



Israel's Security Policy in a Changing Middle East

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Policy Forum with Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon
Moderated by Robert Satloff, Executive Director

Transcript

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ROBERT SATLOFF: Ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to introduce the minister of defense of the State of Israel, Bogie Yaalon. [Applause]

MOSHE YAALON: Thank you, Rob, for the introduction. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased, honored, and proud to be here at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy to be able to address you about our tough neighborhood, the Middle East. As Rob mentioned, I spent nine months in 2006 here in the Institute, so I feel like among friends, whom I see here. But I'm proud to say my time here in the Institute was worthwhile, and reading your papers now, in trying to analyze, to understand, the changes in our region, in the Middle East, is worthwhile as well. So thank you for what you are doing.

I remember that [U.S.] Secretary [of Defense Chuck] Hagel was here six weeks ago. I read very carefully what he said. And I hope that he will read very carefully what I am going to say today. [Laughter] Nevertheless, what was expressed in Secretary Hagel's briefing here is the bond between the United States and the State of Israel, based on common interests and common values. And I can tell you that, yes, we have established intimate, earnest dialogue between us, directly, and by our staff, indirectly, for the benefit of our two countries. And today, my visit is part of these ongoing discussions, which have to be done frequently, according to the changes in our neighborhood in the Middle East.

As you all know well, the Middle East is going now through a very dramatic, I would say historic, event, in which we witness the outcome of strengthening political Islam, entrance of even more radical jihadi elements to the arena, heightening Shia-Sunni conflict everywhere—regionally and in the countries [themselves]—and even radical Sunni elements, including the influence in many countries around us—widening the challenges to moderate countries and monarchies—the phenomenon of no-man's-land, which we experience from Sinai, as an example. It might be a new phenomenon in the Golan Heights which is exploited by radical elements. In Sinai, many radical elements, whether global jihad followers, Iranian-backed factions, Palestinian terror factions, [are] exploiting this kind of vacuum. And it poses to the Middle East a threat of terror and weapons proliferation.

Having said that, in a higher perspective, I would say that, yes, we witnessed the collapse of the nation-state system in many countries. And the nation-state system, to my mind, was imposed in many countries artificially—not in all of them. Egypt is a historic country with a long history, and it will remain Egypt. But countries like Iraq—[it] is divided into, generally speaking, Shia, Sunni, Kurds. The tribes in Libya . . . Syria: its ongoing civil war reflects the rivalry between the Alawites, the Sunnis, the Kurds, which enjoy already autonomy in Syria. And we have to look at it historically, as it was imposed by Western leaders almost one hundred years ago:

Sykes-Picot, the end of World War I. We have to look very carefully for our new Western ideas to be imposed on the Middle East.

Nevertheless, not incidentally, monarchies [have] survive[d] so far, and artificial states—publics, let's call them—are on the way to collapse, to be divided into sectarian enclaves with political, sectarian differences and violence. . . . [But] generally speaking, Israel enjoys today a relatively calm situation security-wise. The border with Lebanon: peace and quiet since 2006, no Hezbollah provocations. The border with Syria: some problems, because of the internal situation but, generally speaking, a calm situation. Going down to the south, in the Gaza Strip: a couple of weeks with not even one provocation on behalf of Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad or any other faction. Sinai: a quite complicated situation—the last attack was rockets launching toward the city of Eilat. But again, a relatively calm situation. Serving in the military, I don't remember such a calm situation in such a long period of time.

But we have to warn ourselves that what dominates the Middle East is instability. So far, they are engaged among themselves, fighting each other, but it might be, in the end, that the weapons are directed toward us. Anyhow, [they] are well armed—militias, elements, whether Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad—well armed with rockets, missiles, which is a threat for our security.

Syria: Syria is engaged in a civil war. I can't see stability in the near future. I'm not sure what will be the outcome of this internal conflict causing almost 100,000 casualties—unbelievable. It has become a sectarian conflict, of course—political, sectarian conflict—and, in many areas, we witness ethnic cleansing, Sunnis killing Alawites and Alawites killing Sunnis. And the Kurds enjoy already autonomy in the northern and eastern parts of Syria. I am not very impressed [with] the achievements of the regime today. [Syrian president Bashar al-]Assad controls only 40 percent of the territory of Syria. [Inaudible] is controlled by the Kurds and the Sunnis. But we can't see any conclusion in the current situation—with Assad, without Assad, as we talk about the very hostile relationship between the sectors—which will affect the future of Syria for a very, very long period of time.

