

בלמ"ס/מידי

אל: כל הנציגויות
דע: תפוצת הסברה
מאת: מח' מידע ואינטרנט – אגף תקשורת

הנדון: דברי רה"מ לועידת הנשיאים 17.10

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Jerusalem, 17 February 2010

We meet once a year, so what has changed since we last talked? Well, I think that two things of importance have changed. We've had elections in Israel; we've had elections in Iran. And in both of them, the people have spoken loud and clear. In Israel, the people have said we want a secure peace, a general peace, peace that will stand, that will be defended and defensible. And the people of Iran said, "We want freedom, we want freedom from the brutal tyranny that has been exposed for all the world to see."

Let me begin with Iran and then let me go to our quest for peace and security. In these things, I think, we have the support and friendship of the United States of America, on both the gradations that I'm about to speak.

In Iran, there has been the exposing of this regime, not only by its nature and the fact that they gun down demonstrators, that there is a popular movement that is quelled by violence. That I think everybody understands today. That wasn't evident a year ago when we met, because people thought that there are populist leanings there, yes. They can amass people, they can fill up squares, but overwhelmingly, I think, people understand that the great majority of the people of Iran, given a free choice, would have ousted this regime and let me tell you: they did oust this regime. But the elections were rigged, and now the quelling of protests is rigged and the filling of squares with supporters of the government is rigged. I think the nature of this regime now is understood, not only by leaders around the world and by governments around the world, but by decent people, fair-minded people everywhere around the world.

The second thing that was exposed was that Iran is conducting a secret nuclear weapons program. That was exposed by the revelations about the secret facility in Qum, and I think people understand that you don't build a secret facility in Qum, you don't build centrifuges to enrich uranium to a high level and you don't build ballistic missiles to send medical isotopes. Everybody understands that. So, whereas still a year ago, there was a difference about what is the nature of this regime and what is its intentions, I think today that has largely dissipated. And if there gaps in assessments about the advance of Iran's nuclear programs, those have largely dissipated. Unfortunately, they've dissipated as the leading

governments in the world have become aware and share with each other the knowledge about the promise of Iran's military-nuclear program. As low-enriched uranium is being massed in Iran, the differences of how much there is have largely disappeared, and the gap that is left with the production of actual weapons, is also greatly reduced.

So there is greater consensus today about the understanding that this is a brutal tyranny, intending to produce the weapons of mass death. What they intend to do with these weapons, they hardly keep a secret. Obviously, the first: this is a threat to Israel, a threat to the region, a threat to the world, and it could spark off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, among the other pernicious results of such a development. There are many, many pernicious developments.

I think the camp of understanding has shrunk dramatically because of these two events: the exposing of the tyrannical nature of the Iranian regime and the fact that it is engaged in a secret and now not-so-secret program to produce nuclear weapons.

Now that we have understanding, the hour is approaching in which the international community must act to prevent Iran from completing its nuclear weapons program. It is possible to apply very forceful sanctions. Watered-down sanctions, modest sanctions will not do the job. If anything can do the job, it is tough sanctions, crippling sanctions. And such a package of sanctions that could apply to many fields should have what I think are the teeth to make this regime stop and take notice. This means curtailing the importation of refined petroleum products - gasoline - and also curtailing the export of energy products, because Iran and this regime's budget in particular are heavily, heavily dependent on the energy sector.

These things are being discussed right now in the Security Council as we speak. I presented my view that what is required right now are crippling sanctions directed against the importation of gasoline and the export of energy from Iran. I believe this is the minimal package that will have an effect. I said this to President Medvedev in Russia, to Prime Minister Putin, to President Sarkozy of France, to Chancellor Merkel of Germany and to Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. I spoke to all these leaders in the last few days, in the last week or so.

The understanding requires a decision. I think what is required are tough, crippling sanctions on the energy sector now. Other things as well, but it must be coupled with this because sanctions on the import of gas and sanctions on the export of energy from Iran has teeth, and what is required is something with a bite right now.

I cannot tell you what the result will be, but I always quote Hillel the Elder, who said famously some 2,000 years ago: "If not now, when?" Well, if the international community doesn't apply tough, biting sanctions on Iran now, when

will it apply them? So there is a consensus that has emerged internationally. We'll find out very soon if it's a full consensus, but it's a very broad agreement. And now we shall see if the international community at this moment of truth acts as I hope it will.

