

# Challenges Facing Israel and the World

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As you know, Israel is a country that receives a great deal of international attention, far exceeding its size. Some of this attention is positive, some less so—and all of it makes the task of Foreign Minister very challenging.

I believe that one of the deeper reasons that Israel generates such passion and interest around the world is that the challenges and issues that we face as a country are really a reflection of the core challenges that our planet faces.

Throughout history, this tiny piece of land has been at the crossroads between cultures, values and conflicts, and it is no less so today. Israel is a Jewish democracy in the heart of a turbulent Middle East.

Today, I would like to speak about these issues and draw attention both to the dangers and to the opportunities before us.

In order to take calculated decisions, especially in the Middle East, it is often necessary to take an outsider's point of view. We need to rise above daily events and subjective emotion, and try to identify processes and trends in order to determine what decisions should be taken.

It seems to me that anyone observing the present global situation can see that the conflicts that threaten our world today are less about territory and more about values. This is not so much a clash between nations or religions, but between moderates and extremists; between those who fight terror and those who give refuge to terrorists; between those who are tolerant of differences, and those who reject the legitimacy of any ideology but their own.

Because this is, at heart, a conflict about values, it is also a conflict that crosses borders and national identities. We have seen this in the global terrorism phenomenon that has reached from Moscow to Bali, and from New York to London.

We see it also in the Middle East, where the culture of radicalism and rejection is threatening the stability not just of Israel but of an entire region.

I often hear it argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the source of all the tension in the Middle East. But this argument fundamentally confuses symptom and cause. The

truth is that the conflicts in the Middle East are a *consequence*, not a *cause*, of radicalism and terrorism. It is the ideology of hatred and extremism of rejection of the other so prominent in the Middle East, that fuels conflict, and has so far prevented us from reaching a lasting settlement in which the rights of all people could be accommodated.

In the Middle East especially, the power and reach of the radicals has been multiplied by a deadly mixture of rogue states that export extremism and weak states that incubate or tolerate it.

We have seen this in the growing strength of groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, working with Iran and Syria, in order to increasingly dictate the regional agenda and sabotage any viable efforts at peace.

Clearly, the most prominent example of the rogue state is found today in Tehran. The Iranian regime denies and ridicules the Holocaust. It speaks openly about the need to wipe Israel off the map, while pursuing the nuclear weapons to do so. And it finances and directs terrorism in massive proportions as a way of advancing both its ideology and its interests.

This regime is a clear and present strategic threat to Israel, but it is no less a threat to the values of the international community and the security of the region and the world as a whole.

In fact, many countries in the Middle East particularly the Arab/Sunni regimes have an increasingly acute sense of the threat they face from a nuclear Iran.

These countries do not necessarily have relations with, or sympathy for, Israel but they are no less threatened by the prospect of a radical, nuclear-armed Iran on their doorstep or the fear that non-conventional technology or weapons will be transferred from Tehran to terrorists.

One wonders what more needs to happen for the world to take this threat seriously and to do what is necessary to confront it. We have seen dark periods in recent history when the writing was on the wall and the world failed to react. Is it possible that, like then, the writing is on the wall, the threat is clear, and the world remains indifferent?

Today, there is little doubt in the international community about the magnitude of the Iranian threat or the nature of the regime's intentions.

But one can still hear from some capitals hesitation and excuses. One can hear talk of the possible effect of oil prices, or the need to give more time, which, of course, the Iranian regime exploits only to move closer to nuclear weapon know-how and capability. There are some who perceive the prospect of a nuclear armed Iran as a single, isolated, and somehow manageable, problem. They are deeply, and dangerously, mistaken.

If it becomes clear that the world is not going to seriously confront this threat, this can lead to a domino effect. Some countries in the region may seek protection in nuclear weapons of their own.

Others may feel compelled to appease or submit to the Iranian regime. In either case, we will face an unacceptably dangerous and volatile situation.

For anyone who still had doubts about the threat posed by Iran, the recent conflict in Lebanon should have removed them. Some mistakenly look at this war as another round in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In truth, it was a confrontation between Israel and Iran.

Though the war took place in Lebanon, it was the case of a rogue state and its well-armed proxy, Hezbollah, taking advantage of a weak state, Lebanon, in an attempt to impose their agenda on the region.