Having said that, the opposition is not homogeneous, is not unified. When we talk about the Sunnis, we have [the] Muslim Brotherhood, supported by Turkey and Qatar; we have Salafis and moderates, supported by Saudi Arabia, generally speaking, and [others]; and we have al-Qaeda elements coming from Iraq to Syria with the idea to destabilize Syria and then to destabilize Lebanon, destabilize Jordan and Saudi Arabia, having a stronghold in Sinai, and encircle Israel. This is the idea. The idea is to defeat Israel—but, so far, to impose their ideology in the territories in which they operate—in Syria, especially in the southern part of Syria.

Lebanon is connected to Syria [more than as it has ever been]. Actually, the war is taking place now not just in Syria. In Lebanon as well, we see Syrian aircraft, Syrian attack helicopters, operating in the Beqa Valley—against Sunnis, of course; as

Lebanon is used by the Sunnis, as strategic back—logistics whatever. And eternal conflicts in Lebanon—Alawites from the north, Tripoli, Shia versus Sunnis—and that's why, of course, Lebanon is not going to be stabilized in the coming future. They decided to postpone the elections; that's one of the signals of instability in Lebanon.

So in the north, both countries—Lebanon and Syria—are engaged in internal wars. What is the Israeli policy in this case? First of all, we do not intervene, we do not interfere. We are in a very sensitive position, of course, so any Israeli intervention might affect the side that we might support—not for its benefit. Nevertheless, we put for the Syrian regime clear redlines—very clear: one is not to allow any delivery of sophisticated weapons to any terror factions, militias—whether it is Hezbollah or any other faction—not to allow chemical agents to these kinds of factions, and to keep our sovereignty in the Golan Heights—not to allow any crossing fire from the Golan Heights, intentionally, not intentionally, to our side. And when they violate, or they cross, these redlines, as we did in the Golan Heights, in any crossing fire, we act in order to destroy the Syrian-regime, the Syrian-military, fortification, position, that was responsible for this kind of fire.

We use humanitarian aid for the people who live along the border in the Golan Heights—just humanitarian aid, whether it is medical treatments for injuries . . . We deployed a field hospital on the border, and we evacuate Syrian injuries to our hospitals. And this kind of humanitarian aid for the benefit of the people who live along the border—many of them are stuck in enclaves because of the situation; crossing fire between the military and the opposition. So, yes, we do help them by humanitarian aid—and that's it.

Jordan is affected as well by the situation. There's no doubt that the refugees are a phenomenon. In Jordan, it's a big headache for the king—more than a half million refugees, [maybe] even more than that; we're talking about Syrian refugees, we're not talking about all the Iraqi refugees from the past. And, of course, the situation in Syria might affect Jordan security-wise as well. Al-Qaeda elements in the southern part of Syria might challenge the Hashemite kingdom as well.

From our standpoint, it should be very clear that Jordan is an asset in the Middle East; in terms of stability, it is a very important asset for stability in the region. And that's why we supported and we actually believe that Jordan should be supported by the United States, by other allies, in order to keep Jordan as a stabilizer in the region. Along the border, we enjoy peace and tranquility; it's not just a calm situation, because the Jordanians are doing a great job when it comes to security.

Going down to the south, Egypt, the regime, is challenged at least by three challenges: the first one is the economic challenge. The Egyptian economy has been deteriorating since the beginning of the uprising in Tahrir Square. We don't see any horizon economy-wise in which the Egyptians will be able to develop some other resources, economic resources, for the benefit of the country. And, of course, it

affects the people. Without going through the data, we watch it very carefully, and we worry about it. The second challenge is the political one: those who are not happy with the current regime, are not happy with the idea of an Islamic Republic, are demonstrating, challenging the regime on the streets, calling for the regime to step down, and so forth. It's not a sign for stability for the coming future. And the third challenge is security, first of all internal security. People in Egypt do not feel safe—because of the economic situation, the lack of law and order—they don't feel safe. And that's why people started to believe that it might be that this kind of Islam is not the solution. The slogan *Al-Islam Huwa Al-Hal*—"Islam is the solution"—has to be implemented, and so far it looks like a failure.

