

MIDDLE EAST UPDATE:  
PEACE PROSPECTS AND THE DANGER OF WAR

by Yitzhak Rabin

EDWIN J. FEULNER, JR.: Welcome to The Heritage Foundation. I am Ed Feulner, President of Heritage. I am especially pleased to welcome our distinguished speaker, Israel's Defense Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. I am honored that Minister Rabin chose to deliver his address at The Heritage Foundation, because I am sure that he knows that Israel's most reliable friends in America are the conservatives. It is conservatives who recognize Israel's security and peace in the Middle East require a militarily strong United States. It is conservatives who recognize--and applaud--that Israel sometimes has to take tough, unpleasant action to defend itself. It is conservatives who have rallied to the defense of the Jewish community in Nicaragua. Today, I believe, Israel's real friends are the conservatives.

For its part, Israel has proved itself to be not only America's best ally in the Middle East; it has proved itself to be America's only reliable ally in the Middle East and, frankly, one of our most reliable friends in the world. For example, Israel has consistently backed the United States in the United Nations with a record of support for our joint interests unmatched by any other nation, even our good friends in Great Britain.

In contrast to some American liberals who question Israel's every move and criticize it when it strikes back against terrorist attacks, conservatives see Israel as the best hope for both Western interests and Western values in the Middle East. And Yitzhak Rabin, a truly great Israeli leader, exemplifies those battling for our common heritage in one of the most important and most dangerous regions in the world.

He has served in the Israeli government for more than 30 years. He began his career as a member of the elite Palmach troops in 1941. He went on to hold many positions of command in the Israeli Army, including Commander-in-Chief during the 1967 Six Day War. He served as Israel's Ambassador to the United States from 1968 to 1973. And in 1974 he became Prime Minister of his country serving in that

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Yitzhak Rabin is the Defense Minister of Israel.

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position until 1977. In 1984, he was named Minister of Defense, a position he currently holds. Unlike some other Western leaders, Yitzhak Rabin--a man of the West himself--has not suffered any lack of nerve in the face of hostile powers. As a soldier, a statesman, and diplomat, this intelligent and tough leader exemplifies the kind of friend of freedom American needs in the world today.

His topic will be: "Middle East Update: Peace Prospects and the Danger of War."

The Heritage Foundation is honored to welcome you, Mr. Minister.

YITZHAK RABIN: Dr. Feulner, ladies and gentlemen, when I chose the title of my talk today, I did not know how correct it would be this week. This week we have witnessed the threat of war, the dangers of terror, and the hopes for peace. Last weekend, two atrocities carried out by terrorists at Karachi and Istanbul and today the summit meeting between the President of Egypt and the Prime Minister of Israel. Sometimes you ask yourselves how could it happen that at the same time, in the same region two totally contradictory events can take place. This is the Middle East that collectively carries with it a real opportunity for peace and tranquility but at the same time the horror of terror and the threat of war.

When I try to look at the prospects of peace--and I speak as an Israeli--I believe that at present we see the fruit of a strategy that was agreed on by Egypt, Israel, and the United States. It was agreed on in 1974 in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War--the 1972 war--when the United States, Egypt, and Israel decided together (we did not speak then with the Egyptians; it was done through the United States) that first the United States, as a superpower, will lead the peace process, neutralizing as nicely as possible the Soviet Union. Second, the United States will look at Egypt and Israel as the two cornerstones for the structure of peace in the region. And third, we all will try to move ahead with the peace process, even gradually, wherever and whenever it would be possible.

As a result of this strategy, first we had the disengagement agreement with Egypt in January 1974. We had, in September 1975, the Sinai II agreement as you call it or what we call the Interim Agreement. In 1978 the Camp David Accords; in 1979 the Peace Treaty and the only peace that has been achieved between an Arab state and Israel. And today another page, if not another chapter, in the strengthening of the peace between Egypt and Israel without bringing in the Soviet Union to play any role. I believe that Israel's peace policy should focus first and foremost in strengthening the peace between the key Arab country--Egypt--and Israel. And what has been done and practically signed yesterday is another step in strengthening the peace that was achieved as a result of the strategy that I have described.

