



## How to improve Israel's Foreign Policy and Foreign Service?

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Today we commemorate the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, of blessed memory. On this occasion, it is important to talk about the rift within the nation of Israel. I would not have believed that 22 years after such a horrifying, callous and shocking political assassination we would find ourselves again surrounded by so much incitement, verbal violence and fanaticism. We can sense the incitement and the rift: they are constantly intensifying. Yet in my opinion, 80 percent of Israelis, Jews and Arabs alike, really want the same things: they want security, they want the government to offer them a political vision for the future and they want a just economy. We can consolidate a consensus around these principles, and we should strive to achieve them every day.

Does anyone know what Israel's foreign policy is? Is anyone able to describe it in three short sentences? I don't know what it is. And we all know that we don't know what it is. Sometimes, when you don't know something, this is a sign that you don't know. And sometimes it is a sign that the thing doesn't exist. Sadly, I think that the State of Israel has no coherent, clear foreign policy. We have ministers who make headlines. Any minister who wants publicity goes to a television studio and makes declarations about a united Jerusalem or about Iran. However, not every such statement has significance, especially in the current explosive situation in the Middle East. In my opinion every ministry and every minister should deal with their own matters. When the Minister of Transportation, for example, says that "we will use military force in Iran," does anyone think this is the result of a cabinet discussion? Does anyone discuss the ramifications of such a statement? No. These words are damaging, in opposition to what people tend to think. When the Minister of Defense, for example, blames Hezbollah for firing on the Golan Heights and explains the reason behind the fire, but the army responds by saying that it was unaware of the incident, this is significant. I dealt with Hezbollah for around 20 years, as an intelligence officer and in reserve duty. I am well acquainted with the organization and its way of thinking. Upon hearing this, Hezbollah presumes that the Minister of Defense has a reason for making such a statement, that he is preparing the ground for something. These things endanger us and our security.

Likewise, Israeli behavior towards the radical right wing in Europe jeopardizes us. The *Likud* party invites the leader of the extreme right-wing Austrian Freedom party, Heinz-Christian Strache, a man with whom President Peres refused in the past, to visit Israel and welcomes him. But, the Israeli government must not accept the extreme right-wing government in Austria. The fact that they find Muslims objectionable does not mean a thing. Anti-Semitism is always anti-Semitism. We cannot differentiate between anti-Semitism directed against

Muslims and that against Jews. Anti-Semitism always has the same form and the same face. I call upon the Israeli government to wage a campaign against this, to talk to our partners in Europe, and to make it extremely clear that we will not accept that a country like Austria, with its history, will be governed by a party whose leaders propagate such anti-Semitic messages. We must not accept this because if we do so, we will see it increasingly frequently, in other European countries as well.

Our foreign policy has no plan, no management, no leadership. There are lots of pretty pictures and good speeches. We excel at that. Our Prime Minister had a special envoy, Yitzhak Molcho, who has just recently quit. Senior figures in Israel's security establishment, who should have been aware of what this envoy was doing, did not have a clue. This is a frightening situation. How can we conduct foreign policy in this way?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is housed today in a much more beautiful building than in the past, but the Israeli diplomatic service has been broken into five or six different bodies. There is no longer any real and professional foreign service in Israel, which manages coherent diplomacy, aided by diplomats who are aware of the necessary nuances, intricate historical details and all the associated sensitivities. This no longer exists, as though it has no value or meaning. I meet many foreign ambassadors and consult with MFA veterans who all describe the magnificent foreign service which Israel constructed over the years and which this government has succeeded in destroying.

We have excellent people in the MFA but we have too many ministries dealing with foreign affairs: public diplomacy, strategic topics, countering the BDS (Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions) movement, and so on. I come from the world of management and this is not the way things should be managed. When there is no overall vision, we manage nothing. The problem of BDS, for example, is indeed serious and I condemn it. We need to continue fighting against BDS, which is led by people whose attitudes border on anti-Semitic and even cross into it. They are not only concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Yet we, through our actions, empower the BDS movement and give the people leading it more scope than they deserve.

Conducting a foreign policy like that of Israel is no simple challenge. There are countries in the world that cannot understand why we do not solve the Palestinian problem, and we do not always know how to tackle their questions and explain the matter. However, a professional foreign service must be familiar with the matters and know how to deal with the difficult questions. A professional foreign service needs to understand the complexity of the issues and deal with them wisely.

The increasing politicization of the MFA and the restriction of professional and intellectual freedom among Israeli diplomats are not coincidental. This is intentional: the government wants it this way. This is a matter of decision and part of a strategy. It is part of the same strategy which limits the power of the police, the budget department of the Ministry of Finance, and the Civil Service Commission. The present government does not believe in the professional system which it operates. What happens to our foreign service is one example of a broader phenomenon, and in order for this to change the government must simply want it to be different. This is not a technical or complicated matter. If the right people are appointed, trusted, and the tactics and strategy are defined for them – it should work. This is a matter of management.

