a partner, and Israel's interests are identical to the international community's interests. Israel is no longer the country that stands still, refuses to budge, and waits for processes to be imposed on it.

The change that has taken place is dramatic, and we must not lose it. I, of course, intend to continue acting accordingly and to enlist the world against all the threats we are facing, and they do exist. I believe that this approach is much better than feeling righteous but oh so alone. Thank you very much.