

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL ZEEV SCHIFF MEMORIAL LECTURE  
ON MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

## **Israeli National Security in a Changing Regional Environment**

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## Israeli National Security in a Changing Regional Environment

**LT.-GEN. (RES.) BENJAMIN “BENNY” GANTZ**

**20th Chief of General Staff**

**Israel Defense Forces**



*Lt.-Gen. (res.) Benjamin “Benny” Gantz completed four years’ service as chief of the general staff of the Israel Defense Forces in February 2015. After joining the Paratroopers Brigade in 1977, he rose through the ranks to serve as commander of Ground Forces command, commander of Northern Command, defense attache in Washington, and deputy chief of staff. General Gantz received his undergraduate degree from Tel Aviv University and two master’s degrees—one in political science from University of Haifa and a second in national resource management from National Defense University in Washington D.C.*

It’s a pleasure to be here today. It’s a very respected institution, and I’m very honored to be here speaking at the memorial event for Zeev Schiff, who was a real icon for me in Israel. I was telling Rob before we started that, actually, when I met Zeev, and spoke with him, I was not who I am now. I mean, I was still Benny, but I knew less than what I know now. So, in so many ways, I really studied from him, and learned from him—not just having some background briefing or whatever meeting we had. And I really cherished his wisdom and, even more so, as much as I cherished his wisdom, I cherished his ethics, which we lack so much in today’s very shallow activities of so many people. And I think that we should look into men like Zeev, and his friends, and go back a little bit to more basics and ethics and things that we must maintain—because we can and we should change so many things in our lives, as changes arise. But we

should never give up our core ethics, core values, core interests—whatever those are. So it’s really a privilege to be here today.

I thought that the best way to interact would be to answer questions, if I can. And, if not, I see so many people around who can do it instead of me, so this is not a big issue. However, I do have ten remarks I would like to start with—short remarks, short paragraphs—and share my thoughts and we can take it from there anywhere you would like me to do...

When I was about to finish my assignment, I had an appearance in front of our foreign affairs and defense committee in the Israeli Knesset. Five people showed up out of fifteen, but there was the better five. Among them was [Shaul] Mofaz, who was the former chief of staff, and he obviously said a few things for me—and he said that he really envied me because I had only one prime minister and two ministers of

defense. So I said, you know, Shaul, you are right, but don't forget that you had only one president in Egypt and I had three. [Laughter] So if I really look at the last five years in the Middle East, I can really sum it up in two words: *balagan astrategi* in Hebrew, "strategic mess" in English. And it's a very dynamic situation, we all see that—I don't have to repeat it to explain everything that we all saw. And the voice of the crowds became so important—the voice of the streets became so important—so even if we look at Egypt as we see it *now*, I don't think it's the same Egypt as [former president Hosni] Mubarak left it when he went down—even though [President Abdul Fattah] al-Sisi kind of came back. It's a U-turn; it's not really 360 degrees. In between those two points of when Mubarak was in and where Sisi is right now, there is the crowd and the streets and the demands. And he understands that he NEEDS to fulfill something for those 90 million people in order to stay in power. And, if not, he's going to go down with the next demonstration, this way or another. And, in a way, everything is so dynamic, everything is so moving, and we see it with our own eyes—I've heard Shimon Peres once saying on another occasion, to deal with such an issue, it's like fixing your watch when it's working. It doesn't stop, it changes, keeps going on, and you still need to fix the watch type of stuff.

So I don't want to go over those issues, obviously. But I do say this: well, yes, it's the end of Sykes-Picot and that in certain regions, especially in Iraq, Syria, Kurdistan, and these areas—some of it might be in Libya as well; I hope in other places less—we see a new shape of statehood, following what used to be Sykes-Picot lines, and we'll see the characteristics will be more on tribal and local agendas than on artificial lines as they have been portrayed years back. So, well, you know that anyhow. So what I have to suggest with challenges has to do, I think, with three zones. And since we face such ambiguity, and we don't really know what's going to happen, we must find what needs to be done—for example, in the case of Israel, what is the defensive manner you're going to have facing an unknown future? We did it in Israel in two

areas, I think, fairly well: on the Sinai border and the Golan Heights border. Those areas, when you look at it operationally speaking, are totally different than they were, let's say, five years back. So we took the measures that needed to be taken . . . [in areas where] we know we must have serious defensive capabilities. The other issue that is crucial, even more crucial than before, is our intel capabilities—because sometimes it was tough, but it was simple. You have a state in front of you, maybe the fight is tough, but you know what you are doing. Now there are so many players. Herzi [Maj. Gen. Herzl Halevi] once showed me a slide, maybe I have to give [him] credit. [There are] chess players, about five people against each other on the same board. So it's not that two people are playing chess. So many players are playing around it, and the levers of state versus players have changed a lot. So you must have a very high level of intelligence—so we must continue this as well.

Then, what are the options? Over there, I would seek to try to increase as much as we can cooperation with others—because so many interests, and I will go back to it in a few minutes, are there for others as well. So we can have some kinds of cooperation that we didn't have, maybe, before.

Last but not least, I think it takes a huge amount of a new kind of leadership—because we must look again at our processes of how we learn things. I don't think that anyone knows what's going to be the future. No one really can promise "I know the solution for everything." He doesn't even know the questions, so how can he have the solution? And even the political leadership must understand that, in such a dynamic situation, strategic-learning processes are part of professionals but also political institutions, and political leadership and state leadership—because we have to come up with new strategies while those things are still happening. And maybe we don't know all the answers. So we go back to what we must do and make sure we try to prepare what we might be able to do in different cases in the future. But it is far more complex than what we used to have five, ten, twenty years ago. Okay, those are the political players, those are the

states, those are the interests, those are their capabilities, A leads to B, B leads to C, et cetera. It doesn't work this way anymore. It's a whole new dimension that we need to take into consideration. And it's true for the operational, strategic level, and it's also true for the state level, of how you approach things for today.

