



**Transcript of Lt. Gen. (res) Moshe (Bogie) Ya'alon
in conversation with Sir Malcolm Rifkind
Margaret Thatcher Conference on Security
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The video recording of this panel is available on the [CPS YouTube channel](#).

Malcolm Rifkind: Thank you very much indeed, ladies and gentlemen. It's perhaps very natural that we should move on from a discussion which indeed included many important issues involving the Middle East and to now get a perspective from one of the most important countries of the region, namely the state of Israel. This is an interesting year to look at Israel as a state and the developments in the region because it's the 50th anniversary, of course, of the Six Day war. 50 years, half a century, have passed since Israel had that remarkable military victory and, of course, that led to the occupation not just of the west bank of Gaza, but, for a period of time, of Sinai and, of course, the Golan Heights.

During those 50 years, it's not as if nothing has happened. There've been huge developments, varying initiatives both by Israel and its Arab neighbours. One thinks of the Oslo process and all that flowed from that. The fundamental issue of Israel's relationship with its Palestinian neighbours has, of course, not yet been resolved, and some are very pessimistic about that. I heard recently that an Israeli and a Palestinian had jointly been to visit the Almighty, and when they were in the presence of God they said, "We are an Israeli and a Palestinian. We've come together to ask you will there ever be peace and a resolution of the difficulties between Israelis and Palestinians?"

God, apparently, thought for a moment and replied, "Yes, of course there will. I have not the slightest doubt about it, but it won't be in my time." Easy to be pessimistic, but then it's an Israeli remark I think, General Ya'alon, that miracles take longer, but they do happen. We are very privileged this afternoon to have as a guest of the conference one of the most senior persons currently involved in the Israeli political scene. A man who by his background and his career encompasses the history of Israel, because of course, most of his career was in the Israeli defence force. He served during the Yom Kippur war and in various other military roles and he rose to the highest rank in Israel as Chief of the Israeli Defence staff in 2002.

Then on leaving the Israeli defence force, ceasing to be a full-time general, like so many generals ... one of the most remarkable things is the soldier-citizen relationship of the military and of the civilian world in Israeli, consistent with his democratic nature ... he moved into the political world where he's had an equally distinguished career. He has served as Minister of Defence from 2013 to 2016 and as Vice Prime Minister. Of course, he has more recently indicated that he may be contemplating forming his own political movement with a view to the next Israeli election. We all know what can happen in all



sorts of countries, not just France, when individuals form their own political movements and capture the public imagination.

Now, in the conversation we're having, and we've only got half an hour, I just want to begin by referring to a remark you made, General Ya'alon. Incidentally, we were at a conference together in Jerusalem just last week, so we're really just carrying on the conversation we had then. When you ceased to be Minister of Defence, you actually resigned. You resigned from Mr. Netanyahu's government.

When you resigned you said, and I will quote your words at that time, you said that there had been difficult disagreements on moral and professional matters with Prime Minister Netanyahu, and you warned that extreme and dangerous elements have taken over Israeli and the Likud party. Now that was just last year, and, of course, that government remains in power. Could you share with us your thoughts as to why you felt at that time, presumably still, that extreme and dangerous elements had taken over Israel?

Moshe Ya'alon:

Thank you, Malcolm, for the introduction. Thanks to the Centre for Policy Studies to allow me to be here. Hopefully next year I'll be sitting with Arabic representatives and not alone. I believe it is possible and I will elaborate about it. I would like to start off not with our internal challenges, but about the region, which as continuation to the former session the title of the session was Ideology and Fragmentation in the Middle East. In retrospect, mentioning 50 years anniversary for Six Day War, I believe that the morning of the 5th of June, 1967, was a peak of certain ideologies dominating the Middle East, like Nasserism, Baathism, pan-Arabism.

The idea, the ability to mobilise an Arab coalition against Israel at its peak on the morning of the Six Day War. Since then, we witness a decline, a decline in this kind of ideologies, which have been replaced by new ideologies, mainly radical Islamic ideologies. In a way that the term the Israeli conflict is irrelevant for meanwhile. Nowadays, because of the development in the region, Israel enjoys unique strategic option. As a result of the development in which the Middle East of today is dominated by these radical Islamic ideologies which were not mentioned and emphasised the way that, I believe, it should've been done in the former session.

First of all, the Iranian Shia ideology. The Iranian Shia aspiration for hegemony in the region. In a way, quite successful as Prince Turki Al Faisal mentioned. They try to have now a ground corridor, which is called in the region the Shia-Christian, from Tehran via Baghdad, which is dominated by Shia government, Damascus, whose Alawite Regime, supported by the Iran Regime, Beirut, Lebanon, vis a vis Hezbollah. As you mentioned, Lebanon has been abducted by Iran. The decision to wage a war against Israel is not going to be taken in Beirut. It's going to be made by the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, in Tehran. The Lebanese government is irrelevant. Even Hassan Nasrallah is not the one who's going to take the decision.



