

## MERIDOR BRIEFING

25/11/09

Good Evening.

There are three issues I want to speak about tonight. The first is the Iran situation, the second the Goldstone Report and the third the Palestinian issue. These are issues that concern us.

### Iran

The conflict that developed between Iran and the West led by the United States has become a contest, which is how many countries look at it. If at the end of the conflict Iran will be successful – if that means becoming nuclear – then this will mean the end of an era of non-proliferation and set world rules. If certain countries hear that Iran has gone nuclear – they will go nuclear. This will change the rules of the game.

There is a very solid alliance between the United States and many Arab countries and Gulf States – historically against communism. Arab countries rely on the United States and for the United States, this is an important area in the world in terms of energy.

The United States is concerned. They do not want a nuclear Iran to happen. So some of these countries will have to tilt towards Iran if Iran becomes a hegemony power in the region. It's a nightmare for them, but they'll have to do it.

There's a historic struggle between the majority and minority in the Muslim world. Moderates versus jihadists such as Taliban, Al Qaeda, Hamas and others. Iran is looked on as a leader in this revolutionary trend. If Iran is successful, think of the attitude of Hezbollah or Hamas.

The potential development of Iran as a nuclear country carries major consequences that are negative and even alarming, which is why I believe America is taking the stance it takes. They're (Iran) piling up uranium every day. They have long-range missiles. The coming months are vital.

American action aided by European countries and the rest of the world can be effective. Iranians are not irrational. They listened to United States' demands to suspend in 2003 after the Americans looked strong following the Iraq war.

## Goldstone Report

Our enemies have a new paradigm of war. It's built on two components. The first is using technology of missiles and rockets in big numbers. In Gaza there are thousands of them. In Lebanon 60,000 rockets and missiles, some covering the North, some more of Israel. Second, deploying missiles in densely populated areas, rooftops, cellars, barns etc. Then when war starts thousands are launched every day. What are we supposed to do?

They use human shields. We need to stop it. If this means by the air force or by ground forces, going in can cause huge loss of life – we're in civilian areas. Every nation has the right to self-defense. But what do we do? There's a moral question here. The answer is simple but tough. It's a military question and a legal question.

International law has been given some teeth in three ways. First, the world community, Security Council, setting up courts to try people for war crimes. Second, establishing two international criminal courts in the Rome Convention. Third, universal jurisdiction of states for example trying Ariel Sharon in Belgium.

The Human Rights Council established the Goldstone committee. Mary Robinson declined. The committee of four includes Professor Christine Chinkin, of the London School of Economics, who prior to Goldstone signed an advertisement in the British press, which stated that Gaza was not a war of defense but a war of attrition.

The Goldstone Report is not aimed mainly at what happened; it is aimed mainly to intimidate us if there's another conflict. This new paradigm of war is seen as a success.

I don't think one needs to change international law, but we need to adapt according to new challenges. It can't be done through Parliaments, but through international dialogue. Israel should raise this topic openly.

It's connected to the peace process. If there is a resumption of talks – final/partial agreement - we don't want the same problem. We left Gaza, Hamas took over and launched rockets. If we're accused of war crimes we won't take risks. This can change the rules of the game.

## Peace Process

There's economic progress in the West Bank. But one should not think what we have is enough. We're keen on continuing peace talks with the Palestinians. All previous negotiations with the Palestinians were without preconditions now they're making preconditions. I think that is wrong I think that's a mistake. I hope what we do today

(settlement moratorium) will help in that respect. We should not overlook negative lessons.

In previous negotiations with Ehud Olmert and Abu Mazen, Olmert offered unprecedented concessions on borders, refugees, Jerusalem. There was no positive reply. I hate to see it. It leaves us with no good answer. But if Abu Mazen didn't feel right to accept these offers where are we? What is it? Is Abu Mazen not ready or is he not in control? Nevertheless if talks are resumed we need a strategy. Where do we go? It may be unrealistic to set high goals.

The best way is a two-way approach. We hold negotiations of final status issues, but concurrently act on the ground bottom up. Top down on final status and bottom up the other way. People should see a continuation and growth on the ground.

There's still a problem with Hamas. Hamas still holds the same ideas. It doesn't recognize Israel and won't abandon arms.