The second thing that took place, as I said, was an election in Israel. And the people of Israel spoke very clearly about their desire to have a genuine peace with genuine security. The two are obviously related: you cannot have peace without security in this area, and that has been proven more than once, sometimes with tragic consequences. I think that, in many ways, the quest for peace has been set back by a tendency on the Palestinian side to pile up preconditions upon preconditions to negotiate about the negotiations; to talk about talking. We've said from day one, 10 months ago when we formed the government: let's begin negotiations for peace now. You cannot complete a peace negotiation if you don't begin it. And you can waste another year, another two years on negotiating about negotiating about negotiating. There is a tent out there; it's called the peace tent. We're in it. We said to the Palestinian Authority on day one: "Come into the tent. Start negotiating". And they stand outside and they say: "No but we need A, B, C, D and E", terms that they never asked of any government ever since the beginning of the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians some 16 years ago.

It has taken time, but I think on that issue too, there is a growing consensus by the international community who figured out that Israel wants to negotiate and is eager to resume peace talks, and that the Palestinians are the ones who are refusing to do this. To use one metaphor, they've climbed up a tree, and until very recently, they liked it up there: good breeze, everybody was competing with each other offering them more convenient velvet covered ladders to get down from the tree or climb down a little part of it. But the simple fact is, they have to come down to Earth. They have to enter the tent and begin negotiating peace. I think that the idea that negotiations have to be predetermined with an outcome demanded by the Arab side, whether it's the Palestinians or the Syrians, that is they define what is the end result, we're supposed to give them the end result and then pretend to negotiate the end result on their terms, is something that none of us would accept and no nation would accept in any kind of fair-minded negotiations.

So the idea of preconditions is totally unacceptable, but the idea of peace negotiations immediately, without preconditions, is not only acceptable, it's the course that we should proceed on. And I hope that we will proceed on it precisely because there has been a great amount of agreement with the United States, with the leading countries in the world, that this is what needs to be done now. I'm less particular about the form of the negotiations. Ultimately, the only way we can reach a final settlement is through direct negotiations for peace. This is the only way you can actually resolve this issue. But if the beginning has to involve some assistance, it's fine. You know, we always say it takes two to tango; in the

Middle East, sometimes you need three. Fine. We have to begin the dance, and you have a third party helping us, helping the Palestinians get into the tent, fine.

But proximity talks should lead to direct talks, and direct talks are the only way that we could realistically resolve this issue. But about resolving the issue, not about entering the tent, about exiting the tent with a peace agreement - I'd like to talk about the two things that now consolidated into a very broad understanding and a very broad agreement in the Israeli public. It is not unanimous; it is not universal; but it represents a great body of Israelis who understand that there are two requirements, not to enter the talks, but at the end of the day, to complete the talks, and these are things that we will obviously raise in the negotiations in great detail.

The first is legitimacy: that is the acceptance, by the Palestinian side, of the State of Israel, the Jewish State of Israel, the nation-state of the Jewish people, as a legitimate entity, and conferring that legitimacy from the leadership down to all levels of Palestinian society. That's not something that's obvious. When I raised this issue in my speech at Bar-Ilan University, the response from the Palestinian Authority, not from the Hamas, from the Palestinian Authority was: we will never recognize a Jewish state. We will never recognize Israel as the Jewish state. Why not? You asked us to recognize a Palestinian state as the nation-state of the Palestinian people and you refuse to recognize Israel as the Jewish state, the nation-state of the Jewish people? After all, we have some attachment to this place, you know? It goes back quite a while. If you visit my office, you will see a stamp, a signet ring. It was found not very far from here, a few hundred meters from here, next to the Western Wall. It dates back 2,800 years. It has the name of an official from the time of the Kings of Israel. The name of that official is "Netanyahu." Netanyahu Ben-Yoresh. That's my last name. My first name goes back 1,000 years earlier - Benjamin also walked these hills.

We have some attachment to this land, shall we say, millennia - close to four millennia. Four thousand years. The Jewish people have spent almost half of their history, a little less, trying to return to this land, and have broken all the odds of history to achieve this. And brought it up back to life after it was desolate and empty. You'd think that a final peace agreement in which Israel is asked to recognize a Palestinian state in part of our ancestral homeland, because there are many Palestinians here. You'd think that the Palestinians would say: "Of course we'd recognize Israel as the Jewish state, as the nation-state of the Jewish people". And yet, they refuse to do so. Why? What could possibly make them refuse to do so?

Well, because there are three things embedded in the recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. The first is that it remains preponderantly Jewish, and this means that the refugee question, the Palestinian refugee question, will be resolved outside the borders of Israel in a final agreement of peace. That means putting an end to the idea that somehow you'll be able to

flood Israel with Palestinian refugees. Remember, Israel absorbed Jewish refugees from Arab lands as a result of the attempt to annihilate Israel in 1948. There were two sets of refugee problems: one was created by Arab invasion of Israel, one Arab refugees, Palestinian Arab refugees who live in the surrounding areas and countries; and the second, Jewish refugees from Arab lands who had to leave their homes penniless and came here. And Israel absorbed them - roughly an equal number - on a tiny speck of land. Both justice and common sense demand that the Palestinian refugee problem be resolved outside the borders of Israel. So far, we've not had a willingness on the Palestinian side to recognize this simple reality. It's not even a demand; it's a reality. Otherwise, you cannot have a stable peace. On this there is obviously a huge consensus in Israel.