The second aspect I would come up with is the operational changes. So, we have seen it all. [During] the 1973 war, I was a fourteen-year-old kid. I was not in the IDF at the time. In our backyard, between the village I was raised in, my parents' farm, and air force nearby, there was a battery defending the air force base. And I went and helped there as a fourteen-year-old kid. You know, bringing stuff, bringing food, trying to be part of the action—I didn't see one plane throughout those three weeks. But when I was the chief [of staff] at the very same field of my parents' backyard and Grads and Qassam rockets fell, coming out of Gaza, it's a different threat in the very same place. And I ordered, as the chief of staff, to close those ... batteries. So in 1973, you know, it was part of my future, and two-and-a-half years back, we have adopted a new strategy with technologies and capabilities as far as defense, state-of-the-art. We all must remember it was made together with the United States and the support of the U.S. administrations, and I think that we are presenting state-of-the-art defense capabilities in Israel. I hope we won't need it, but unfortunately we will.

So we see the other aspects as well. So it's standoff trajectories, undersurface capabilities, more urbanized-area—the whole list, you all know it, let me not repeat it. Maybe I will just say 'new dimensions.' Cyber is definitely one of them. The IDF has moved a lot into this arena, beginning six or seven years ago, and we continue to do so. We started at the time of Gen. [Gabi] Ashkenazi. I continued it as a chief, and I know Gadi (Eizenkot, current chief of staff) is doing a great job on this, and definitely it's in the hands of our very, very talented guys. So we must promote this as well.

So if I have to ask myself, what would be the future lessons of this situation, in terms of operational

changes, I think I would come up with maybe four or five sentences: First, and very unsurprisingly, it takes budgets. And I think that we argue too much about this issue. Israel is not a state that can argue on this; it just needs to put the right amount that's needed, and it's not [rocket science], I don't think it needs that much—and put aside this arguing. It's ridiculous. We have so many other resources that we can argue—and resource allocation—that I don't think that just the security budget is the solution for all the other needs we have within the state of Israel. And we must maintain our capabilities and, really, our edge over the others. Go back to the United States that we are lately so much angry about it, but we should not forget the relations we have with the United States... I don't know [any other nation that has] any similar legislation that tells the president of the United States to report to the Congress every four years about Israel's qualitative military edge. It's really unheard-of type of stuff, and it needs to be appreciated by Israel—definitely by me. But we must maintain this qualitative military edge, and we must make sure that our forces are very, I would say, hybrid. We cannot allow ourselves to have forces that can deal with military stuff, and forces that can deal with terrorism stuff, and forces that can deal with this, or forces that can deal with that.

It's true that you must maintain some specialties, but altogether I think we have to be very hybrid, very balanced between air forces, ground forces, cyber, navy, et cetera, et cetera—very interoperable. We cannot afford not to be interoperable, and I think we are doing a great job on this one as well—and very, very flexible and being able to react. Once again, no one can really portray the future scenarios. This is gone. The scenarios as we're going to see them are different from what we envisioned. And when something will start, we will have to adapt ourselves very fast to whatever situation will arise in the future. And only by doing so, training so, practicing, can we do that. So all those changes in the operational arena—obviously, we'll be tackling them, and I'm sure that the IDF and the security

organizations—not just the IDF—must continue this as much as we can.

**IRAN.** I have followed it, like all of you did, very closely till last February—and from a very [good] distance since February till now. So, in short, I would say that, yes, I do agree that a better deal could have been reached. I do see the challenge—that the theoretical enrichment rights that the Iranians might have gained out of this are indeed a challenge, especially in those areas. But I also see the half-full part of the glass here. And I see the achievement of keeping away the Iranians for ten, fifteen years into the future—and postponing their capabilities of having a nuclear capability—and with the right price. Usually, they have said that war is an extension of the political activities. In other words, you have political activities, and if you cannot succeed, you use war. Well, they have had political activities, and they have saved a war, which I think is not bad in and of itself.

Now, I'm not naïve. I understand who we are dealing with. I understand why the Iranians want to possess nuclear capabilities. I understand that we must look into the future, and I think this is what we need to suggest. And I would look at the deal as it is: it's a done deal. And let's look forward. And looking forward, I would definitely promote—most important—the intel capabilities and the intel cooperation between the entire organizations and countries to make sure that we expand as much as we can the known areas, versus the unknown areas. And if they stay unknown, then you know that they are unknown—you all know this sentence, I cannot repeat it, right? But we must extend out intel capabilities. We must continue to build defensive and offensive capabilities that will be used as deterrents—or as an operational means, when and if needed in future times. We must strengthen the others around and do everything in our capacity to prevent the need of a nuclear race. Currently, I don't see the need for one... because if you can ensure that Iran doesn't get it, so why would the Saudis have it? Etcetera, etcetera.

And, last but not least, I would even dare to say that there is a need to reach out to the Iranian

people themselves, who have a large base of Westernized aspects. They want to live their lives, they see the Internet just as you and I see it. And let's turn it into a kind of a honey trap, if you wish, for future times. Now, from what I know, and I think I know, and from what I assess, and I think I have a basis to assess it, I'm not worried about Israel's security situation. We are the strongest country in the [Middle East]; we know how to take care of ourselves. And this issue is a worldwide issue that [affects] the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and all that sea trade, it affects the region, and then it has to do with us. Not the other way around. It's not an Israeli issue, then a regional issue, and then a world challenge. It's the other way around—it's a world challenge. Let the world deal with it. It's a regional challenge. Let's see how the region deals with it. And we will stay strong as we are. So I refuse to get hysterical on this. And I think we need to look into the future, and I understand that the United States of America has suggested it, and I'm sure the state of Israel will be there, and we should continue to promote our capabilities to face a negative development if it arises in the future.

