

Opportunities and risks for Israel.
Op-Ed by Former PM and Min. of Defense
of Israel

Back in the early 50's our first PM David Ben Gurion was asked by a visiting Bar Mitzvah kid how comes that he, rather than any other leader during the last 2000 years re established the State of Israel. BG replied that in ancient times people were born with a sixth sense, one for seizing opportunities. along history most of us lost it. I, BG added, did not. I've seen an opportunity and I seized it. He didn't mentioned the horrors or the sacrifice of the 48' war. PM Menachem Begin, several years after the bitter 73' war made the daring peace with Egypt. PM Itzhak Rabin, exactly 20yrs ago, signed the Peace treaty with Jordan and amidst a wave of terror, facing a huge internal rejection led the first steps towards a settlement with the Palestinians. He was assassinated by a Jewish terrorist. They

all faced the risks, yet seized the opportunity. That's statesmanship and leadership. This is the defining element of greatness.

During the last three years we're living through a geo political earthquake. The world order which existed since the demise of the Ottoman Empire following WW I is collapsing. The Arab Spring turned into an Islamist Winter. Borders are erased. Old tribal and sectarian bloody disputes awakened. In a sort of a perfect storm Israel finds itself all around its borders at the focal point of a clash of civilizations combined with a clash within Islam between fanatic terror and modernism, Suna and Shia, while all the legacy threats: Iran, Assad in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza are all alive and kicking.

So, whoever says we have to be open eyed and ready to strongly respond to any threat to our security and citizenry is right. We've just shown in Gaza we know how

to do it.

But the opportunities are there as well. Greatest opportunity, which might occur once in a generation, is to reshape our relationships with the Arab Moderates based on our common interests vis a vis Extremism, Terror and Iran. Achieving it could open the gate to a more peaceful Middle East based on cooperation and synergies rather than blood and revenge. No way to achieve it without sincerely trying to move forward with the Palestinians. And it won't happen if we will sit idly waiting.

A precondition to seize such an opportunity is a mighty, sober, self confident Israel, in strong alliance with the US. An Israel which can deter or defeat any combination of regional powers, yet an Israel who is ready to contemplate and consider a modified Saudi or Arab League Plan as a basis for negotiations.

The unique relationship we have developed with the US over the last 45yrs

based on common values ,mutual respect and shared interests is a cornerstone of our strength, world posture and future. It is also a crucial building block of any regional peace and cooperation strategy. Allowing IL/US relations be hurt is a grave mistake with far reaching damaging consequences.

As the Minister of Defense of Israel I've met more than once with President Obama , as well as with President Bush before then, reiterating with both Presidents that the US is our best friend and ally, but Israel is a Sovereign and when we will face decisions where in our judgment the security and the future of Israel and the Jewish people are at stake we will make the decisions on our own. We cannot and will not, I added, delegate the responsibility for such decisions unto the hands of even our best friends , which are you. We expect you to respect it even when we have different views. American Presidents respected it. We have at the

same token, to respect the US right to have their positions on issues which are crucial for them and their expectation that Israel will respect it.

furthermore, this equation is not fully symmetric. It is the US which will provide us with the new F-35s and ensures the Qualitative Edge of the IDF vis a vis any combination of neighbors. It is the US who significantly financing both IronDome, Arrow and David's Sling missile defense systems. It is the US who deployed in Israel an X-band radar and committed itself to deploy US soldiers, missiles and vessels to defend Israel in a case of a missile attack from Iran.

it is the US which supported us with \$3.0B a year for forty years by now and deployed American munitions and spare parts worth hundreds of Millions to ensure our war time supplies. It is the US who rushes to the UN Security Council or other world organizations to veto or block initiatives which might damage or

constrain Israel. We should never forget it.

The recent spurt of verbal exchanges is a worrying signal that something went wrong. It should be stopped and corrected. The sooner the better.

Netanyahu is not a coward. I've seen him as a young special forces officer under my command facing fire and direct risks to his life. A courageous soldier. That doesn't change. Other cheap words would have better not been used. But the same applies to President Obama and Secretary Kerry. they are not enemies of Israel. they are Good Friends. Kerry has a decades long record of support for Israel. Since he became Secretary of State he invested his time energy and prestige trying to help Israel and the Palestinians to bridge disputes and reach a breakthrough. It did not work but it was a noble effort which justify thanks rather than curses. We are worried of the outcome of the P5+1 negotiations with Iran and we think that the chemical

weapons in Syria should have better been attacked. But President Obama continues and strengthens a legacy of Presidential support for Israel. He is directly behind around \$1.0B that we've got for IronDome, a system which enabled us to win the last contest in Gaza and he allowed and promoted an unprecedented intimate cooperation between our respective defense and intelligence communities. Israel has a vital interest in resuming healthy trust, mutual respect and working relationship with both.

But back to basics. The most profound internal debate inside Israel in regard to the future is about the relationship between Israel's security needs and the viability of the "two states solution". We all agree that we are living in a tough, merciless and highly unpredictable neighborhood. even more so recently. So it is clear that our security needs are of the highest priority and we should build certain "safety margins" into any future

security planning. But the Israeli Right is going further and under several guises argues that the security needs of Israel and what we've learnt from rockets and tunnels in Gaza and the ISIS operations in Syria and Iraq renders any viable, demilitarized independent, Palestinian State - impossible. In other words, the "lesson" of recent years according to our Right is that Israel's Security and the "two states solution" are incompatible. That's a fallacious conclusion, a distortion of basic truths and realities at the service of narrow political interests.

I've served a lifetime career, fighting and defending my country's security. Most of the time in uniform. Based on this experience, I confidently conclude, and it is a professional rather than political answer, that if and when a Palestinian demilitarized independent State will be established side by side with Israel behind borders which will consist of a solid

Jewish majority for generations to come and will include the major "Settlement Blocks" accompanied by mutually agreed swaps and an Israeli long term military presence along the River Jordan - the IDF and the Security Services will know how to defend Israel. better rather than worse than now. Moreover, I'm confident that if we will bring together all former Israeli Chiefs of Staff, all former Commanders of the Central Command(responsible for Judea and Samaria) and all former Heads of Intelligence ,SecServices and Mossad, an extremely vast majority of them will agree with me on this issue. True,it might take time, frustrations and setbacks. It might have to go through prolonged periods of interim arrangements. but the IDF is much superior to any conceivable rival and will be able to defend Israel under all those circumstances.

the Right argument is convoluted. the opposite is true. The real big threat to the Zionist Project is not the "two state

solution” but rather the “one state solution” which will lead inevitably to either a non Jewish or a non democratic, potentially ever bleeding State. Still, this is the vision the Israeli extreme Right shares unknowingly with the Hamas (and with all due differences with the lunatic, Post Zionist fringes of the Israeli Left).

In order to seize the opportunity for regional peace and cooperation arrangements and in order to block the deterioration towards “one state solution” action, tenacity and decisiveness will be essential. politics of survival, anxiety and pessimism will not do.

we are facing a moment of truth. a time for daring decisions. The essence of Zionism, its raison d'être had always been to take our fate in our hands. make decisions and follow them with actions, rather than being dragged by events and decisions of others and paying the price for it.

our legendary Foreign Minister Abba Eban famously said that the Palestinians had

never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Lets not fall into the same trap.