I believe that this threat is not just against the state of Israel. It is against our neighbouring countries, like Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, North African countries. Then we have the jihadist from the Sunni camp, on top of them ISIS, but also Al-Qaida followers with the differences between them, but with the idea to impose Islamic caliphate their way. First of all, in the region, and then all over the globe, claiming for hegemony, as well, their way of Islam. They are now in conflict with many parties in the region. I believe that ISIS is going to be defeated on the ground, whether it is in Syria or in Iraq. It's a long way regarding ISIS in Libya. There is still a conflict in Sinai between the Egyptian regime and ISIS elements. Generally speaking, the West will have to deal with it in a very long period of time. Terrorists in Europe, terrorists in other Western countries. This is the Sunni jihadist in the region.

The third radical Islamic movement, which claiming for hegemony in the region and beyond, is a member of NATO, Turkey. Erdoğan is the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East. What we witnessed is a rogue behaviour of Turkey led by Erdoğan in a way that he supports Muslim Brotherhood elements, whether it is Hamas in the Palestinian Arena, Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, facilitating other Muslim Brotherhood elements and behaving in contradictory interests to Western interests like by facilitating ISIS with the idea that ISIS element from Syria or Iraq will kill the Kurds, or allowing what I consider as deliberate Islamisation of Europe by pushing illegal immigrants, not just refugees, to change the demography of Europe.

This is Erdoğan. The case those three radical Islamic elements has been successful in the last couple of years is a result of US weakness. The US administration decisions, the former administration decision, not to be proactive or even to disengage from the Middle East, later on coming back to fight ISIS, but considering Iran as part of the solution and not the main problem, although Iran is a main generator and instigator for instability. Not just by calling to wipe Israel off the map of the earth. Saudi Arabia is suffering from it, undermining the kingdom. Facilitating the Houthis is proxy in Yemen, of course, against Saudi Arabian interests. Bahrain, undermining the regime over there.

This vacuum, actually, because of the American weakness has been exploited by these elements to include, in a way, the Russian intervention. Russia is not enemy, but in many cases we are not on the same page. Of course, United States not on the same page with Russia. That was the weakness. Nowadays, it might be a change. We witness a change in the US policy, just the launching of 59 Tomahawks against Syrian targets as response to the Bashar al-Assad use of chemical weapons against its civilians. It's one example. Another example is what Prince Turki Al Faisal, mentioned, the corridor which Iranians with Sh'ia militia is trying to create in Syria from Damascus to Iraq.



Now, we witnessed US air strikes again, US elements on the ground, even by intercepting Syrian aircraft, intercepting Iranian unmanned air vehicle, to the point that there is a conflict, at least diplomatic one, not yet on the ground, between the United States and Russia. I'm mentioning it because for the region, this kind of change is a great relief. You can see it in Cairo. You can see it in Riyadh, in Panama, and even in Jerusalem. For us, it's a great relief. Let's wait and see what will come out of it, whether it is a grand strategy or just reactions to what is going on, on the ground. This is actually the main challenge for Middle Eastern parties.

The Middle East is going to suffer from chronic instability for a very, very long period of time. I don't see solution or solutions and my recommendation as we did, as we do in Israel, we have to manage this conflict in the way of this situation omitting these challenges in a way that our interests are going to be enhanced. In this regard, Israel found itself with the Sunni Arab regimes in the region. On the same boat, I could replace Prince Turki Al Faisal talking about Iran, talking about Yemen, talking about Lebanon.

We are on the same boat. Iran is our main enemy. For the Sunni regimes, it's about the Shia-Sunni conflict or Persian-Arab conflict, another matter. As they consider, now, the radical Islamic Sunni jihadist as enemy, although part of them facilitated them in order to be used as proxies, against the Shias in Syria, in Iraq and other places, common enemy. Muslim Brotherhood to include Turkey as its new Ottoman aspirations for dominance in religion, for them it is a threat. In this regard, this is a new Middle East in which we can find room for cooperation with our neighbouring countries to exclude ... Probably, Malcolm, you will ask me about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Going back to your question regarding the situation in Israel, I believe in the Israeli democracy. I do believe in our vibrant democracy, but we have some bad news. Netanyahu is the third Prime Minister which is now investigated by the police and suspected for corruption, the third one. Now, he's still unfortunately in gaol, Prime Minister Olmert. This is the bad news. The good news, that we have a vibrant democracy, law enforcement authorities which do not allow this kind of behaviour. That's why our prime ministers also are suspicious in corruption; they have to go through the process like any civilian.