**ARAB NEIGHBORS.** I want to say a few words about the Arab countries around us. Basically, I see them sharing with us the same interests. If I would—I'm sure the Jordanian chief would have said it; I believe, not that, I know, that the people from Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, the Egyptians definitely, even the Lebanese would share the same interests as Israel as far as seeing what's happening with the jihadists around them. And I think we should keep supporting those countries, helping them survive those events that we all see. I can recommend for the United States and other world leaders to promote human rights, stability, and only then democracy concepts of administration. But we all should prefer, for the time being at least, human rights, stability—that those might lead, eventually, into democracy concepts. If we try to bring democracy concepts, it will bring instability before the area is actually ready to deal with it, so you end up having such a huge mess. And I think we should try—and it's not too late, because we see what's happening in

Egypt, we see what's happening in Saudi Arabia, we see what's happening in other countries. We need to strengthen Jordan as much as we can. We need to support other places as well.

I go back for a second to operational needs and hybrid capabilities. It's true that most of our threats are kind of asymmetric threats as we see them right now. But given the fact that stability is not totally secure, we also must be able to cooperate against military forces—regular or semi-regular military forces...who knows what is going to be the future. And it takes time to build capabilities. So I would remember that as well.

**ISIS.** It bothers me more on the strategic values of it than it is bothering me on the operational piece of it. To sell a girl for a pack of cigarettes takes human values—as if they do not exist at all. ISIS respects nothing but itself; I doubt it respects itself, but it definitely respects nothing but itself. So I think the world cannot allow itself to let this phenomenon stay there. Yes, it's going to take a long journey—definitely. I agree. But we cannot accept the phenomenon. So if you ask me, it should be based on three pillars: fence it, fight it, and shape it. Fence—make sure that all the countries around it are strong enough to contain it in the region where it's at; and that it's not exploding as much as [it] can. And if it shows up in other places like in Sinai, like in Africa maybe, we must fight it there, obviously, as well. Fight it—whether it's defensive, whether it's offensive standoff or special forces. I think, down the road, maybe some more time, ground forces activities will have to be there. I don't see it is disappearing. So I don't think we'll be able to—the world won't be able to—give up on this. So it will take a coalition to do it. It will take a while to build it. But I hope it will happen. And shape it—in supporting whoever is there, the people there, and others.

But there is another point that I heard from a very—from an author, we had a private discussion, who told me, 'You know, Benny, you can win something, you can fight something with military forces, but you can win an idea only with an alternative idea.' And I think this is so much true. So at the same time as we fight it, I think we must think and try to

look for a positive idea, I will say, that can be used and promoted so that Muslims in places like Europe and other places, when they want to identify themselves, they might identify themselves with some positive alternative idea and not just by the jihadist idea as they see it now, which is bigger than what they are. Maybe Tunisia—a secular government was just elected after the Arab Spring has begun. Maybe this is a place you can support. Maybe you can support places like Egypt. Maybe you can support those places as a more positive idea that the Muslims can identify themselves with—and not just the victims of jihadists, as we see it now.

**SYRIA.** You know, I will not take the risk saying "two, three weeks," that type of stuff. What we might see currently, especially with the Russian support, is the establishment of an Alawite or smaller Syria enclave in the western part of Syria. There is a link-up of interests between the Alawites, Hezbollah, Iran, and definitely Russia, which needs Tartus, Latakia as places to operate in the Mediterranean from. The challenge will be that it might be kind of what we used to call the radical axis, of Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, with the support of the Russians. I see the downsides of it. The upside of it will be maybe we can stabilize and buffer a little bit the expansion of those jihadists into the western part of Syria and into Lebanon as well, which is fragile anyhow. So there are upsides, there are downsides. Maybe we see here some kind of 'Soviet Mandate,' if you wish, over Syria. But [we have to] come up with an understanding of how everybody continues to fight the jihadists.

Now, as we spoke of a little bit before, Rob and myself, why are the Russians doing it? Are they speaking with the Americans over Ukraine, but in Syria? Are they speaking with the jihadists—don't move on to the southern part of Russia as they're doing it here. Are they just doing it for [Bashar al-]Assad to stay, or do they want to secure it for someone other than Assad to walk in? So many things that might be an explanation—I leave it open, or I would say 'all of the above.' But that's the reality.

On the ground, there is a challenge of deconflic-

tion, and I don't know what happened in the meetings between Israel and Russia a week ago. But we must make sure that we are capable of operating when and if needed in this area.

**ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS.** Another hot potato is Israeli-Palestinian relations. I would simply say this: no one is going anywhere and, therefore, everybody should stick to what's important and give up all their other dreams. We need to stick to security and give up the dreams, as we would like to have them—all governments of Israel have said two-state solution, so this is not news. And the same goes for the Palestinians. If they want to gain sovereignty, they need to give up some of their dreams as well. And I think we need to stick with security. I won't get into details. It has been dealt with before, and I think we must promote it; from an Israeli perspective, I'm saying it because of Israeli interests. All governments of Israel have said that, so I think that that's the way ahead and it should be done.

**ISRAEL'S IMAGE IN THE WORLD.** This is tough—boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) and all those activities that we see—and we must find ways to promote those capabilities because, after all, we are not as bad as people say we are. We have been treating Syrians for four years now, way before Europe even started to think about it. I approved, personally, each and every one of them that came to Israel for treatment. Hundreds of them were treated already—and we are a small country.