In the current situation, our two defense establishments, Egyptian and Israeli, have good cooperation for the benefit of our two countries. Sitting in Cairo and looking around, I believe that the only safe border is the border with us—neither from Libya nor Sudan, the Gaza Strip is a problem, even across the Red Sea, Yemen is not stabilized, so this is their only safe border. With all the complexities, with all the differences between the Muslim Brotherhood ideology and the idea of having these kinds of relations with us the way that [they are] implemented now—actually, the Egyptian commitment to the peace accord [continues] because of these kinds of reasons and because of the understanding that there is no way to get the U.S. financial support without being committed to the peace accord—a matter of interests. The relationship, actually, between the two defense establishments is the way to keep stability between our two countries. These days, in Sinai, military forces are deployed to deal with the terror elements. It is against the military annex of the peace accord, but we allowed it. [They made a] special request; we responded positively for a certain period of time. And, of course, we expect Egypt, the Egyptian security forces, defense forces, to deal with this phenomenon of terrorists using Sinai as no-man's-land—because, in the end, of course, the weapons are directed against them. Last week, another Egyptian officer was killed by terrorists in this kind of activity. We still remember the terror attacks in which terrorists killed sixteen Egyptian policemen. So we hope that the security forces of Egypt will deal with Sinai in a way that we will not absorb terror attacks—neither in Eilat nor in any other place.

It brings me to the smuggling of weapons—the smuggling of weapons operations—coming from Libya, in the past from Sudan as well. It has been reduced, part of it because of the Egyptian activities.

And here we come to the Palestinian arena. As you probably may well know, [U.S.] Secretary [of State John] Kerry is trying to bring the two sides to the table. And we say, from the very beginning, we are ready to sit [at] the table immediately, to discuss everything, not just territory, of course, because in this case the Palestinians have just to get and not to give anything. We are ready to discuss everything around the table without preconditions. So far, there are preconditions, and that's why the idea to conclude—two months, which has been concluded on the 7th of June—to have any kind of cure-all, to sit [at] the table and to have a political process—it

failed so far; it has been postponed. So far, the Palestinian side is rejecting to come to the table. They want to get something for coming to the table. That's preconditions.

Nevertheless, our policy in this case is very clear. On one hand, we don't want to govern them. And actually they enjoy already political independence. They have already two political entities, divided from each other: one in Gaza, very hostile, but deterred now; very hostile—all the elements that are there are preparing themselves to execute more terror attacks against us, more rocket launching against us. But since the Pillar of Defense operation, we've deterred them. I'm not sure that it will be for a very long period of time. We should be ready to act. But this is a hostile entity, not ready to meet Quartet criteria and so forth. But we said we are ready to sit with the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), to talk about a political process. But, of course, to talk about everything, like recognizing our right to exist as a Jewish state—they deny it; like agreeing that any agreement based on agreed lines, territorial compromise based on agreed lines, will be considered the end of conflict and finality of claims—they deny it; and, of course, there is a need to address our security needs after two decades of very bad experiences with them and a piece of territory that was delivered—like Jenin, Nablus, and so forth have come to be homicide-bombing launchers and, in the Gaza Strip, rocket launchers. So we have many security grievances, let's say, that they have to meet, but let's sit at the table and discuss it. For the meanwhile, let's make progress from the bottom up. Let's improve your economy. Let's improve your governance. We want to see a reliable, accountable, responsible neighbor—improve your competence to govern, law and order, security . . .

But there is a missing element, you've heard it from me many times: education. To be very clear, as long as they educate their kids—and I'm not talking about Hamas, I'm talking about the Palestinian Authority—actually to hate us and to kill us, wearing explosive belts for kindergarten, admiring the *shahid* as martyrs, Israel not appearing on the maps or textbooks. No Israel—we are all settlers, those who live in Tel Aviv or in Bethleh—in Beth El. We are all settlers—colonialists or settlers, whatever. Without this kind of change, I can't be optimistic regarding any final settlement based on the common ideas—the current ideas.