The second question is their willingness to abandon all claims, irredentist claims on Israel, on the Israeli-Arab citizens who enjoy full civil rights in Israel, to say they have civil rights. They have the vote; they participate in our parliament, in our government, in every walk of life. There are many things that still need to be done there, but they have the political representation as citizens of Israel. And yet there is a lingering undertone that says: no, we'll ask for national rights, for minority national rights. Thereby we could carve Israel into sub-states. What we expect the Palestinians to do is to recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and this means that they have no more claims, that the conflict has ended - end of conflict, end of claims - along the lines that I've described that unite, I would say, the overwhelming majority of Israelis.

This is what I mean by legitimacy. Again, I don't place this issue or the next one that I will now raise as a condition for entering the tent of peace, for beginning negotiations. I place no conditions on entering negotiations, but for the negotiations to succeed down the line we hear all the time what the Palestinians expect of Israel; here's what Israel expects of the Palestinians. These are the two minimal things that we expect. They'll have a long list; we'll have a long list. And this is what negotiations are for. But it's important to understand what unites us, and if we are united, I think we have a better chance to achieve a genuine agreement.

That genuine agreement also has to be couple with security. Now why? Well, I just came from Russia. We have a lot of kinship with Russia because over one million of our citizens speak Russian. Quite a few of them are in my Cabinet. The head of our Knesset faction is a Russian speaker, Zeev Elkin; the chief economic advisor is Russian. These are all people I appointed. The head of the Jewish Agency, you may know him, Natan Sharansky is also a Russian speaker. I'm told, by the way, they all speak Oxford Russian, whatever that is. There are also some other speakers. There are many Hebrew speakers here. A few English ones too.

We have a great kinship with Russia. There are a few differences. Israel is smaller than Russia. How much smaller? How much bigger is Russia compared

to Israel? One hundred times? Twenty times? Well, we have some problems in education here. No, Russia is not twenty times bigger than Israel; it's not one hundred times bigger than Israel. It's 800 times bigger than Israel. You can fit close to 1,000 Israels in Russia. So I asked my Russian host to imagine that you actually compress Russia into 1/10 of one percent of its territory. Then it becomes a very small country. Greater Moscow is considerably bigger than Israel in its widest configuration. Then I said: Well, being small doesn't necessarily mean you'll have a security problem. I mean, Luxembourg doesn't have a security problem. Monaco doesn't have a security problem. Belgium doesn't have a security problem. Really? It did. It's a small country; it's about twice the size of Israel. That's how small Israel is. And Belgium was devoured within a matter of days when a band of aggressive enemies, committed to its conquest, guided by an uninhibited ideology of violence, conquest, bloodshed. Still all they wanted to do was conquer; they didn't want to destroy. They didn't want to drive the Belgians into the sea. But when you are small, very small - one of the tiniest countries in the world, as Israel is - and you're surrounded by enemies who want to see your destruction and are amassing short-range rockets and missiles and other lethal weaponry - then that becomes a huge security problem. Israel's small size and the nature of its enemies around it makes a security problem like no other anywhere on earth.

Because I was in Russia, I said that they also had a security problem, but they had thousands of kilometers to absorb an attack and then to repel it. We don't have thousands of kilometers; we don't have hundreds of kilometers; we don't even have dozens of kilometers. So our security problem is very real, very poignant and must be addressed in negotiations for peace. And let's try to be a little more specific about it. What is the problem with that? What is our problem right now having withdrawn from every last centimeter in Lebanon? We walked out precisely as the international community prescribed. We received a guarantee. We received a document, an official document - a UN Resolution, Resolution #1701, supported by all the members of the United Nations Security Council and by the entire world. There was an international force - UNIFIL - tasked with ensuring that there won't be any rocketing of Israel from South Lebanon. And what has been the result of this promise? Well, before the Second Lebanon War we had 15,000 rockets in Lebanon; now after we received an agreement, a pledge, signed, sealed, delivered by the Security Council along with forces on the ground to implement it - international forces - we have now 60,000 rockets in South Lebanon, of greater lethality and range. They are deeper in Lebanon, and they reach deeper into Israel.