Where would be the best place, really, to be a secure Arab in the Middle East right now? Israel. Where is the second-best place? West Bank. See what's happening in other places. See what's happening in Lebanon. See what's happening in Syria. See what's happening in Libya. See what's happening in other places. Where would be the most secure place to live? Hospitals, education, and everything—and, of course, all our capabilities, medical capabilities, agriculture, scientific, you name it. You know Israel very well, and I think we must find ways of explaining it in different ways—and not by governments, but

people-to-people. And I think that the new-media capabilities are very much in there, and I think we can use them far more than we have used them so far. And I think that we must not give up on this specifically.

**ISRAELI-U.S. RELATIONS.** I was once asked to come and speak in front of the U.S. Marines' Anniversary Day in Tel Aviv, and I summed up my speech then saying, 'There's no other Israel for the United States in the Middle East, and there's no other United States for Israel in the world.' And I basically believe that's the situation. Israel is a solid rock of stability, of democracy, of so many different capabilities that you all know very well. So it's not that there are not other countries which are very important, and precious, et cetera, et cetera, but we do represent something which is kind of a U.S. extension, if you wish—a forward post, if you wish. And the United States was there, I don't know, I guess eleven seconds or eleven minutes after the declaration in 1948 and from there ever [after]. And we must not forget it.

A friend of mine, Gen. [Martin] Dempsey, wrote me the other day on the present that he gave me: "Partners by duty, friends by choice." And this is exactly how I feel about the United States. Partners by duty—strategically speaking; friends by choice—values and people-to-people. And we must continue this, and we must promote it as much as we can. And I think it is so important to both our futures. I understand the differences, you know, between Israel and the States.

When I first met Martin Dempsey, someone sent me a link before I met him showing him singing "New York, New York" of Frank Sinatra. By the way, I think he sings better than Frank Sinatra. [Laughter] But when he came to Israel, I took him to a restaurant and I brought a few soldiers to sing something and I said, 'Listen, Martin, you know we don't gather intelligence on the States, but it doesn't mean we know nothing.' I had those soldiers sing for him "New York, New York." I was very pleased; he was very excited. And I was so happy that they tricked him.

So I paid a visit to the States, and we sit in his home, and we have dinner with a few of his guests. And then

twelve opera singers walk in and sing “Jerusalem of Gold” in Hebrew. So he wanted to show me, “Ok, you with your tricks, but we are the superpower here, don’t mess with me.” [Laughter] And I like this idea, because even in Haiti, when we were there—we were the first ones to come in, with the help of the Americans—and we did great for two weeks, we really saved so many lives. But we ran out of breath, you know, it was too far for us, too big for us. And then, I think it’s called the *Comfort*, it’s a huge hospital ship of the United States...ten thousand beds, everything in it. And so, we transferred all our patients to that ship. So basically, I had this idea. We start something, and then the Americans come and fix it. So that was my strategy for Iran. I said, ‘Let us start something. You will fix it later.’ They didn’t buy the idea.

U.S.-Israel relations are cherished from both sides, I believe. I’m sure that all obstacles which might be there, for several reasons, must be bypassed, and we must look into the future. I think we can look into the future. We have no alternative *but* to look into future cooperation.

Last, not least, I would say the most important one. I believe that the biggest and the most serious challenge, or issue, for Israel’s strength is inside Israel itself. It’s inside Israeli society itself... Every time, when I speak about it, I call for unity and not for uniformity. Those are two different phrases, as far as I understand the English. Jewish tradition had developed over the years not by agreeing with someone but by disagreeing with someone. When you sit and learn the Talmud, you disagree with something, you argue over an issue, and this is how you basically flourish, you expand your know-how, et cetera, et cetera. We talk about synagogue as a joke. You know, you have three synagogues: the one you go, the one you don’t go, and the one that you never go to. So all those kinds of things that have made Israel, and made the Jewish people in Israel, a very flourishing and advancing society [are not] a weakness—this is a point of strength, as long as you know how to keep it in a unified framework, with Jewish citizens and non-Jewish citizens as well. So I think this is a huge

challenge that the government of Israel needs to deal with; the society of Israel needs to deal with it. And I think it is important.

So, if I have to sum up what I’ve said so far, it’s very interesting—too interesting, I would say—but it is what it is. I think we will face a long period until it will restabilize itself—I don’t know, maybe ten, maybe fifteen, maybe twenty years. It’s not going to end up tomorrow. On a day-to-day basis, from Israel’s perspective, it’s relatively quiet but fragile on all fronts. But I don’t know on a day-to-day-basis assessment. It’s very fragile. We have to behave, and to act, sometimes with force, sometimes with not using force. And we have to be very responsible about how we act there. I am confident in the future of Israel. I’ve seen, and had the right to be part of, the idea that really represents the Israeli society in so many ways and see...how they do with each other, how they interact with each other. And I’m definitely confident with the security of Israel. And I see—currently, I see more and more of it. I’m also confident with the economy of Israel, with the scientists in Israel, with the other realms of activity as I get to see them even more so to those days as well.

So, if I have to think, what would Zeev have said about the situation, I risk to say that he would suggest to calm down, to get in the room, to talk about what’s really important for both sides, whether it’s America and the United States, what’s important inside Israeli society, stick to our core values and core interests, and just all the rest needs to be adjusted.