So let's wait and see what will come out. So far, we manage the situation; yes, we push—we try to push the economy, to push the law and order, security, and so forth, what is on our side, our responsibility. We do our utmost to improve the situation—it's not the status quo. But the problem, as I mentioned, is a reluctance to recognize our right to exist as a nation-state of the Jewish people in any boundaries. This is the core of the conflict—and not anything else.

And here we come to the most important threat, the most significant threat, to the region: Iran. Today, we watch the elections in Iran. Of course, it's not a democracy. You might call it a "democratorship." Not everyone can be elected. Not all the people are going to participate in the elections. But in the end, the Supreme Leader, [Ali]

Khamenei, will be the one who will make the decision who will be the president, as it happened in 2009, when [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad was nominated by him, although [Mir Hossein] Mousavi won the elections in the ballots. And, of course, regarding the question whether the Iranian policy is going to be changed, [it] is up to the Supreme Leader, not the president. Nevertheless, there is expectation in the West [leading] to the elections. Why? Because there was a hidden decision in the West to wait till the elections—and not to push on diplomacy and not to push very hard on other means until the elections. And now we have to wait and see what will be the policy after the elections.

We believe and we insist that, in the end, this regime should face a very clear dilemma: whether to go on with its rogue activities—on top of it, military nuclear capability—or to survive as a regime. That should be their objective. [There is] no doubt that this regime has come to be the main generator and instigator for instability in the Middle East. You can find the fingerprints in Afghanistan, on the wrong side; in Iraq, on the wrong side; in Bahrain, in Yemen, on the wrong side; in Syria, on the wrong side; in Lebanon, in the Palestinian arena, in Africa, in South America, in Asia, with their terror infrastructure.

I find there are two countries all over the globe that divide the world . . . to territorial commands: United States, with CENTCOM, Central Command, European Command, South[ern] Command, and the Pacific and so forth; and Iran: they don't call it a command, they call it "corps"—the Syrian/Lebanese corps, the African corps, South American corps, Asian corps. This is the aspiration of this regime. Don't underestimate their aspirations to create the Caliphate, the Shia Caliphate, all over the globe, by undermining moderate regimes, all those that are linked to the West, by terror, by other means. And, of course, in the end to defeat the Great Satan. The Great Satan is America, meaning the Western civilization led by the United States. We are lucky to be considered the "minor Satan." But on the way to defeat the Great Satan, Israel should be wiped off the map. Don't underestimate this terminology. And that's why we claim that by one way or another the nuclear project should be stopped, using all tools: diplomacy, if you get anything—so far, very little; economic sanctions—there is an impact, it's not enough . . . And it might be that they will face the dilemma of going on with the project or with activities and [survival] by facing an economic crisis. You know the case so far. They succeed in maneuvering. Of course, the opposition should enjoy at least moral support on behalf of the West, as dissidents are executed, arrested, and so forth. And all of it is not going to be effective if you don't have a credible military option. Otherwise they go on maneuvering, sacrificing—in terms of the economy, they are ready to sacrifice—and to go on with the project. And in order to stop them, all those tools should be used. And in order to avoid the military option, which should be anyhow the last resort, all the others should be used and exhausted. We believe it is still achievable, but we should demonstrate more the determination and political stomach to go all the way in order to prevent a military nuclear Iran.

In this regard, to conclude, I believe that the cooperation and the bond between the United States and Israel is very, very important. Again, looking around to the Middle East, there is one democracy, stabilized, which is able to defend itself, by itself. No need to deploy either American troops or others in order to defend Israel—sharing the same interests as well as the same values. And I have to say that the cooperation between our two defense establishments—in the broader perspective, not just in the military; intelligence, and all the other elements of security—is a pillar in our ability, both the United States and Israel, to meet the challenges ahead of us. And I believe that, in this case, we are going the right way, regarding the cooperation, but the challenges are ahead of us, and I hope that we will find the right way to prevail. Thank you. [Applause]

