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Amos Yadlin: The intelligence picture

By Yaakov Lappin

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Maj.-Gen. (ret.) Yadlin, former military intelligence chief speaks to the 'Post' about his career in the IDF.

Yaakov Lappin Maj.-Gen. (ret.) **Amos Yadlin**, former military intelligence chief, was one of eight Israeli fighter jet pilots to strike Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981. Before that, he took part in intense air battles against enemy forces in the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

He was one of the first Israelis to pilot an F-16 warplane in the early 1980s, before becoming the commander of a number of Israel Air Force (IAF) squadrons.

Throughout the 1990s, Yadlin commanded a number of air bases. In 2004, he was appointed IDF attaché to Washington. Two years later, he became the first member of the IAF to be appointed as head of military intelligence, a post he served until 2010.

Today, Yadlin is director of the prestigious **Institute for National Security Studies** at Tel Aviv University.

In regard to his evaluation of Iran¹s nuclear program, Yadlin says, "Iran has all the capabilities it needs to decide to create a nuclear weapon. The day of the decision could be tonight, when they might choose to break out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and enrich uranium to 93-95 percent, from 20%." Enriching uranium to weapons-grade material - beyond the 90% threshold - is, surprisingly, the easiest part of the process, Yadlin points out. "It's very simple to do. The hardest part is to enrich uranium to the 0.7-3.5% level," he says. In other words, Iran mastered the most difficult aspect of nuclear weapons production a while ago.

If Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei decides to go all the way now, it would take Iran between four to eight months to possess a working nuclear weapon, Yadlin estimates. If Iran uses its new generation centrifuges, which enrich uranium faster, it could take as little as six months.

Yadlin has objected to the idea of Israel taking a lead in issuing military threats

against Iran, describing such a policy as counterproductive. Quietly, Israel should prepare a military option and put it on the table as a last choice, he says. "But we have to have other options and give them a chance," he adds.

Washington and Jerusalem should be fully coordinated on the Iranian threat, but the cooperation shouldn¹t end there, Yadlin urges. "We're facing many of the same threats - al-Qaida, Iranian nukes. We are exactly on the same side," he says.

With the US and Israel sharing the values of democracy, human rights and freedom of speech, there is every reason to believe that political differences between US President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu can be overcome, says Yadlin.

The US isn't about to shift away from the Middle East, despite earlier signals that it was seeking to move its military focus from the area and concentrate on the Pacific arena, where China's influence is steadily rising. Yadlin feels that the shift to the Pacific theater came too soon.

"The US can't leave the Middle East in a flash. It has too many interests here. The price of energy is still influenced by the Middle East," he notes.

Turning his attention to the Palestinian arena, Yadlin says the time has come to think outside the box and for Israel to define its own borders in the face of continued Palestinian refusal to formally accept a two-state solution.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has made a strategic decision to enter a reconciliation process with Hamas, a decision that should not be dismissed by observers, Yadlin warns.

On the international front, Abbas is bypassing Israel and trying to use the United Nations as a substitute for direct peace negotiations, he adds. "The strategy of the Palestinians is not to reach negotiations but to get concessions from Israel via the international community," Yadlin says.

Israel is absorbing significant damage to its international standing from the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians, Yadlin argues. In order to maintain its status as a Jewish and democratic state, it is time for Israel to think about how it can define its eastern border with the West Bank without being dependent on the Palestinians.

"My basic claim is that the Palestinians don't want a two-state solution. On the other hand, we can¹t condition our [national] character, as a Jewish democratic, secure, legitimate state, on the Palestinians," he says.

His solution: To renew the peace process with the PA but to plan for the likely

possibility that an Israeli two-state offer will once again be rejected.

"I think that if it fails, we will have to shape our border alone, and we will have to take hold of our fate," says Yadlin. That entails a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Areas A and B in the West Bank, where most Palestinians live.

Unlike the disengagement from Gaza, which was total and left open a weapons smuggling artery in the form of the Philadelphi Corridor, this unilateral disengagement would leave the Jordan Valley in Israeli control to prevent rockets and arms from pouring into the West Bank.

Some areas, mainly where settlements exist, would also remain mostly under Israeli control as a bargaining chip, until such time as the Palestinian Authority came to the negotiating table with serious intentions to conclude a peace deal.

"The bottom line is that we could tell our friends, 'Look, we withdrew from 85% of the West Bank, and we've made a two-state solution offer," says Yadlin. "This withdrawal is offering the reality of two states." As for his view on the geostrategic storm in the Arab world, Yadlin says that the slaughter in Syria, where some 70,000 people are estimated to have been killed in the civil war, meant that the world has not learned its lessons after the Rwanda genocide of 1994.

"The world didn't meet its obligations. If the world had intervened [in Syria] two years ago, 50,000 people would still be alive," he says.

Looking at the Syrian chaos from Israel's point of view, he says, "It's not necessarily negative. Beyond the humanitarian catastrophe, the axis of Hezbollah, Iran and Syria - an axis that will not allow any peace deal - is weakening." Powerful Sunni states, mainly Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, are emerging as new power brokers in the region, though it remains far from certain that they will work together.

"There's no love lost between the Muslim Brotherhood [in Egypt] and Saudi Arabia - [Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip] Erdogan is not loved in Egypt. I'm not sure there will be an active Sunni pillar. We¹re a long way from that," says Yadlin.

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