### Settlements

We have decided to launch a ten-month pause on settlement activity. We didn't do this in agreement with the Palestinians, but we sincerely hope they'll take this act seriously and come to talk to us. You know the Israel political map, you know it's not easy but it was passed by a majority and if you talk of a group of seven – then unanimously. We want to show our people and the Palestinians that we're ready to take steps to important talks with the Palestinians. We hope they take this as a sign of goodwill and good intentions.

Tough decisions people don't like. We took a decision that was not easy for us, but leadership is what people are looking for. This follows (Bibi's) the two state solution speech at Bar Ilan University. He had the courage to say things that are difficult. It's not what he wants but he's ready to give things up. I want to see the day where Abu Mazen will go to a Palestinian university and make a parallel speech, for example the right of return to Palestine and an accepted state for Palestine and a state for Israel.

I wish to see support from Arab countries. Support is needed for tough decisions. In that context we took the unilateral decision. Generally speaking nothing new, everything under construction continues until completed. We're not getting anything in return – it's not an agreement it's unilateral. We hope the world understands we took the initiative and will start something good.

### Questions

Fox News - Mike Tobin:

The Palestinians made it clear it was a precondition for talks. Why announce a settlement freeze now?

Dan Meridor:

We're doing what we can to try to resume negotiations. We have an interest in the resumption of talks. It's wrong to think the Palestinians don't have an interest too. We took 8,000 Jews out of Gaza. We gave the Palestinians a chance and it went negatively. Hamas took over and killed Fatah. We're trying to do what we can to relaunch negotiations.

New York Times – Ethan Bronner:

If the settlement freeze had been announced six months ago it would have made an impact. Now it feels late and inadequate. What's taken so long? This was asked of Israel in the spring.

Dan Meridor:

We wanted an agreement. We're ready to resume negotiations. They never asked this of us in the past. We talked alongside building all the time. We've offered something that was not offered before.

Some people think in Israel and abroad that the problem occurred from 1967. Your colleague in the NYT in 2000 wrote in the form of a letter. Dear Yasser from Bill (Clinton), if it's 1967, we'll help you. If it's 1948, forget about it.

This is a difficult river to cross. If you want to cross borders no agreement. It's just one more phase in a long and bloody war. We have a bridge to cross. We've crossed it. Two states. Israel is there. Do we have the other side?

Since 2000 the Jewish state is not accepted. The problem is not a Palestinian state, but a Jewish state alongside the Palestinian one.

Washington Post – Sammy Sockol:

The Government announced a partial freeze. Why are you not fulfilling earlier commitments to US administration like illegal outposts? Are you going to resume talks from the point the last government ended?

Dan Meridor:

If agreements are reached then they should be respected as basis. If not agreed then we don't need to start from there. The roadmap was an agreement. Agreements

should be kept always, but if they don't accept an agreement you can't ask me to accept.

Financial Times – Tobias Buck:

Does the government believe they can entice the Palestinians back to the negotiating table with no compromise on the sovereignty of Jerusalem?

Dan Meridor:

There are differences. Jerusalem is on the table as everything is on the table. We're ready to talk. John Paul II said that this city is holy to three religions, but it was only promised to one people. We think Jerusalem is our capital. Nationally we think it's our capital. We haven't said we're not negotiating, but that doesn't mean we're going to give it away. This is our position.

National Public Radio – Ellen Krosney:

Can you comment on a step up in more home evictions and demolitions for Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem?

Dan Meridor:

No one likes to see people evicted from their homes; Palestinians, or Jews from Gaza. It's about illegal construction. We also did it in Judea and Samaria – we did it to Jews. You also have court orders from former tenants. I don't see a big problem here. The issues can be resolved by agreement.

Haber Turk – Asli Sozbilir:

The relationship between Turkey and Israel has been strong for years especially in the domain of intelligence, but after Turkey is getting closer with Iran will cooperation continue as strong as before against terrorism in the Middle East?

Dan Meridor:

I think Israel and Turkey have a solid relationship for many years based on clear interests. I've seen things lately that I wished had rather not been said. I hope this doesn't change the relationship. Turkey wants to join the EU. I hope relations continue as they were. I hope we overcome the problems.