For Israel, the war revealed some considerable shortcomings which we must correct, but it also produced a significant setback for Hezbollah and a historic Security Council resolution that creates a genuine opportunity for positive change.

Our decision to halt the military operation and give a chance to the international community and resolution 1701 was not an easy one.

The history of our people and our state has, unfortunately, taught us to question whether we can rely on others. Indeed, even in the Lebanese context, many Israelis point to the fact that it was the failure to implement another resolution, U.N. resolution 1559, which called for the dismantling of Hezbollah, that produced the suffering and destruction that both Israelis and Lebanese endured last summer.

I am not naïve, I live, after all, in the Middle East, but I believed at the time, and I believe now, that resolution 1701, if properly implemented, can help turn Lebanon from a weak state where terrorism flourishes, into a responsible state that asserts sovereignty over its territory and respects the rights of its neighbors, including Israel.

This is a critical test for Lebanon and the international community. Success in the full and immediate implementation of resolution 1701, including the release of the Israeli hostages and the proper enforcement of the arms embargo, will be a success for the forces of moderation in the region. It will be a success for peace, and it will have positive implications in the Palestinian arena. But, by the same token, failure will carry a high price.

Ladies and Gentleman, The recent conflict in Lebanon also helped to reveal an important re-alignment of interests that is underway in the Middle East. In the case of Lebanon, all the moderates of the region, Israeli and Arab alike, share a mutual interest in helping create a stable and responsible state that can stand up to the extremists and their supporters.

This same objective should unite moderates throughout the Middle East in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I believe deeply that the establishment of a peaceful, viable and responsible Palestinian state is not just a Palestinian interest. It is an Israeli interest, and it is an interest of all those who want the region to prosper.

There is, in fact, a common vision that binds Israelis, moderate Palestinians and the international community together. It serves the goals of both peoples and represents the basis of a genuine and lasting peace.

At its heart, is the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Israel believes in this vision, and from this vision we have drawn our principles for peace.

The first is inherent in the very idea of two states. For the Jewish people, Israel was established to be our national homeland. It was the solution for Jewish refugees, the realization of Jewish rights.

And this is the true calling of the future state of Palestine: a national homeland for the Palestinian people—the solution to Palestinian claims, the fulfillment of Palestinian dreams, the answer for Palestinian refugees—wherever they may be.

On this question, the United States has been willing to state clearly that the claims of Palestinian refugees must be resolved through the establishment of a Palestinian state, rather than in Israel.

Europe has so far refrained from making a similar statement, even though it is clear that the claim of return is incompatible with the two-state solution that EU itself has promoted.

Indeed, Europe has been silent even though it may be precisely declarations of this kind that can help moderate, and often weak, leaders to persuade their people to distinguish between realistic demands that can be part of a peace settlement, and unacceptable demands that only perpetuate the conflict.

The second principle for peace is drawn from the concept of living in peace and security. On the basis of this principle the international community has insisted that the State of Palestine that emerges next to Israel cannot be a terror state.

It is the last thing our troubled region needs and it is for this reason that the Roadmap insists on an end to terror and its support infrastructure.

An end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will also require agreement on a common boundary. There are those who believe that if only we could turn back the hands of time to 1967 all would be resolved. But, in 1967, there was no Palestinian state, there was no link between the West Bank and Gaza, and there was no commitment to lasting peace.

A two-state solution requires the creation of a new reality, which never existed in the past. For it to succeed, both sides will need to commit to compromise and to believe in co-existence.

Israel, its government and its people, are deeply committed to such a peace. Stagnation is not in our interest and it is not our policy. The people of Israel have been called upon to give up part of their historical heritage to make room for the dreams of others, and they have made their choice.

It is for this reason that we embarked on the painful process of disengagement, hoping to create an opportunity for peace, though sadly, we received terror in return.

It is for this reason that we are ready now, as we have been ready in the past—as we worked with Egypt and with Jordan—to reach out and engage with all those who share this vision and these values, including Chairman Abbas and the moderates in the Arab world, in order to turn the dream of peace into reality.