Thank you so very much. [Applause]

## Questions & Answers

**ROBERT SATLOFF:** Thank you very much, Benny, General Gantz. That was really quite a tour d’horizon: ten important topics that you hit in just brief remarks. Thank you. I’m going to take the opportunity of opening the discussion with a few questions and then turn the floor over to our guests. I’m going to ask you about a topic that didn’t hit your top ten, and that is the arena where Israel was engaged in fighting over

the last number of years. And that is Gaza. Israel has found itself fighting in Gaza three times in recent years. They're coming there more frequently. The battles are getting longer. There's no certainty that we've seen the last. So let me ask your assessment. What is the state of deterrence vis-à-vis Gaza? Do you expect there to be another round? And what else can Israel or other parties do to prevent another round and begin to address the more underlying problems vis-à-vis Gaza?

**BENJAMIN GANTZ:** That is definitely a challenge for us, both on the strategic level and on the operational level as well. The strategic level, or strategic aspect of it, consists of almost two million people who live there, and being run by Hamas, and having the right to live normal lives. *[audio problem]* I think that the IDF has, had, will always have the capability to overtake Gaza and regain the operational advantage...Israel will pay the strategic price for what we do, operationally speaking. So between choosing the strategic price and holding Gaza for so many years in the future *[audio problem]*, I think that so far we have done right. *[audio problem]* I think that lots of effort has been done in the Gaza Strip before [Operation] Protective Edge, and after Protective Edge as well, to promote humanitarian aspects: building, food, floods, commerce, soil. You know, hundreds of trucks go in on a daily basis, hundreds of trucks. I'm not sure, it's probably about five hundred or even more now.

I guess there is a gap between the military branch and the political branch of Hamas. It's kind of between themselves, and I think the chance for escalation is there. I'm not saying I see the interest of any of them to stop it, but...I think we should promote the situation in Gaza as much as we can. We need to maintain our readiness for future conflicts...

**SATLOFF:** All right, let me go up the strategic ladder and jump to the other end. You made some very important remarks about the Iran nuclear agreement: "A done deal, we need to look forward." Now, Israel of course is not part of the Iran nuclear agreement. Its major ally is—not just is, but its major ally is—the

principal promoter of the Iran nuclear agreement. Up until now, Israel and the United States had been close partners in all sorts of Iranian issues—intel, operations, all sorts of things. How do you see the U.S.-Israel partnership vis-à-vis Iran moving forward? How do you expect to deal with limitations and constraints? What sorts of new opportunities might there be for Israel to operate, for Israel and the United States to work together?

**GANTZ:** It's very, very difficult to really refer to these issues because on most things you cannot even talk. Israel is a sovereign country. If it ends up understanding that it needs to operate, then I guess it will operate. I would try and maintain the strategic relations, and what follows, in a very tight connection with the States, as much as possible. So, of course, we do a lot of things together. And I think we can share and we should continue to share, and I'm sure that we are doing it. So basically, I think we need to work on it together, and Israel has the right to decide whether it wants to act, if it wants to act, at any given time. But I think we have a lot to offer to the States, and I think the States has a lot to offer to us. And I think that we should follow this line of action. Now, it is very complicated, Rob, to talk about it because I obviously will not get into the details I knew until six months ago, and I don't know the details of today, so I am limited here. But generally speaking, I do believe we share identical interests on this issue. And, if that's correct, then all the rest is solvable.

**SATLOFF:** On the other side of your northern border, up until now, you've had to deal, of course, with Hezbollah and missiles and, regrettably, Israel has fought there. But now you have Russian troops, you have Iranian troops, on the other side of the Syrian border. This is a totally new dynamic for Israel—to have a foreign state deployment on your border. How do you deal with this? How do you address this? It's different than just dealing with the Syrians or just dealing with substate actors—but Russians and Iranians?

**GANTZ:** So, first of all, I'm glad that I'm not into the

details of what was in the trip to Moscow the other day. But it's very important to maintain open channels with whoever you can maintain open channels with. And if you don't have direct channels to those people, to some of the players, you must look for bypasses and find indirect channels to those people. Some strategic communication, I would say, is so important these days. Secondly, I would say again something that I said during my briefing here: the intel capabilities are so crucial, because if before we just had to find a needle in the hay, now there are several of them, and you don't want to touch all of them. So you still don't want to light up the whole haystack and the area. So intel goes back to the game as much as you can.

I guess we will have to be able to act directly against each and every threat that we think we need to act against. And, once again, I believe that if we see something which is really, really threatening us, militarily speaking, now, and we find no alternatives, then we need to act. And I think—we have done it before, and I'm sure we will do it in the future as well.

**SATLOFF:** Complex...

**GANTZ:** Yes, it is by far more complex, and as I said, it makes it—unfortunately, it makes it more interesting.

**SATLOFF:** You mentioned briefly, and then you dismissed, the controversy over budgets, money. Let me ask a question this way: if you had a marginal dollar, where would you spend it, in terms of Israel's national security?

**GANTZ:** If I have to simplify, if I will have only one dollar, I would put it on intel. If you will give me two, I will put it on offensive capability. If you give me three, I will invest in defense as well. But if you give me only one, I think intel would be the most important, because then you know how to allocate all your other operational or strategic resources. But if you don't have the right intel, you'll end up wasting lots of security energy...

**SATLOFF:** Let me ask one last question, and it goes to your tenth point, being that the most serious

security challenge to Israel comes from within. And I'm not going to try to pull out of you, you know, your own political aspirations—I'll let other people ask that question. If you could make one practical suggestion on this front, what would it be? What would you want—you know, you have your five minutes on Israeli national TV on what we should do to improve our internal situation, practically, operationally. What would it be?