I'm proud of the process. I'm not proud of corruption, of course. Nevertheless, in the last couple of years there was a trend which has been manipulated by our Prime Minister in which I found myself on the other side, which led to extremism, generating hatred between sectors in Israel, not considering the rule of law, offending the media, offending the Supreme Court and so forth. In this case, I found myself on the other side to the point that I had to resign from the government.

Malcolm Rifkind:

Thank you very much indeed. I was wondering whether we'd get to the question I had asked you, and you have indeed come to it for which we are grateful. We've got relatively a short period of time. One of the questions that



is being asked and I think it's one that you are particularly suited to be asked to comment on, is regard to the question of will there ever be a two-state solution in Israel? Now, if I'm not mistaken, Bogie, at one stage, you supported the Oslo peace process, you were quite happy to be quoted as someone who believed in a two-state solution, but that you've since become disillusioned with that. You no longer think it's a practical proposition.

Can I ask you, there's obviously been increased interest, and it's reflected in the questions that have been sent in, as to whether a one-state solution is actually a practical proposition? What I'm ... It's really a two-part question, but a brief reply if you would so we can get at least one more question in, do you believe a one-state solution is a practical proposition for Israel? Would it involve equal rights for the Palestinians in that one-state solution? If you reject that, as well, is it really tenable to say after 50 years of occupation that the Palestinians must look forward to another 50 years of occupation without a state and without becoming full citizens of the territory, which is their homeland?

Moshe Ya'alon:

There are too many misconceptions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. First of all, to admit I supported Oslo. I sanctify human lives more than land, to the point that I realised, actually, we don't have a partner. For a real two states, for two peoples, I emphasise two peoples because the Palestine leadership, those who are considered moderates, claims that there's no Jewish people. I quote them, Judaism being a bigger religion; it's neither peoplehood nor nationality, so why should Jews deserve a state? And now Mahmoud Abbas, the moderate, not to compare to Hamas, is trying to hold back Balfour Declaration. This is a gap.

First of all, to understand the cause of the conflict is not what is called occupation since '67. The conflict is all them. We had fight for our independence in '48. We had to fight earlier Arab terrorism; we call it incident, the Great Arab Rebellion, Arab violence. Trying to reject or not to allow, to prevent the creation of the Jewish state. Unfortunately, this is the case still now. That was my awakening under late minister Rabin. I served as head of the intelligence in the peak of Oslo, when I realised actually, Arafat used Oslo as part of the fascist theory, fascist strategy. Let eliminate the state of Israel phase by phase, step by step. That's about the past.

Now what should be done? In one hand, there is no chance for final settlement. I'm very clear about it, I'm frustrated about it. There is no chance on the other hand, I don't want to rule the Palestinians. Actually, they enjoy political independence since Oslo. This is the great achievement of Oslo. They have their own parliament; they have their own government, president, municipalities. I don't want to run their political institute whatsoever. That's fine. They decided to be divided to two political entities. We have Hamastan in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Sovereignty in Judah and Samaria in the West Bank. We can manage even with Hamastan. You know I led protective



operations defence minister on summer 2014. Since August 2014, Hamas didn't dare to shoot a single bullet to our side.

There are certain elements in Gaza, Daesh elements, ISIS, Islamist, who are in a conflict with Hamas. Then they want to challenge Hamas. They provoke launches to our side, like it happened yesterday. In this case, we respond with our stick, again the launchers, ISIS in this case. Again Hamas is responsible, would implement it. Having said that even about the Gaza Strip, we disengage from the Gaza Strip. We are not moving. We are not deployed anymore there, whether soldiers or citizens. We are put with all the settlers in the Gaza Strip. What was the outcome? We shout about land for peace. We got land for thousands of rockets. This is the case. Even the Gaza Strip is dependent on us. We provide them with water, electricity. They're so dependent on the state of Israel. I don't see really, a viable entity both cases.

Malcolm Rifkind: Because of the limited time, could you comment on whether the increased speculation about a one-state solution is in your view, a viable option?

Moshe Ya'alon: Not at all.

Malcolm Rifkind: Neither now nor in the future?

Moshe Ya'alon: No. It is against our interests. I don't believe that the Palestinian interests is to have one state solution or bi-national state whatsoever. What should be done is to enhance the political independence as we ... This is the case in the West Bank with Palestinian Sovereignty. To keep the territories which will be part of the Palestinian entity in the future, it's about us, where not to settle in Judah and Samaria. Of course, to use a bottom-up approach to improve the economy, to improve the infrastructure, to improve security. What is a Palestinian viable economy regarding the Palestinian Sovereignty in the West Bank? It's none.