Can we expand the peace process beyond the peace between Egypt and Israel? To achieve peace, we need a reconciliation on the part of an Arab country or an Arab leader with Israel's existence as a Jewish viable state. Second, this Arab country--this Arab leader--should be closer to the Western world, to the United States, than to the Soviet Union. I am not aware of an Arab country with close affiliation with the Soviet Union that really desires peace with Israel. President Sadat would not have reached the decision to go to Jerusalem to make peace with Israel before he made the decision that he should switch from being the key Arab country for Soviet policy in the region and become closer to the United States.

Today, the only practical candidate with which we can negotiate peace among neighboring Arab countries is Jordan. Syria is the most hostile Arab country towards Israel. Lebanon does not exist as an independent Arab state. But under the present circumstances, we are fully aware that Jordan cannot go it alone because of threats of terror and threats of radical Arab countries on the outside and cowardness of oil Arab countries that do not dare to support moderate Arab countries. Jordan's position at the present is that without a fully fledged international conference under the auspices of the United Nations where the Soviet Union will play an equal role today to the one that the United States might play--co-chairmanship of the peace conference--Jordan cannot enter into any meaningful peace talks with Israel.

Israel always believed that bringing in the Soviets to be involved in the peace process will produce the opposite to peace. I do not believe that the Soviet Union is interested in peace but on its own terms which will serve its purpose, its interest vis-a-vis Israel and vis-a-vis the United States. We find ourselves in the last year being attacked: "Why do you oppose international peace conference?" By the Arab countries, by the moderate Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and by some circles in the United States. We have made it clear. Even if there will be an international peace conference, Israel will not attend unless the Soviet Union does one of the following: resumes diplomatic relations with Israel, and what might be even more important for us, opens the gates of the Soviet Union to free emigration of members of the Jewish community there that will choose to do so.

Without the Soviet Union meeting one of these two conditions we cannot see any international forum in which the Soviet Union is included and in which peace is discussed. Unfortunately, we are the only ones that put conditions to any participation of the Soviet Union in any peace process in whatever forum that it will take place. Even the United States has not placed any conditions to the participation of the Soviet Union.

I believe, therefore, realistically under the present circumstances, we should try to do whatever can be done in

strengthening the peace with Egypt. I do not see, unfortunately, a possible breakthrough that will bring about immediate peace negotiations between Jordan, Palestinians, and Israel. But at the same time, I believe that there is understanding--not agreement--between Jordan and Israel to lay the groundwork that in the long run will facilitate peace negotiations between our two countries.

It is for us to say together, Jordan on its part, Israel on its part, that fighting PLO terrorism that is the main obstacle to peace. We can do it by encouraging moderate Palestinian leaders in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to gain force, to take over the municipalities, business and to fight the terror organization leaders and activists. I believe that most of the Palestinians in their heart prefer not to see Israeli occupation, but at the same time they oppose terrorism and would like to see a peaceful solution to the complex of problems in which Jordan, Palestinians and Israel are involved.

But look what has happened just in the last eight months. One of the most important Palestinian young leaders became mayor of Nablus, the largest city in the West Bank. He focused only on the further interest of his population--120,000--and did not want to be involved in any political problem. He wanted only to serve the people there. He improved their standard of living, education, quality of life. He was assassinated because he represented to the terror organization a real potential threat of an authentic leader that cares about the people. Look what happened five weeks ago, to the former mayor of Gaza. No one can consider him to be a friend of Israel. He appeared on the Jordanian television after meeting with Jordanian leaders and said, "The main purpose of all the Palestinians is to get rid of the Israeli occupation of our territory. We would like to solve it by the only way that it can be solved. Not by terror, by political negotiations. They have to do this in cooperation with Jordan. The PLO policy is not helpful to achieve what we the Palestinians who reside in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would like to achieve." He did not speak in favor of Israel. He spoke realistically. As a member of a group whose fate for 38 years had been to be a football in the hands and the legs of all the Arab countries leaders. And what happened? Two days after his appearance on the Jordanian television, a bomb was put and exploded in his packing plant in Gaza--a warning by the terror organization--"Beware. Your fate might be the fate of the mayor of Nablus."

