

# **Ambassador Yitzhak Levanon**

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**Notes from - Press Briefing 27.10.09**

### **Part 1 – Statement of Mr. Levanon**

#### **A. International Developments**

##### **1. Lieberman's Visits Abroad**

- Has met with counterparts in South American, sub-Saharan African, and East European nations since appointed FM.
- Israel broadening its foreign relations with countries on the geo-political periphery, improving bilateral ties with countries in those regions.

##### **2. Goldstone Report and UN Censuring of Israel**

- Reflects Politicized nature of Human Rights Council, doesn't embody original post-WWII principles of true defense of human rights.
- Council "singles out Israel"; Arab and Islamic countries enjoy automatic majority and dictate their obsessive focus of Israel onto the agenda.
- Goldstone didn't utilize the 120 pages of testimony from the Israeli accounts of suffering.
  - Ignored the detailed story of woman in Ashkelon who suffered from Qassam attack, who testified before him for three hours.
  - Ignored the fact the there are ongoing internal Israeli investigation of IDF policies and conduct during Cast Lead.

#### **B. Regional Developments**

##### **1. Turkey**

- Stressed that the Israeli-Turkish relations remain strong.
- Israel concerned about Turkey's warming of relations with Iran and Syria, doesn't want it to be aligned in their axis.

- In particular, today's meeting of Erdogan and Ahmadejad
- Uncertain to say where Turkey is headed geo-politically and strategically, as military ties with Israel remain solid (didn't refer to barring Israel from air force drill)

## **2. Lebanon**

- Hizbullah strengthening its status, pressuring central government to adopt its radical agenda.
- Hizbullah Still independent of central authority control.
- Recent developments (probably referring to mysterious explosion in southern Lebanon) will not contribute to regional stability.

## **3. Jordan**

- We commemorate 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of peace treaty, peace a strategic asset and so far enduring.

# **C. Local Developments**

## **1. Negotiations with Palestinians**

- Israel ready to discuss all outstanding issues, no matter how sensitive
- Doesn't put forth any pre-conditions for negotiations
- Wants to strengthen Abbas government with confidence-building steps, but needs Palestinian reciprocity.

- Wants to wait for outcome of Palestinian elections, hopefully to be held on schedule in January.
- Americans pressuring sides to talk to each other, Israel will try to cooperate with Washington.

## Part 2 – Q & A session

Q: Regarding Israel's rejection of the Goldstone Report findings, when has any country acknowledged committing war crimes?

A: In the case of Darfur, a few Sudanese officials have admitted wrongdoings, but the UN Human Rights Council hasn't so much as made a statement over the events in Darfur.

Q: Does the UN Human Rights Council and other Human Rights NGO's lack credibility? Also, force is being used against journalist...

A: Israel investigates all accusations of violent misconduct it receives. Regarding Human Rights organizations, usually these organizations issue their reports first, and seek the Israeli response later. That's why Israel rejects this report.

Q: Why does Israel object to the UN Human Rights Council issuing its opinion, after it did its job professionally, and gave both sides a chance to voice their claims.

A: Israel rejects the Goldstone Report as biased. Goldstone treated each side differently. He didn't list the position of Israeli officials and didn't cite the testimony of the Ashkelon resident who testified before him.

Q: How can Israel justify dropping 700 tons of explosives, versus 6000 Qassam rockets from Gaza?

A: The principle of proportionality doesn't mean "one for one" even according to the UN Human Rights Council.

Q: The Goldstone Report also criticized Hamas' actions.

A: Those were only examples of the biased treatment. Goldstone completely ignored the 120 page Israeli statement.

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Q: Regarding your statement that Israel is willing to renew negotiations without preconditions, aren't Israel's refusal to divide Jerusalem and its insistence on being a Jewish state preconditions?

A: These aren't preconditions. They are Israeli positions. The status of Jerusalem will be on

the table. Regarding the principle of the Jewish state, a recognition of the right of the Palestinians to have a state requires a reciprocal recognition of a state for the Jews. The goal of Israel is a two-state solution.

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Q: Regarding the violence in the Al-Aqsa Mosque – where is Israel headed in Jerusalem? Palestinians fear losing Al-Aqsa, and there is an official plan to do so...

A: I am amazed by the question. Jews are forbidden according to their religion from entering the compound, and none enter. Arrangements are in place in coordination with the Wakf to allow tourists to visit the compound. Otherwise, the mosques are always open before worshippers. On Sunday (October 25), inciters prepared buckets of stones and molotov cocktails in advance. Every morning, the police enter and patrol the compound according to the agreement. On Sunday, they encountered stone throwing.

Q: Azzam Al-Khateeb says Al-Aqsa is under threat...

A: You can ask Jordan about the permanent arrangements. In 1968, the government of Israel passed a resolution to arrest anyone who desecrates a holy site.

Q: Israel keeps closing Al-Aqsa..

A: Israel wishes to stick to the arrangements in place.

Q: Getting back to the Goldstone report - we see that the official Israeli position has gradually shifted regarding an Israeli investigation of operation 'Cast Lead', and has gone from a complete refusal in the beginning to the point where some government officials are calling for such an investigation.

A: A distinction must be made between a Commission of Inquiry and an investigation committee. Israel investigates everything it must, but doesn't think there is any need for a Commission of Inquiry. The Justice Minister is examining different ways to conduct the investigation.

Q: Isn't the idea of pursuing changes to the international law on terrorism a megalomaniacal idea?

A: The laws of war were created in 1949, at a time when most wars were between states. Today, laws must adapt to the situation of non-state terrorism that has become prevalent around the world, not only in Israel.

Q: Regarding the possibility of renewing the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, is President Abbas in a crisis that will prevent him from running for reelection?

A: That question should be directed to the Palestinian side. I cannot comment on internal Palestinian matters.

Q: Is there a chance that negotiations will resume?

A: I believe there is, because there is no other alternative. But there are forces hindering renewal of negotiations, like the Palestinian elections. The real question is only when will negotiations renew. I expect that if the elections are held in January, the Palestinians will be busy preparing for them. I hope negotiations will be able to resume after the elections.

Q: How is Israel preparing for the elections in East Jerusalem?

A: I have no answer yet. We will decide when there is a final date for the elections.

Q: A child has just lost his home in Um Laysoun, which was recently destroyed. The Municipality of Jerusalem doesn't give any building permits to Arabs, while nothing is done against illegal settlements. What would you say to that boy? How can you explain to him why he lost his home?

A: I sympathize with him, but if the house was built without a permit, it is illegal. I can say from my own experience that the municipality destroys even balconies that are closed in without a permit.

Q: Regarding the Amnesty report on the water situation in the Palestinian territories – is this report also false?

A: We are used to one-sided reports that are published without asking for the Israeli position first. The numbers in the report don't match the numbers we know to be true. Since 1948, the average per-capita water consumption has decreased from 500 cubic meters to 170 cubic meters - approximately by two thirds, while the average per-capita Palestinian water consumption has increased from 80 cubic meters to 100 cubic meters. Moreover, the Palestinians don't invest in upkeep of pipes and a lot of water is wasted through faulty pipes. They don't invest in the collection of runoff water for agriculture, and refused to build water desalinization plants, as Israel did.