**GANTZ:** It's not that much practically, but it's more philosophically. But let me use the liberty of answering anything I want, right? I would suggest to all fragments of the Israeli society to ask themselves not what it is that we are about to gain but what it is that we are willing to give up—because only by being willing to give up something do you leave space to the other one to approach. If everybody gives up something, we will be able to get closer to each other. If you ask me, that would be my philosophy. So, when you bring it into a practical perspective, so—the ultraorthodox say, for us this is important, but we are willing to do this and this and this. So people need to give up something; otherwise, no one can get closer to each other.

**SATLOFF:** Okay, thank you. Alright, I'm going to open the floor to your questions. I'll begin with my colleague David Makovsky and then come to your English grammar professor Leon. David, up in front?

**DAVID MAKOVSKY:** So, in keeping with your last remark, Benny, can you—I don't know if you've said anything in public about something that now might seem like ancient history. But the Allen Plan—I wanted to know if you could make any remarks about it. Can Israel agree to the idea of foreign forces in the Jordan Valley as part of any deal with the Palestinians?—point one. And the other point is, you expressed the confidence of the United States and Israel working together, saying there's identical interests on Iran. There's been a lot of debate in this country—as you correctly say, it's a done deal now, so we can look back over the summer. How confident are you that the United States and Israel could deal with

a cash infusion by Iran to Hezbollah and other allies, other proxy forces? How concerned are you about the IDF—you know, do you think the United States and Israel can handle this threat of Iranian cash infusion to the region?

**GANTZ:** I think that we can. I think we should—this is why international cooperation is so important: it's not just Israel and the United States, it's the international community that needs to understand that Iran acts in so many different places, and it needs to tackle those capabilities. So it's not just a local issue. So altogether, I think that, yes, risk might be there, but we can operate and cooperate worldwide against those aspects.

As far as security considerations, if I want to give you a simple answer, then, no, I don't think we can have international forces in the Jordan Valley. I think we should secure the borders. I don't expect anyone to get killed for me. And I think that the Jordan Valley, security-wise, is as important as it was before—or even more important if you see the last five, six years' development. So basically, that's what I believe.

**SATLOFF:** Leon, up in front here.

**GANTZ:** Spare me, eh. Mercy. [*Laughter*]

**LEON WEINTRAUB:** Thank you. I'd like to follow up on what you just mentioned about the prime minister's recent trip to Moscow. I'd like to ask you, what do you think, now that you're out of active duty, what do you think are the points he should have stressed to President Putin about Israel's vital interests in that area? And what, if any, are the few points on which you might have said to the Russian president: This is our bottom line. This must be respected—to the degree that Israel is capable of putting such a demand like that on a power like Russia.

**GANTZ:** Thank you, Leon. I think that, really, I'm not into the details of what has been said there—but I assume that, at least, from reading the headlines and—I'll ask the forgiveness of my journalist colleagues here—that I read only the headlines...I would risk to say that they talked about things that might be

given to the Syrians but basically will be transferred to Hezbollah and from Syria to Lebanon, as we have seen in the last few years so many different times. And we didn't leave this question open, but we acted against those actions when and if needed, and I think that it had—I assume that he clarified those things to the Russians as much as they can. And besides, and it goes back to John Allen's activities and others, it's a small area—so, you know, everybody's flying there, and there must be some kind of processes of deconfliction and making sure that we have the right ties and the right connections, and I hope that they talked about those issues as well. So, to go back to your question, and to sum it up, I would say, I'm not sure that we are that much of strategic engineers in the area that we can really influence so many things. But we have to make sure that what's important for us is well understood. And I think that the prime minister has delivered this message. I hope he did. I believe he did.

**SATLOFF:** In front here, Gil, then Marc.

**GIL TAMARY,** Israel's Channel 10: General Gantz, you spoke about the Iranian deal, and I would like to ask you about—what is your take on the way that Prime Minister Netanyahu handled and continues to handle the dispute with President Obama? Do you think that his strategy is helpful for Israeli interests? Or is it counterproductive? And the other point—just because Rob mentioned it: you spoke about leadership. Do you see yourself at any point in the future taking part in the Israeli political arena?

**GANTZ:** I'm not in the position to advise the prime minister on what to do. I believe that he has his considerations and calculus and experience, and overall responsibility to decide how he acts. So he doesn't really need my advice. I do believe that our relations, meaning Israel and the United States, are so important for both sides, and I believe that both leaders understand, and hopefully we'll continue to operate this way.

As for myself, those things currently are not on the horizon.

**MARK KIMMETT:** General, good to see you back.

**GANTZ:** Yeah. Thank you, Mark.

**KIMMETT:** I want to go back to the comments that have been made thus far about Syria. I thought I heard you say that you predict that, in the long run, it's more likely that we're looking at a rump Syria around Latakia and Tartus and that, by implication, most of Syria is going to become an ungoverned state. What does that mean for Israel's strategic posture in that part? Is that going to place an additional burden on the Golan and the forces you have to put up there? Is that going to require more resources? How do you handle a Jabhat al-Nusra state on that flank the way you've handled southern Lebanon?

**GANTZ:** Thank you, Mark. It's great to see you again. I think I need to connect the things that I've said about Syria and the things that I've said about ISIS, because when I talked about ISIS, you know, it's fencing, fighting, and shaping. So the future of those areas needs to be shaped—so, if you ask me, envisioning those areas twenty, maybe thirty years forward, those ungoverned areas currently being controlled by ISIS will be controlled in a different way which I cannot define yet. Small provinces, confederation, what would be the political future of those areas down the road, I cannot predict it right now.

Operationally speaking, we must be able to operate against whoever we believe we need to operate against—I would risk to [say] case by case, but I guess it's not that dramatic, but...And it goes back to these intel issues that I was talking about—because if you don't know who's doing what, then you're just using your hammers with no logic.