Terror has become the main obstacle to peace; the main obstacle the bring about real leadership of the Palestinians who are ready to solve the problem by peaceful means. And without coping with this problem I do not see any prospect of peace eastward of Israel. Let's hope that Jordan, after the rift between King Hussein and Arafat closed the offices of the PLO, will take measures against these leaders of terror of region and we will do our part to reduce terrorism. We will cooperate indirectly also in creating better

conditions for moderate Palestinians to participate more actively in running their own life in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

I believe this will be the way to lay the groundwork that in a year or two years will produce results that will lead towards peace.

One or two positive developments: the agreement about Tabah, the summit meeting, the resident ambassador of Egypt's return to Israel, the long-term move by Jordan and Israel independently in the direction that I described. There is no doubt in my mind that the terror organizations and that the countries that back them--Libya, Syria, Iran--must increase their efforts to bring about terror to undermine these positive developments and I am not sure that what we witnessed in the last weekend is not the beginning. The United States took daring and courageous action in its raid against Libya: to go to the roots of terrorism, countries that encourage, support, and carry out terror acts. Let's face it, the impact was great, but it starts to fade away.

Syria was not yet touched. Nor was Iran. They cannot tolerate these two positive developments. Israel is prepared, but I believe it should be said here, "Beware." I would not be surprised if efforts will be made to increase terrorism, especially the kind of terrorism that was carried out in the last weekend. Terror against innocent people--really innocent. What had the passengers of Pan American Flight 73 to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict? What had the old members of the Jewish community in Istanbul praying on the Sabbath on Saturday to with the Arab-Israeli conflict? It is easy to these animal terrorists to attack easy targets--innocent people. They would not dare attacked Israeli soldiers. They would not dare attack a defended target. They go after the easiest targets--innocent people.

I believe that we have--the United States, Israel, European countries--to make all the preparations, to take all the precautions not to make the terror groups' goals easy to be achieved. Allow me to say a Pan American plane can be hijacked, but no Israeli El Al airplane can be hijacked. It might be attacked. There might an attack at Vienna, or Rome, or Madrid, or London, but no El Al can be hijacked. We understand that we are at war and therefore we have to be prepared to cope with it.

We would not hesitate to intercept in international waters a ship that carried terrorists. We are not hesitating to intercept ships from Cyprus to Beirut if they carry arms, military equipment to terror organizations. I do not believe that there is an international law that allows terrorism and prevents fighting terrorism.

Therefore, on one hand, we have the opportunities to strengthen the peace between Israel and Egypt, to lay the groundwork later on, fighting terrorism, to develop peace negotiations between Jordan, Palestinian and Israel. At the same time, we have to be prepared to

meet the potential military threat from Syria but even more so, more immediately, terror acts that will be encouraged by Libya, Syria, maybe Iran, and all the terror organizations the main one of which is Mr. Arafat's PLO and its descendants. This is the problem: you cannot achieve positive moves without readiness to withstand threats and terror. And to withstand them effectively.

The Soviet Union's role is in encouraging the radical Arab countries. The amount of arms that the Soviet Union has shipped into Syria is really unbelievable. Syria gets quantitatively and qualitatively better armament, better military hardware, than any one of the communist countries in Europe. Whenever a new weapon is shipped out of the limits of the Soviet Union, it first ships to Syria then to Libya and only then to the so-called Socialist Soviet Republics. Unfortunately, the Soviet Union continues to play a negative role when it comes to the peace prospects, an unfortunate role in encouraging Arab countries that they are the source of helping terrorism in the region.

As an Israeli, no doubt as the Minister of Defense of Israel, we are determined, on the one hand, to explore every possibility to move ahead with the peace process, but at the same time to fight any terror anywhere and to be stronger now to deter any temptation to use force against us. We hope that we find understanding in the United States, understanding that has been translated to practical support of Israel the way that it has been done for so many years between our two countries and for which Israel is very thankful to the American people, to the various American Administrations, and to everybody who is here. Thank you very much.

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