Viable economy is being employed in Israel. More than 70,000 of them are employed in Israel. 60,000 of them are employed in the settlement in Israel industrial zones in Judah and Samaria. Many of them are employed as subcontractors of Israel industries, enterprises, Israel textile industry either in China or in the Palestinian Authority. Infrastructure, can they survive without our water supply? We supply Jordan with water, with gas. It's like psalmist wings for those who claim full separation, we are here, they are there. It's unique situation. Even security, regarding security, as long as we enjoy freedom of operation in Judah and Samaria, to include the Palestinian areas, which wasn't the case until defensive shield operation in 2002.

Then we suffer from more than 1,000 casualties as a result of the homicide bombing attacks coming from the Palestinian areas. It was land for terror of course and not land for peace. Today, Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] is dependent on us. We make 70% of the job in fighting Hamas, Palestinian-Islamic jihad and ISIS in the West Bank. Common interests, that's why we



enjoy cooperation between the Palestinian security apparatus and our security forces. From top-down, my main point when I claimed in front of the late Mr Rabin in 1995 I don't see any sign on the Palestinian side for reconciliation or co-existence between us and the Palestinians, is education.

As long as Palestinian youngster, three years old, from kindergarten, is educated to kill us, to hate us as Jews, as Zionists, and to kill us wearing explosive vests, what is the prospect of peace? Nowadays the big issue, the Palestinian authority finance the terrorist who are in jail according the amount of the Jewish blood that was spilled. If you're sentenced the entire of your life, you'll get good money; just for 10 years, less. The family of jihadist terrorist was killed as homicide bomber attack, is salary to the entire of their lie. This is the way to promote terror not to prepare your people for peace.

Malcolm Rifkind:

Thank you. We have time for one more question which I'd like to put to you. Many people have interpreted the advent of President Trump as good news for Israel, both because of his strong support for Israel but also his antipathy to Iran and his call for a much more dramatic impact by the region against Iran. When he was both in the Middle East, he used these themes. That must have been music to the ears of many Israelis, perhaps to yourself. However, and it's an important however, in his case, in his speech, he attempted to make a linkage between a regional effort against Iran, led by the ... including the United States, perhaps including Israel, a common enemy that you could work together to try to defeat.

He combined with that, that that would be that much more successful and effective if the Israeli Palestinian issue could be seen to be making progress that would make it easier for the Arab countries that wanted to work with Israel to be able to do so. Now that's second half of that equation could not have been, I presume, as welcome to your ears and to the ears of the Israeli government as the first half of what he was saying. Is it a question of having both or neither or can that circle be squared or square be circled, whichever metaphor you wish to use?

Moshe Ya'alon:

For a very, very long period of time, the Arabs claimed that the cause for instability in the Middle East is Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is not the case now, I would say. I'm not talking about paying tokens for Palestinians. To claim it now, today, it's ridiculous. What is the connection between the Israeli Palestinian conflict and the ongoing bloodshed in Syria? No connection. The internal conflict in Iraq, internal conflict in Yemen, the tribal conflict in Libya, no connection, even the revolution, current revolution in Egypt, no connection, no linkage to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We hear it less and less.

Secondly, we tried very much to bring in to the regional process, our Arab neighbouring countries. We believe that this is a good start. To have them, you know heavy responsibility for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a Palestinian problem as well. What we found until recently and I'm not sure President Trump will be able to convince them, they have different priority.



Internal challenges, a high priority. In the external arena, Iran, Iran, Iran and then the jihadist in the region, Muslim Brotherhood element in the region.

The Palestinian issue is in a very low priority. Now we tried very hard and we failed. It was exposed that we were in Aqaba Summit with Secretary Kerry, with the participation of our leaders. I was there. They were reluctant to spend, to be invested on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many of them are frustrated from Mahmoud Abbas, the Saudis because of the Mecca Agreement which was reconciliation with Hamas and Fatah, in which both sides are not ready to be committed to it.

Or President El-Sisi of Egypt trying to convince Mahmoud Abbas to take responsibility in Gaza immediately after Protective Edge operation, he didn't want to be accountable. That's frustration. In the last two years, the only party in the region which is ready to spend money on the Palestinians is Qatar in Gaza. The Saudis didn't spend a dollar. If President Trump will be able to convince them to come to any kind of regional process, we'll be more than happy. I have another explanation for their reluctance to be invested in it. They created the Palestinian problem as a weapon against the state of Israel. Today they're on the same boat. They don't need it.

Malcolm Rifkind:

There we are. That's very, very insightful response to a number of questions that have been asked. I think you will agree with me that we've had a great privilege in hearing the views of one of Israel's senior statesmen, who has not only served his country over the years but may have a very important political future ahead of him. Please join with me in thanking Bogie Ya'alon for his time. Thank you.