

Israel's Search for Security and Peace

Apr 30, 2001



Brief Analysis

On April 27, 2001, Israeli minister of education Limor Livnat delivered a keynote address at The Washington Institute's Sixteenth Annual Soref Symposium. The following are excerpts from her speech. [Read a full transcript. \(templateC07.php?CID=174\)](#)

The End of Oslo " . . . The political road that brought us to the crossroads we are now at was one replete with navigational errors, steering miscalculations, and poor vision, traveled by fatigue-driven guides driving under the influence of reckless idealism and senseless naïveté . . . On February 6 of this year, the people of Israel made it eminently clear that they know it, and have left the road that led from Oslo to chaos and bloodshed in their homes and on their streets. The best of Israel's political pundits could not have imagined that Ariel Sharon would ever be elected prime minister of Israel, let alone with a plurality unprecedented in democratic nations. But they did not understand the people of Israel, and probably still don't. It was the most potent statement imaginable in favor of a new road and a more promising future."

Democracy and Peace " . . . Whether democracies will go to war with other democracies in the future is debatable. That to date, democracies have not gone to war with each other, is not. Hence there is great reason for hope. Democracy is on the march the world over . . . [However] there is though one region of the world where democracy is conspicuously not on the march; it isn't even on the horizon, [namely,] the Middle East. Outside of Israel there is not one [democracy]. In the past, that explained, in part, the special relationship between the United States and Israel. Today, that fact explains the nature of peace that can be achieved in the foreseeable future, and therefore, the only peace which must be pursued. It is the peace of deterrence, not détente. If more democracy means less war, less of it means more war . . .

"Will we ever get to a state of affairs that means less war, if we accept a status quo that means more? Ask the idealists. Realism does need idealism. One of humankind's most important primordial instincts is to effectuate change, to develop, to invent, to improve. But all that must be done in the context of what is possible. We can dream of the impossible, but we must live in a real world. For an individual, idealism without realism is dangerous. For a nation it is suicide.

"Peace then, between Israel and her neighbors, must be based on deterrence not détente. That is realism. But it is also idealism, because it is the only way of procuring democratic change and ultimately a peace of détente as well. It was not the détente of the 1970s that defeated communism, but the deterrence of the 1980s that left the Communists with no choice but to embrace democracy . . .

"The peace that we must pursue therefore, must be an interim functional peace, not necessarily a final and formal one. Or put differently, in order to achieve a formal peace we must first shun it, and instead pursue a functional and operational one. When we control the high ground of the Golan, Judea, and Samaria, we have functional peace. When we do not, we have the potential for life-threatening anti-Israel aggression. When we have a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty, we have rights and freedoms guaranteed for all the religions of the world and we have historic justice. When we have a divided city, we have a prize for aggression and the creation of a new Belfast or Beirut.

"I don't know if Islam is antithetical to democratic government, I hope not. That is for theorists to debate. What I do know is that to date it has proven somewhat impervious to its influences. I also know that other ideas that moved men, and which also seemed unchallenged by democratic freedoms, were ultimately affected by them. I believe that the same can happen in the Middle East . . ."

Concessions and Peace "If there is no clear victor, peace is impossible. Instead of seeing our territorial compromises over the years as a victor's overtures toward formal peace and regional understanding, our neighbors perceived our magnanimity as expressions of incremental defeat and weakness. There is no other way of understanding Arafat's rejection of Barak's offer . . . Not only must 1967 be redressed in Arafat's mind, but so must the sin of 1948 find atonement in the realization of the right of return. The moment it became clear that that was not going to happen — terror . . .

"For future peace, this new totalitarianism must be defeated. And to defeat it Israel must retrieve its own inner moral confidence . . . Just as evil empires of yesterday fell at the feet of freedom-loving ideas that motivate humans to remain calm in the face of trouble, secure in the righteousness of their cause, so too this new evil will find defeat . . . If Israel wins the battle against this terroristic tyranny, the world will win too.

"Practically speaking, this means no more unilateral concessions on Israel's part. Ninety-eight percent of the Palestinian Arabs living the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, are no longer under Israel's control. And that is the way it should stay. In addition over 40 percent of the territory has been turned over to the Palestinian Authority. Giving Arafat a sovereign, territorially contiguous state — with internationally recognized borders over the rest of the West Bank and Gaza as well — is out of the question. There is no rational explanation conceivable for doing something that would destabilize not only Israel, but certainly Jordan and probably the entire region as well.

"Until now the argument has been that without the creation of such a [Palestinian] state, regional and world stability would be threatened . . . That was the argument that the Palestinians used to convince the world that all Middle East problems depend on their [problems] being solved. Well over the last eight years, diplomacy was focused almost entirely on the Palestinian problem, and the Middle East became far more unstable, as Iraq slipped out of UN monitoring, Iran became more assertive and the Russians backed both [Iraq and Iran] against the United States. The new Bush administration is to be lauded over the fact that it has rejected this canard of Palestinian centrism. It is a rejection long overdue . . ."

Jewish Values and Zionist Idealism " . . . Because the temptation to jump ahead too quickly to the détente period and bypass the requisite period of deterrence is so great, a democracy needs stamina and ideological conviction to persevere through times that make sunshine patriots get up and run. If a population is usurped of its *raison d'être* and sapped of its moral strength, it will not be able to confront the existential challenges to its survival . . .

"By calling into question every established norm, by defacing everything sacred, by obfuscating the difference between right and wrong, by shattering the national ethos, by universalizing national particularity, and by moving the periphery to the center, the doctors of moral and historic relativity foster a life-threatening osteoporosis that effects the national body. Even the most skilled diplomat cannot reach a stable peace, when his own nation is infected with such fundamental self-doubt. Teaching traditional Jewish values means first and foremost those values which provide the basis of the Judeo-Christian ethic, which in turn provide the underpinnings of democratic freedoms."

◆ This Special Soref Symposium Report was prepared by Liat Radcliffe.

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