It is for this reason also that it is so important that the international community refuse to grant legitimacy to a Hamas led government that seeks to transform a resolvable political dispute into an endless religious confrontation.

A Hamas led Palestinian Authority, refusing to adopt the three fundamental requirements of renouncing terror, recognizing the right of Israel to exist or acceptance of all previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements between Israel, is a failed entity.

The world cannot accept a situation in which a terrorist organization is regarded as a legitimate political partner, part of the governing entity of that country, while continuing its involvement in terror.

The three requirements set out by the international community for any PA government to fulfill are fundamental preconditions for responsible governance as much as they are the basic building blocks of peace.

These conditions are not an obstacle to peace or to the establishment of a responsible Palestinian State; they are a crucial ingredient for their realization. They should not be open either to negotiation or to vague formulations. That would be a recipe for future conflict not future peace.

To overcome the forces of extremism and realize the dreams of peace, much will be needed. We will need to stand up against terrorism, as firmly as we stand up for peace.

We will need people and leaders throughout the Middle East to see that we, Israelis and Arabs alike, face a common challenge.

This is not a zero-sum game. Not every Israeli interest is at odds with Palestinian interests. We all stand to benefit if we embrace the blessings of co-existence, and take responsibility for our region's destiny.

Ladies and Gentleman, I have spoken today of the global conflict between moderates and extremists and its expression in the challenges that Israel faces.

In confronting these challenges, Israel is profoundly grateful for the leadership and the friendship of the United States. I know that you have just held dramatic mid-term elections here in the U.S., but the special relationship between Israel and the people and government of the United States transcends party lines.

It goes beyond a strategic alliance of interests, or a shared view of the threats we face, and is based on a genuine and unshakeable alliance of values.

I believe also that across the United States there is a deep understanding that Israel has lived for many years on the frontlines of a conflict over the same values that the U.S. holds so dear. We face this conflict on different fronts: as Jews against the dark forces of anti-Semitism, as Israelis against the enemies of our statehood, and as members of the free world against the merchants of global terror.

We have been guided in this conflict by two core values that are embodied in our declaration of independence and shape our national identity.

The first - that Israel, with Jerusalem at its heart, is the national homeland of the Jewish people - their refuge from persecution, their first and last line of defense.

The second - that Israel is a democracy; that the values of justice, peace and humanity - first expressed by the prophets of Israel - are an integral part of our nation's sense of mission.

We share the same values as the community of democratic states. We are ready, and proud, to be judged by them. They are our own. But too often there is a gap between perception and reality. In our world, too many leaders make decisions not on principle or on the basis of what they know, but on the basis of what their public perceives.

Sadly, in many parts of the world, Israel is seen mainly through the lens of the Arab-Israeli conflict. And too often, that lens is distorted. To many, this conflict is portrayed as a clash of David and Goliath, with Israel perceived unjustly as Goliath. But this simplistic image ignores the fact that Israel remains a threatened democracy in a hostile region.

We have, of necessity, the capacity to defend ourselves but we will always be constrained in its use by our values. And yet, we face an enemy willing to use all the means at its disposal, to kill without restraint and without distinction.

Every innocent casualty in this conflict is a tragedy. There is no difference between the tears of a grieving Israeli mother and a grieving Palestinian mother.

But there is a critical moral difference between the terrorists that hunt down civilians, and the soldiers that target terrorists, while trying to avoid civilian casualties. And it is incumbent upon the international community to uphold this basic moral distinction.

Ladies and Gentleman, the dangers Israel faces are intense and varied but they are, in essence, the same dangers the free world as a whole faces. Similarly, the values that guide Israel in confronting these dangers are the same as those shared by the democratic world, even if those values are tested in Israel in a way that many democratic countries have, fortunately, not yet had to experience.

We expect the international community to stand with us in our struggle against extremism, and for peace, because it is also the international community's struggle. We expect the international community to reject the attempts to de-legitimize Israel, and work with us to defend our legitimate and basic interests, because they are also the international community's interests. Our defeat is your defeat. Our victory is your victory.

It is in this spirit, that I hope that all moderates can join together to protect and advance the values that we share in order to build a Middle East, and a world, that gives peace and security to all peoples and supremacy to none.

Thank you.

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