We will build the foreign service anew: one ministry, the MFA, assigned with developing a strategy and with implementing it from beginning to end, without dividing the responsibilities between a number of ministries. Everything connected to Israel's foreign relations will be concentrated in the hands of the MFA. We will construct it professionally and appoint the best people. I will not allow political appointments in any managerial positions under ministers. A strong foreign service is part of our national security, just as social cohesion is a vital part of our security. Our security relies not only on tanks, planes and submarines, but also on Israel's foreign relations and on its social cohesion.

The Prime Minister is angry that we do not applaud the political achievements made by the State of Israel. We actually do. We think that the State of Israel is a source of pride for all Israelis. The State of Israel gives the world technology, academic scholarship, research and knowledge. In Israel, we have amazing people in industry, agriculture, high-tech, and civil society. Israelis are involved in these fields all over the globe, yet we are continuously told that the whole world is against us. I do not believe that this is the case. The government instructs us from a young age that everyone is against us and this generates a societal certain reaction, one in which I do not believe.

I look at Israel's challenges, including the real and present threat which Iran poses. The Iranians say that they want to destroy the State of Israel and we must treat this with due severity. We must prevent them from achieving the ability to do so. We need to continue and insist that the nuclear deal with Iran will be corrected and changed. The first part of the deal stipulates that Iran's nuclear plan will be frozen for ten years; but according to the second part, once these ten years have passed, the Iranians can again start enriching uranium. The thinking behind this is that during the first ten years the Iranians will acquire the world's trust. I do not accept this. In the last two years Iran has continued to express its desire to destroy the State of Israel. So how can we trust them? Iran's intentions are not changing and therefore the second part of the agreement must be corrected. For this to happen, we do not need speeches. We need quiet diplomacy. This rule applies in all negotiations, be they political, security or financial. We need wise and quiet diplomacy and not speeches, however impressive and excellent they may be.

With regard to the Palestinians, there is a big difference between Netanyahu and the Zionist Union. I believe in the solution of two states for two peoples. I think that this is the only solution and do not know of any other relevant one. I believe that we must begin negotiations. Israel must initiate this. We are the strong player in the Middle East and therefore it is our obligation to do so. We must enter negotiations even though there are many obstacles. I do not know if it is possible to reach an agreement today, and I do not know whether the partner we have on the Palestinian side is capable of this. There are big question marks regarding this among senior figures in Israel, Arab countries, the Palestinians and the Americans who were involved in the earlier negotiations, with whom I have met. That does not mean that we should not try. We need to try although we do not know if it is possible to reach an agreement with Mahmoud Abbas, because this is in our interest. Today we are playing a game of accusations. This is Israel's strategy in the Middle East but it is childish and will lead nowhere. It is not a strategy that the country should be adopting in the long term, it is perhaps a tactical tool, but not a strategy.

I believe that 80 percent of Israelis want a diplomatic horizon, a resolution to the conflict, and a moderate policy. This is also evident in surveys, which indicate that a large portion of *Likud* voters support the solution of two states for two peoples. If there was a leadership which would talk about this positively and not negatively, even more would join and support

the two-state solution, because the public listens to its leaders. If we explain to the public that it is impossible, gradually the public will be persuaded that this is the case. I think that it is also possible to convince them of the opposite.

When we will be elected, I intended to strive for a diplomatic horizon, not deal with illusions and not create spins in order to buy time. I will strive for negotiations that will bear fruit and I will take positive unilateral steps to generate trust in the Middle East. In the present stalemate no one has any hope, in particular the younger generation. We must work to create a feeling that something positive is going to happen. This will also make it easier for Israel in the international arena and improve its global standing. The world expects us to take the initiative, not to leave the stalemate as it is: this is not effective for anyone.

Any agreement that we seek to reach with the Palestinians requires a regional initiative that involves the other Arab states. However, clearly, we cannot only seek progress with the Arab states without advancing with the Palestinians. Our current government tells us that we can reach an agreement with Saudi Arabia without moving forward in the Palestinian channel: this is untrue. Regarding the Arab Peace Initiative, I think that we need to accept it, but with some changes and adaptations. We must say yes, we accept this concept of a regional Arab-Palestinian peace initiative, and understand that we also need the involvement of the Arab states in the process. Technically, it is simply impossible to reach an agreement with the Palestinians without their involvement. For example, take the refugee issue. There will not be a right of return, so not everyone will be able to go to the West Bank. What will happen to the refugees in Lebanon? We need to sit down and talk about this. There is also a need for money to fund certain aspects of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, and in this respect the Gulf states are very important. It will be necessary to reach a decision regarding Jerusalem. And whatever the decision on the topic, there are key figures in this regard within the Arab world, such as the king of Morocco. We need to understand that we cannot act alone.