SATLOFF: Bogie, thank you very much for that really impressive *tour d'horizon* of the region and both your assessments and your policy prescriptions. Thank you very much. I'm going to take the prerogative of asking you a couple of questions to start our discussion. Let me first ask you to put on your analytical hat of your old DMI [Directorate of Military Intelligence] job. You ended with a discussion of Iran. And you identified the four elements of the strategy vis-à-vis Iran: diplomacy, sanctions, political support for the opposition, and a credible military threat. I think it's fair to say that, basically, this has been the strategy for some years now—the strategy advocated by the United States, by Western powers, by Israel, others concerned with this. But the strategy so far, as implemented, has not affected the pace of the nuclear program. So what's missing? What is the key—what is the ingredient that is missing, or what is the formula that is missing, to compel the leaders of Iran to change their calculus on the military nuclear program, as you identified it? Let's start with that.

YAALON: I'm looking back to 2003. Supreme Leader Khamenei in 2003 decided to suspend the military nuclear project. Why? Because he was sure that, if not, he might be targeted by America. In 2003, the United States is on the offense, phase one in Afghanistan, phase two in Iraq; the main question among rogue leaders in our region was, who might be targeted next? At that time in history, Muammar Qadhafi of Libya decided to give up his military nuclear project without a single shot. And Khamenei decided to suspend it. Until when? Until 2005—when he realized that there is no political stomach anymore for the third phase. This is my answer. In the end, Khamenei should be convinced that there is a political stomach to go all the way, as I said, by all means, whether it is the sanctions, without hesitation, not paying attention to the oil prices, or a military option, again, with all the prices of a military option. When he understands that there is determination, political stomach to go all the way, then he will have to make the decision. And he will make it, to my mind.

SATLOFF: That's the perfect transition to a question I want to ask you about Syria. There is a common narrative here in Washington that, *uch*, all the options are horrible, all the outcomes are terrible—that a victory for the Iran-Hezbollah-Assad side is terrible, that a victory for the rebels, because there are so many jihadists, is

terrible, that it's all terrible. But in the real world, leaders have to make priorities among bad and worse options. So when you look analytically, recognizing that you're not interfering and you're not intervening—but when you look analytically at Syria, what is the worst outcome that you hope the world, America and others, tries to prevent?

YAALON: The worst outcome in Syria is a chaotic situation—but we can manage it. Chaos, meaning a vacuum in which al-Qaeda elements, terror elements will come in and will challenge us, will challenge Jordan, will challenge the stability of the region. I believe that we can manage it. And this is not the only outcome of any change. But so far, you know, we have come to be “solutionists,” they call it. We are looking for solutions. And we believe that there is a solution—we want it also now; we are “nowists” as well. Instant peace, like instant food, and instant democracy. All those “solutions.” This is not the way that the world is behaving, and I believe more in managing conflicts if you are not able to solve it. And most of the conflicts, you can't solve—you have to manage it, and to enhance your interests.

Looking to the current situation in Syria, it has become the arena for the Cold War superpowers, Russia versus the United States. It has become [this]. The Shia-Sunni conflict: Iran, on one hand, with Hezbollah supporting Assad, and the Sunnis, mainly supported by Saudi Arabia. It's a very important conflict. If the other side, if the Shia, is going to prevail, it's going to harm, I believe, many interests, American interests, in the region. What will be the posture of the United States? What will be the perception of the United States among its allies in the region? Is the United States reliable? Or not reliable? Or it's better to rely on Russia? [There are] many considerations we have to take into account in managing this kind of conflict: so whether Syria will remain as one political entity, whether it will be divided into sectarian enclaves with accountable leaderships, or whether it's going to be in chaos for a very long period of time. All of us should look at our interests, as this arena has come to be a playground for all these kinds of conflicts—trying to enhance our interests in order to benefit from the conflict and not to lose from it.

SATLOFF: My last question, Bogie, is about one country you didn't mention, which is Turkey. And I wonder if you could give us a bit of an update on where the Turkish-Israeli process of reconciliation is, now that it's been quite a bit of time since the president arranged the historic phone call between the two prime ministers.