As far as the Golan Heights, we had a wakeup call on May 15, 2011. There was a demonstration by Palestinians in the northern part of the Golan Heights. They breached an old fence that was there and penetrated into the northern parts of the Golan Heights. We contained it, pushed them back. We still missed 2 of those 150 or 200 who penetrated, but we changed the entire operational concept the very same day, and the next two or three years after that, we built the

whole concept on the Golan Heights. So, yes, we will be challenged there, but we are way ahead of the challenge. And I hope we can keep it this way.

**SATLOFF:** I wanted to make sure that I asked you about your southern neighbor, which hasn't come up in this discussion, which is Egypt: you did reference the fact that you had three Egyptian presidents on your watch. Now you have one very powerful one. Could you give us a couple of words about Israeli-Egyptian military cooperation today? And, in your view, how important is the continued deployment of the Multinational Force & Observers (MFO) to your security?

**GANTZ:** I think—as Mark asked about the Golan Heights—we have seen similar events on the Sinai border, different terrorist activities along the border and mainly in the year 2011, and we changed the concept over there, and there was a whole different operational capability over there, and we're very satisfied with it right now. I don't think I would use the phrase "cooperation" with the Egyptian forces, but I would say coordination, which is somewhat less—not as high as cooperation. We share the same border. We must deconflict each other sometimes. We see things where we need to talk to the other side, and vice versa. And I think the role of the MFO has changed a bit from overseeing the agreement we have with the Egyptians to actually reflecting what's happening right now in Sinai, which is very important as well. So the MFO does fulfill an add-on mission, I would say—not just the original mission, which they're still doing, it can reflect...what's happening there, so I think it's important. But it's an addition to what it had to do before.

By and large, I think that Egypt is a nation-state, strong, and very important, not [only] because it represents a magnificent heritage and history but also because it has a strategic posture for future times as well, on the linkage between Africa and the Middle East and Asia, obviously Israel, the Suez Canal. Now they are talking—and maybe even started to build another lane in the Suez Canal. So

it's important that Egypt will be strong, stable, and, I hope, more developed, because there are so many people over there—so this is also important. And I think we can help them.

**SATLOFF:** Very good. Yes, on the far left.

**QUESTION:** Do you believe that the settlements in those areas are helpful or harmful to Israel's security, and if so, why?

**GANTZ:** All the issue of the settlements—it's also a political issue. Some of them, I can see exactly what are their security contribution to the state of Israel. Some of them are a political dispute which I'm not going to get into. So, in other words, you can see them both—some of them just political aspects, to be discussed, and some of them have major security importance.

**DICK MCCORMACK,** Center for Strategic and International Studies: There was an interesting report in the *Economist* magazine a couple of weeks ago that [IRGC Qods Force commander Qassem] Soleimani had had his wings clipped. Did you see that report?—and it suggested [Shiite cleric Ali al-]Sistani had contacted the Supreme Leader and said he had caused problems among the Sunni community in Iraq, and they clipped his wings. I just wondered if you had a thought on that subject.

**GANTZ:** Soleimani is running all over the place, but I haven't seen the specific article. I know that he has some challenges inside Iran, but he's been very much involved in other places. And I think he should be watched carefully.

**QUESTION:** General, here's something a bit more operational. When you were chief of the General Staff, you introduced a doctrine called the "War between the Wars" or the "Campaign between the Wars." And Gen. [Gadi] Eisenkot underlined the importance of that in the strategy document that he released. Why did you feel it necessary to call this a doctrine, and what did you achieve by doing that, as opposed to just a policy that Israel will take action whenever it needs to?

**GANTZ:** At the time, we thought that we should try and find not just an operational lane but more of a strategic trend, I would say—of what is it that we are trying to achieve. If we want to try and prevent a little bit, let's say, force buildup of our enemies—what is it that we are dealing with, what is it that are we not dealing with. So it gave it some more of a strategic trend rather than just operational lanes, I would say. And it helped to create a common understanding within the IDF, and between the IDF and the political echelon, of how to operate, whether it's interoperability within the IDF or across echelons of military activities and political decisions that need to be taken. So we found it comfortable for us, and it has a sexy name, you know, you have to come up with something. So you come up with this. [*Laughter*]

**GHAITH AL-OMARI:** Thank you. If I may go back to the neighbors, and I have two questions: the first one, about Jordan. From your answer to David's question, and from what I heard, there seems to be a concern in Israel that Jordan might be facing instability in the future. Can you speak to that, and also given the periodic diplomatic tensions between Jordan and Israel, what can you do to deepen the security relation between the two countries? The second question, if I may, goes to the West Bank. And under you and under your predecessor, the security cooperation between the IDF and the Palestinian security forces has gone to an excellent level. Can you assess the current status of this cooperation, its sustainability, and what can be done to actually deepen it and sustain it? Thank you.

**GANTZ:** I think that Jordan is a very important friend, ally, and a neighboring country in peace with Israel. We should do anything in our capacity to support it. We have great, I think, relations with the kingdom, with the king, with all its people. I know they are being challenged—millions of refugees already in Jordan are having an impact on the society inside Jordan. Some segments in the Amman area and other places are challenging the kingdom from inside. Now, they are by far more expert about what needs to be

done in Jordan than I am. They understand their society, their trends, their levers, what they can do, what they cannot do. And basically, I think that the world and Israel, to its capacity, needs to help Jordan as much as it can. It is important not just for Jordan's security, it's important for the entire area. And I think we need to promote it as much as we can.