What is our problem in Lebanon? Is it that we don't have a good border between us and Lebanon? The answer is no. We have a very good border. That is not our security problem. The problem in Lebanon is the border between Syria and Lebanon. That is completely porous, and contrary to all the pledges and all the agreements and all the Security Council Resolutions and speeches, this has

become completely porous and weapons flow in from Iran and from Syria unfettered, uninterrupted into Lebanon.

Same thing in Gaza. We walked out of Gaza, every last centimeter of Gaza. We had a multi-national agreement that said that this will guarantee - or an understanding - that Gaza would not be used to attack us. We walked out. Iran promptly walked in, just as it walked in with Hizbullah in the places we vacated in Lebanon. Here it walked in with Hamas. It is shipping rockets to them. What is our problem with security with Gaza? It is not the Gaza-Israel border; it's the border between Gaza and the Sinai. The Egyptian government under President Mubarak is making a valiant effort, recently, basically to impede the flow of weapons, but we see how difficult that is.

So if we want to have security with a future Palestinian state, we must ensure that that state does not become another Hamastan or another Hizbullah enclave, another enclave of Iran from which they would fire missiles deep into our territory and dispatch terrorists and other attacks. We cannot be sure that the culture of peace will emanate down from the leaders. First of all, we have to hear from the leaders, but that it will take root in the people. And in any case, we know that we must have secure arrangements for demilitarization. Demilitarization requires many things, but it must, above all and before anything else, ensure that weapons are not smuggled. 'Smuggled' is a subtle word and a very modern word for what is happening in Lebanon and what is happening in Gaza. These are highways of weapons.

We must have an effective block for the inflow of weapons and an effective block means ultimately must mean Israeli presence on the eastern side of a prospective Palestinian state. It has to be demilitarized, but part of the way that it will be demilitarized is for there to be an Israeli presence. People say: how long does that last? Do we know? If legitimacy has percolated down - up and down - do we know that they have abandoned the goal of attacking Israel? Do we know that they won't be ousted, our peace interlocutors - they will not be ousted the way they were ousted from Gaza by Iran's proxies? What will happen in the future depends on what will happen in the future, but we must be realistic and we must put forward these two conditions of legitimacy and security as building blocks for a genuine peace.

We'll be asked to do things too. And it's not going to be easy. It's not easy. How do I know? Because we've just done things, and they're not easy - believe me. I mean, we've actually done things in the last ten months. We've removed hundreds of checkpoints, barriers, earth ramps - you name them. And as a result, this free movement has enabled the Palestinian economy, the economy of the Palestinian Authority to jump up to 8%, some say more. More the better from my point of view, because I think this helps create a climate of peace and this helps differentiate what happens in the Palestinian Authority then what happens elsewhere as an inducement for peace.

The second thing that we did is I gave a speech outlining these principles of a potential peace with a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes the Jewish state. Those words are carefully chosen because they express this consensus in Israel. And you know what? They have another advantage. They happen to be fair and they happen to be true. And anybody who understands the nature of this conflict and why it's going on, understands that it is the persistent refusal that lasts to this day to recognize Israel as the Jewish state, as the nation-state of the Jewish people, in the absence of proper security arrangements that ultimately endangers the peace, whereas the obverse is also true - that if we have them, we could be on the road to peace.

And the third thing that we did: we made a gesture in our Cabinet - it was very hard. It hasn't made me very popular, for a variety of reasons: not to add new construction, to complete present construction, for a period of several months. We did things. We not only walked into the tent, we did things. We didn't just sit at the table; we did things. We lifted the flap.

Palestinians have done three things: they've loaded obstacles and preconditions that prevent them from entering the tent, demanding of us what they have not demanded from any government since 1994; they've initiated the attacks on us in what we call 'lawfare' and what you call Goldstone, which is meant to deprive us of our legitimate right to self-defense against terrorists who fire on civilians while hiding behind civilians; and they have not tamed the incitement in their official, government-controlled media.

We have done things to indicate this consensus, the desire to see a genuine peace and the willingness to enter it immediately. And so far the Palestinians have moved in the opposite direction. Now we have to see, because the choice right now is for the Palestinian leadership. Just as the international community faces a choice of what to do vis-à-vis the threat of Iran, the Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority's leadership, have a choice of what they intend to do about peace. Will they enter the peace tent or will they stay out of it? Will Mahmoud Abbas go the path of Anwar Sadat or go the path of Arafat? There are those who dismiss him; Sadat was dismissed as well, and then he proceeded with Menachem Begin, to surprise the world. I hope to be surprised, and I hope that, with a real peace partner, we can surprise the world and bring peace to our region, to our children and to our grandchildren.

Thank you very much.

עד כאן.
מח' מידע ואינטרנט – אגף תקשורת
18 פברואר 2010