YAALON: When it comes to money, we're now in the bazaar. But nevertheless, you know that we in Israel appreciated very much what was called the strategic relationship with Turkey. I benefited from it as the head of intelligence; actually we benefited from it, both countries, until 2004. The decision to change the relationship wasn't taken in Jerusalem, it was taken in Ankara. And since 2004, two years after the first elections in which Prime Minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdogan won the elections, his party, AKP [Justice and Development Party], we started to see the change to associate with our enemies—with Iran, with Syria, with Hamas. It was a change, it was done gradually, but the first signs were in 2004. And the peak was, of

course, the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla, a Turkish provocation—I can't say anything more than that, but it was a Turkish provocation—and the Turkish government was responsible for it. It wasn't an "NGO" activity. And the outcome was a crisis in which we tried to solve it—I personally dealt with it—with all kinds of terminology in order to put the relationship on another track.

We should not delude ourselves. We are not going to go back to the golden age of strategic relations, until 2004. But, yes, we have prosperous economy—trade—between the two countries, a matter of interests. We do not threaten each other, of course. And we wish to have the ambassadors back in the capitals—a diplomatic relationship—without any illusions. But hopefully, in the end, we will solve the crisis in the near future.

SATLOFF: Very good. Thank you. Alright, I'm going to turn to some questions from the floor. First, David Makovsky, then Dan Raviv, on the left.

David Makovsky, The Washington Institute: Thanks, Bogie. It's great to have you back here at The Washington Institute. Two questions: there've been these IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] reports which have shown that the Iranians have not reached [Israeli] Prime Minister [Binyamin] Netanyahu's redline. Do you see this as Iran internalizing the Israeli redline, or do you see that they're able through technical means of reconversion back from powder to gas [to] manipulate this redline? And the second question is, it's been announced that John Allen is the new security coordinator on the Palestinian issue. Can you say something that would characterize how you see John Allen's mission as being different from Jim Jones's mission just a few years ago on the same question? Thank you.

YAALON: For the first question, it might be that the Iran regime has internalized Prime Minister Netanyahu's redline and that's why they avoid reaching this redline of 250 kilograms of 20-percent-enriched uranium. And actually, they take the 20-percent-enriched uranium and convert it to fuel rods—it's like making an omelet from eggs—and you can't make it, almost can't make it [inaudible]. . . it's [not worth it] to make it the other way. Nevertheless, it might be that this is the reason. Having said that, [there is] no doubt that the regime's intention, and policy, is first of all to acquire the capabilities and to become a threshold state. And we know what we know, we don't know what we don't know. What is under the IAEA inspection is the enrichment process and the other civilian facilities. As far as we understand, the Iranian regime actually hides the weaponization part of the project—which is there. So I believe that the regime's intention is to acquire the capabilities to become a threshold state and then to be ready to make the decision when and how to break out—namely, to produce nuclear bombs. Of course, internalizing redlines like that—it's good news, but, generally speaking, the Iranian project is in the progress—in the process. They enrich on a daily basis more low-enriched uranium, 20-percent-enriched uranium, and I have the [historical] perspective. [In 2005], they had zero grams of enriched uranium; today they enriched almost eight tons of 3.5-percent-

enriched uranium. And as you said, they have 180 kilograms of 20-percent-enriched uranium. It's bad news.

What has been changed between us and the Palestinians security-wise is experience: the experience of the implementation of Oslo and the experience of the implementation of the disengagement plan and, of course, the changes in the region. All those change should be internalized in the process. And that's why I believe that these kinds of discussions about our security needs should be updated. And I believe that it will be updated.

SATLOFF: Dan, on the left, Dov Zakheim, Eli Lake . . .

Dan Raviv, CBS: Thank you, Mr. Minister. You mentioned that Iran is on the wrong side of all those areas of conflict and tension. What about Russia—is it on the right side and the wrong side, depending on where we're speaking of—and how are your government's relations in discussing these various crises? Please include Iran.

YAALON: The relations between Israel and Russia are very different from the Cold War era. We have diplomatic relations, and we have the opportunity to share our worries, as Prime Minister Netanyahu did in Sochi recently, or by phone calls between him and [Russian president Vladimir] Putin. And, of course, in lower-level channels we have the opportunity to discuss these issues. We are not happy with all the Russian activities in the region, but we have the opportunity to make our comments about it. One of them from the past: the Russian government decided to cancel the S-300 deal, not with Syria, with Iran, a couple of years ago. So when we have our own reservations regarding the arms deal, whether it is the S-300 or other capabilities—antitank guided weapons, air defense, rockets and missiles, ground-to-sea missiles, very sophisticated—we have the chance to make our reservations [known] to the Russian government.

