

Israel's Security Policy in a Changing Middle East

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Moshe "Bogie" Yaalon, Israel's former defense minister and military chief of staff, was the Rosenblatt Distinguished Visiting Fellow at The Washington Institute in 2016.



Brief Analysis

Israeli defense minister Moshe Yaalon discusses how Israel is calm but cautious about the latest developments in the region.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe "Bogie" Yaalon believes that Israel's recent period of relative peace could be shattered by conflict and instability spilling over from its neighbors.

Speaking to a standing-room-only audience at The Washington Institute on June 14, he provided a sweeping assessment of the risks confronting Israel today, from Iran's nuclear objectives, to the conflict in Syria, to the Palestinian campaign to delegitimize Israel. Below are highlights from his speech; for more, download the complete PDF transcript or watch video of the event.

IRAN

"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]n 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."

"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...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] they have 180 kilograms of 20-percent-enriched uranium. It's bad news."

SYRIA

"**A**l-Qaeda elements [are] 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."

"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."

"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."

JORDAN

"**F**rom 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."

EGYPT

"**I**n the current situation, our two defense establishments, Egyptian and Israeli, have good cooperation for the benefit of our two countries."

"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 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."

PALESTINIANS

"**[W]**e 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), [and] like agreeing that any 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...[Some pieces] of territory that [were] 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."

"[There is] no doubt that delegitimization 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 delegitimization."

TURKEY

"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 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."

Moshe "Bogie" Yaalon served for thirty-seven years in the Israel Defense Forces, rising to the position of chief of the general staff. Following his military retirement, he joined the Likud Party, winning election to parliament in 2009 and again this year. After serving as minister of strategic affairs in the previous government, he was named minister of defense in the new coalition government. Between his military and political careers, he served as a distinguished visiting fellow at The Washington Institute, where he authored the study [Lessons from the Palestinian 'War' against Israel](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lessons-from-the-palestinian-war-against-israel) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lessons-from-the-palestinian-war-against-israel>) (2007). ❖

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