As far as the Palestinians, once again, I don't see cooperation as much as I see coordination. No one works for anyone there. So far, the security level, from terrorist activities, not just, you know, like, stones or Molotov bottles, things a little bit more on the heavy piece of terrorism are being prevented also because the Palestinians care about it but mostly because we have our capabilities, and we keep our operational flexibility. And when we see that nothing is being done on the other side, then we go ahead and act against it. This is why we succeeded in keeping it in a stable situation. I think it's very important for the Palestinians to understand that with sovereignty comes responsibility. And if you want Israelis to believe that they can move forward, you must practice it on a day-to-day basis. It's good for you, and it's good for your future as well. And I hope they will continue it.

**SATLOFF:** Benny, I want to thank you very much. I think that one of the most important comments you made in your remarks had to do with the fact that

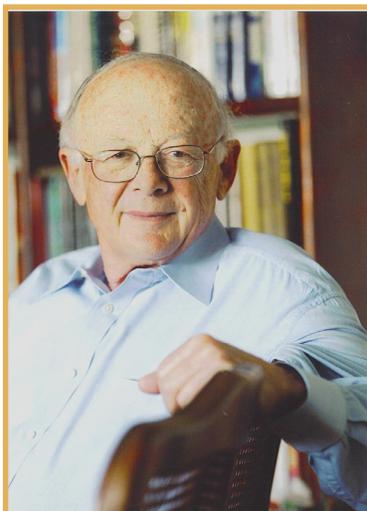
Israel today has answers for all its security challenges. And you're confident that you left your office in good hands. And that while the region around Israel is turbulent and uncertain and chaotic, that you believe that things for your country are, at least today, on good footing. And that's actually a powerful statement.

**GANTZ:** I said it, and I want to repeat it and emphasize something. This is by no means Switzerland. [Laughter] And we have so many challenges that we need to face. We may fail here and there, and we may feel pain here and there. And when things happen, this is not hiding[?], this is not engineering, this is the ambiguity of war—it's painful for both sides. So I'm not promising—I don't think anyone can promise, you know, every day a siesta. It takes hard work from everybody, but it also calls for confidence. And I know the Israeli society, I have seen it through my troops, I am seeing it now to a degree again every day. I do have a very unique experience of gaining a new perspective by looking at so many different things from a different perspective now. And I see the nice things about Israel alongside the difficulties that I've talked about. But as others have said before, in between pessimists and optimists, I will stay a realist, leaning to the optimist side.

**SATLOFF:** Thank you very much. [Applause]

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## ZEEV SCHIFF

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**Z**EEV SCHIFF was born in France on July 1, 1932, and emigrated with his family to Palestine, then under British mandate, in 1935. After service in the IDF as an intelligence officer followed by studies in military history and the Middle East at Tel Aviv University, he joined the staff of *Haaretz* newspaper in 1955.

In more than fifty years of reporting for *Haaretz*, Zeev established a worldwide reputation as the “dean of Israel’s military correspondents.” In addition to his reportage on Middle East war and terrorism, Zeev reported from such hotspots as Vietnam, Cyprus, and Ethiopia, covering some of the most significant and dangerous conflicts of the post–World War II era. His status as a paragon of journalistic integrity earned him the honor, in 1977, of moderating Israel’s first televised debate between prime-ministerial candidates.

Zeev won many important awards for his work, including the Amos Lev Prize for military reporting and the Sara Reichenstein Prize for interviews. In 1974, he was awarded the prestigious Sokolov Journalism Prize for his book *October Earthquake: Yom Kippur 1973*. In 2003, he was awarded the Chaim Herzog Prize for special contributions to the State of Israel.

His publications included two groundbreaking books cowritten with Ehud Yaari: *Israel’s Lebanon War* (1985) and the international bestseller *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising* (1990). Zeev also wrote *La Guerre Israelo-Arabe* (1967, with Eliahu Ben Elissar), *Fedayeen: Guerillas against Israel* (1972), *A History of the Israeli Army, 1874 to the Present* (1985), *A Lexicon of the Israeli Army and Defense* (1976, with Eitan Haber), *Entebbe Rescue* (1977, with Yeschayahu Ben Porat and Eitan Haber), *The Year of the Dove* (1979, with Eitan Haber), *The Saladin Syndrome: Lessons from the Gulf War* (1991, with Walid Khalidi), and *Track II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East* (2003, with Hussein Agha, Shai Feldman, and Ahmad Khalidi). His articles and essays appeared in *Foreign Policy*, *National Interest*, *Middle East Journal*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*.

Zeev maintained professional affiliations in Israel and worldwide. For many years, he served as chairman of the Israeli Military Writers Association. In 1984, he became a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. He was also a trustee of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies and a Brochstein fellow in peace and security at Rice University’s James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy.

From the founding of The Washington Institute, Zeev served as a valued friend and tireless source of wise counsel. In 1985, he authored the Institute’s second Policy Paper, *Israel’s Eroding Edge in the Middle East Military Balance*. Over the years, his Institute publications included *Security for Peace: Israel’s Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with the Palestinians* (1989), the companion *Peace with Security: Israel’s Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with Syria* (1994), and *Israeli Preconditions for Palestinian Statehood* (1999). In 2006, Zeev was named one of the Institute’s inaugural Lafer international fellows.

Upon his death on June 19, 2007, leaders, generals, scholars, and journalists throughout the Middle East and around the world praised Zeev for his insight, kindness, fairness, and integrity. He is survived by his wife, Sara; two children, Eyal and Hadar; and eight grandchildren.

*The Washington Institute established the Zeev Schiff Memorial Lecture Fund in 2007 to support the convening of an annual event to recall the life, achievements, and friendship of Zeev Schiff. This endowed fund has been made possible by generous contributions from:*

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