I believe that when we look to the Russian policy, it's not against us. The main considerations are not Israel. The main considerations are what they call the superpowers game between Russia and the United States, many opened issues, like BMD [ballistic missile defense], no-fly zones, the future of Syria, and others. So they use these kinds of—even—arms, like the S-300. First of all, it's a card, it's a political card, for negotiating, for bargaining regarding their interests in other areas in which they have conflicts with the United States. So we are not happy with these kinds of activities. Unfortunately, our troops were hit by [the] Kornet, which is [a very sophisticated] antitank guided weapon, in the second Lebanon war. It was sold to Syria, and it was used by Hezbollah, the end user. And in the Gaza Strip, one of our school buses was hit. We had one casualty, sixteen-year-old student, again by a Kornet, which was used by Hamas, as the end user. It was sold to Syria.

So we have all these kinds of reservations when it comes to us, but generally speaking I believe that this is a game of the superpowers. And Israel is not the main

consideration on the Russian side, when they sell weapons or when they challenge the United States because of other conflicts all over the globe.

SATLOFF: Eli, Dov, can you both give your questions, and then we'll do another round? . . .

Dov Zakheim, CNA/former undersecretary of defense: Good to see you—and I also remember that briefing, I was there, in 20—

YAALON: You were shocked like Rob. [Laughter]

ZAKHEIM: I want to raise two elements of the peace process that you didn't mention and get your comments on them: the first is there's been quite a bit of discussion of the fact that when Prime Minister Netanyahu and Abu Mazen were in Beijing at separate times, the Chinese raised the whole issue of the peace process in a way that they never had before. Some people interpreted it almost as China trying to get into this whole business. I'd like your comments on that. And, secondly, your interpretation of the latest twist in the Arab Peace Initiative, with the land swaps. What do you make of that?

YAALON: For your first question, the Chinese, I believe, are not keen to be involved politically, but they do have interest economically. And they are ready to participate in many economic enterprises, whether it's Israelis or Palestinians . . . , they are ready to invest in it and to be involved because of economic reasons, which might give them some political gains as well. But the economic reasons are the main consideration, as far as I understand it.

Regarding the Arab initiative—just spin, to my mind. It's not a decision of the Arab League or whatever. And, generally speaking, about the Arab initiative, Prime Minister Netanyahu responded officially, saying, "We are ready to sit at the table without preconditions, with any initiative, but without dictations." And actually the Arab initiative, as it is, as we know it, is a dictation. First of all, you have to give up territory—'67 lines, Jerusalem, the refugees, [UN General Assembly Resolution] 194—and then we, the Arabs, will consider relations with you. It is a dictation. So, to sit at the table without preconditions, we are ready with any initiative.

Eli Lake, *Newsweek/Daily Beast*: Thank you very much. In this season of whistle-blowing and unauthorized disclosures, some U.S. senior officials have suggested America's allies would be less likely to share information with the United States, because they're afraid the United States can't keep its secrets. Do you worry that your most important ally can't keep secrets, and has Israel in any way reassessed what kind of information it would share with the United States, in light of all these leaks?

YAALON: What was the question? [Laughter]

SATLOFF: Let me interpret this: Will you publicly state for the American people that you don't trust the United States? [Laughter] Does that accurately sum it up, Eli? [Unmiked response from Lake.] But I accurately summed it up, I think, right? Do you trust the United States to keep a secret?

YAALON: Yes, we do trust.

SATLOFF: Okay, I have Michael, Barbara, Robert, and David. Briefly, one question each. Don't try to pull a second question.

Michael Adler, Wilson Center: Real quick, the White House announced yesterday that there would be U.S. military aid for the opposition in Syria. Do you feel this is enough—do you feel the United States is serious about doing, having a presence in Syria that could convince Iran it is ready to enforce redlines?

YAALON: I believe that the U.S. administration will do in Syria what will serve the American interests. There is an expectation, on the ground, on behalf of the opposition to get help. That's very clear. They are looking for help. They feel like the other side, the regime, is supported, even actively, by Hezbollah troops, by weapons—whether from Iran or from Russia—ammunition, and that's why they call for support. And they believe the U.S. administration will do what will serve the American interests.

Barbara Slavin, Atlantic Council and Al-Monitor.com: To follow on Michael's question, has Israel asked the United States not to send certain types of weapons, such as MANPADS [man-portable air-defense systems] or other sophisticated weaponry to the rebels? And your discussion of Syria suggests that you regard what's going on there rather like Henry Kissinger did the Iran-Iraq War—that it's a pity they both can't lose. Is that accurate?

YAALON: We are not in a position to dictate—to ask from the United States what to do exactly in Syria—but there are consultations, it's very clear, between the two defense establishments about the situation and what should be done over there. For the next question—might be. [Laughter]

Robert Freedman, Johns Hopkins University: Minister Yaalon, a year ago in the *Jerusalem Post*, you had a very long interview in which you described the differences between the United States and Israel in defining the redline toward Iran. Has anything changed in the last year to convince you that the United States and Israel are coming closer to an understanding on what will the redline be?

YAALON: What has been changed is that we have clarified in the last year the differences between our redlines. [Laughter]

David Pollock, The Washington Institute: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I was very interested to hear you raise the question, or the problem, of Palestinian incitement

and the issue of educating for peace on the Palestinian side. I want to ask you, is there something that you think could be done about this, even now. For example, if President Abbas goes on TV, as he did in November, and says that he does not want the “right of return” to Safed, and that the ’67 borders are the permanent borders of Palestine now and forever, do you think the Israeli government should acknowledge that and respond positively to statements like that? Or do you think that the Tripartite Anti-Incitement Committee should be revived so that Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans can discuss this issue now, even before full-fledged peace negotiations are resumed. Thank you.

YAALON: [There is] no doubt that deligitimization has become the main tool to fight us—delegitimizing Israel’s right to exist as a nation-state of the Jewish people. The good news about it is that they tried to annihilate the State of Israel by conventional force, and they failed. They tried to keep us under attrition war, terror, rockets, and they failed. And their main effective tool is deligitimization, you might call it even—you know, in Judea and Samaria, “popular resistance,” it is called. Stones, Molotov cocktails, demonstrations, and so forth. Not at a very high pace, but it is there. Why? Because it is well accepted, even among Western people who believe that the problem is occupation, apartheid, whatever, all these kinds of slogans.

Having said that, we believe that regarding incitement, the money given to the Palestinian Authority should be conditioned by changing the educational curriculum, the terminology. That should be the way to deal with it. We deal with it on the ground. Recently, it was published that I canceled the VIP [status] of Jibril Rajoub. And actually he’s able to move in Judea and Samaria—I don’t—he’s able to move but without VIP [status], and when he got an invitation to one of our political party conferences, I didn’t allow him to come to Israel. It’s my responsibility. Why? Because of incitement. So there are many leverages on behalf of the West, especially the money delivered to the Palestinian Authority, to be conditioned on reform in education. That should be the way.

SATLOFF: Bogie, our time has come to a close. I want to thank you so much for this broad discussion. Keep going—

YAALON: Just to say that, with all these challenges, I am very optimistic about our future. And my optimism is based on what I know about our strengths, which is based actually on our—let’s call it—human resources: the quality of the people. Waze is going to be sold to Google for more than a *milliard* dollars—

SATLOFF: A billion—

YAALON: —billion dollars. This is the outcome of our very well-known secret: our brains and our hearts, knowledge and spirit. That’s why we have a small and strong military. That’s why we enjoy the state of the art in science, technology, medicine, sophisticated agriculture. And that’s why we enjoy a prosperous economy, against all odds. We found gas in the Mediterranean—it’s going to be an economic and

strategic, geopolitical event. But I hope that we will be able to keep the quality of the people by keeping our education system for excellence and values. And that is my source of optimism. Thank you. [Applause]

SATLOFF: Thank you all very much.