



TRANSCRIPT

SHIMON PERES

President of the State of Israel

to discuss the current situation in the Middle East

The discussion will be moderated by

TERJE RØD-LARSEN

President

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TERJE RØD-LARSEN:

Shimon, it's a real honor to have you here at IPI. As you know, President Peres holds a distinguished place in Israeli politics and is, and I think that's very understated, an extraordinary statesman.

Mr. President, it really is a great honor to welcome you today to the International Peace Institute, IPI, and we are delighted that you have agreed to meet with our group of ambassadors from the countries of the Security Council as well as other countries which play an active role at the United Nations.

I think we have, around the table here, crème de la crème of the diplomatic core and representatives of the secretariat here this morning. I think you're going to see the French ambassador here. Where is he? There he is. I think you particularly are delighted because the French ambassador is also a former ambassador to Israel. I think you recognize him, and we also, I think, have another former ambassador to Israel who is joining us this morning. No names mentioned. Oh, there is a third one as well. Any others around the table? So we have Portugal, Norway, and France, who I all know are very good friends of you personally.

So we're all looking forward to hearing your thoughts on the changes taking place in the Middle East and the challenges and opportunities that they present. We're also pleased for your opening remarks to have with us press correspondents who are going to attend your opening remarks. They, however--and I'm looking sternly at them--will leave the room after

the remarks, and then the discussion will continue strictly off the record under Chatham House rule. I'll be very brief, Mr. President. Many thanks for joining us this morning. The floor is yours.

SHIMON PERES:

Thank you, Terje. Thank you, gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen for coming so early in the morning.

I shall go straight to the point. Undoubtedly, what's taking place today in the world is of a historic dimension. It wasn't organized, neither by church, nor by an army, nor by a political body. Actually, without any organizers at all. It was a result, basically of modern communication, of a younger generation has had opportunity to see face to face the reality of their lives, the ugliness of corruption, the demand of poverty, their system that doesn't pay attention to their own people, and the modern communication has opened their eyes. I don't think anybody can close it. It will remain open. No governor and no dictator can close it again. It doesn't mean that everything will go smoothly.

The second reason is the Middle East is in a very deep poverty, and the question is, can the Middle East escape itself from the poverty? The reason for the poverty is that the population has grown, but the means which are necessary to satisfy their needs and hopes do not exist. I think Egypt is still a key country, indeed, there was a revolution in 1952 by the young officers at that time in Egypt had been, there were 18 million people. Today, there are 81 million people, and Egypt is not a country that has a river, it's a river that feeds a country. The Nile did not grow five times, and other countries alongside the Nile have grown too, and their need for water has increased, and poverty really plays a major role.

My question to myself is, can Egypt escape poverty? My answer is yes, and I'm basing it upon experience, not of our own. Fifty years ago, I think, China and India were poorer than Egypt today. Poorer, divided, corrupted, ungovernable, and look what happened. We're talking about close to three billion people, very much by their own effort, escaped poverty and entered a new life. Clearly the way to do so is not by having more land or having more water, but by having more sense and more technology and having a system that enabled to make use of them properly, namely, first, for a global market, there is no longer national economy, there is only national poverties.

The real economy today is the global one, with our borders, transparent, friendly, and you have to adopt a sort of, not enough to buy the machines or the technology, you have to change the system, and I believe in all those countries, there is the young generation which is capable of doing it. So, contrary to the title of Huntington, I believe it's not a clash of civilizations, it's a clash of generations. A young generation was able to have a good look at its own face.

I'm seeing, shockingly, we were the people of the book, now we are the people of the Facebook, and by the Facebook, you can actually see what's happening day in and day out. And all the other parties, Muslim Brothers, political parties, they don't even answer how to bring out Egypt from poverty. It's only young, modern generation that can do the job. We look upon them with great sympathy and would like to be of help as much as we can, but frustrated. I'm asking myself, how can we help?

Well, I think that I spoke also with our Palestinian friends. Look, you alone cannot help them, and we alone cannot help them, but the two of us together can really be of help. Like an Indian poet who said, I am alone, you are alone, let's be alone together. And we have to be alone together, which means Egypt, which is the key country, and Jordan, which is our neighbor, with the two, we have peace, helped us very much, both the Palestinians and the Israelis, to go in the direction of peace.

Now we can help the young generation and the new mood to win the day. If we shall relieve them from the Israeli-Arab conflict, that can be our greatest contribution, because in between the two camps today, there are, in Arab generation of today, the ones who are the extreme and who are the belligerent use the conflict as a cover for their own ambition, and they are afraid, for the conflict to remain, they overshadow, say directions in Egypt, or the choice in Tunisia, again, this old conflict, which is not so important, when it is being used wrongly, is extremely important.

I spoke with the leaders of both camps as much as I could, and I told them, look, history is like a galloping horse. If the horse passes nearby your window or your door, we'll better mount the horse and gallop with it. Otherwise, the horse will gallop without you, and you'll lose the opportunity. What we are doing now in the Middle East is, instead of galloping the historic horse, we are engaging in horse trading, and horse trading is a long story. Everybody's afraid to lose a penny here, a penny there, and I said, gentlemen, if you really want to be of help, let's buy and bring an end to the conflict as soon as we can and relieve the different parties from being concerned or conditioned or use the conflict as a cover. It's not easy, but I believe this approach was met, basically with a positive response, and my impression is we don't have much time. We have to move as soon as we can. Then it follows the Palestinian partner follows, if the two of us will go together to the United States and other countries, and suggest how to be of help, maybe our voice, our joint voice will have an effect upon them.

And here, I want to say what is my view, how can the problem be solved. I'm not sure it can be solved by governments. You know the European and American administrations will join together and try to introduce money, it won't help. First of all, governments today are in deficits. They are not so gracious on giving money at this point of time. And it requires a great deal of money. You have 80 million people in Egypt, 81, you have 80 million people in Ethiopia, elsewhere, there are very poor conditions, you have 50 million people in Sudan. You have other places. But luckily enough, in our time, a power which may be greater than the strengths of the government.

You know, governments have budgets, they don't have money. Companies have money, they're not restricted by budgets. Governments are very afraid to take a risk. Companies, without taking a risk, they cannot handle the future. I think the modern CEOs of the companies, they're educated people and serious people, and they are concerned about their own media image as well. They wouldn't like to appear as profiteering on the poverty of other countries.

So they've started to create foundations of their own. Buffet and Gates, for example, have a foundation of \$60 billion, which is supposed to go back to the people, and there are many other foundations, there are another \$50 billion who tried to do it here and in Europe, and I think they should do the job, and I would recommend to them, which I'm doing, that they will not use their foundations for philanthropy and charity, but for destiny. Namely, instead of helping individuals seek people, help seek nations. Let the nations themselves take care of their own sick people, and by introducing a net of high tech, of modernity and infrastructure for it, you know, I mentioned China and India, but I should also mention South Korea. South Korea, 50 years ago, was a poor country. They don't have much land, they were divided, they are still divided between the North and the South, and look, in 40 years or so, they escaped poverty. They are today one of the most advanced countries on Earth, industrially and scientifically, and if I'm not wrong, the story of South Korea is they have sent something like 20,000 of their youngsters to study technology. They came back, and they became the nucleus of this revolt.

I think there is a need for technology for peace, tech for peace. I spoke about it as the President, and I think there is a great readiness. Also for the countries themselves, they wouldn't like to see other nations getting involved in their own economies, but they wouldn't mind if private investment will come in and invest in their own companies. We will not create any political uneasiness or confrontation.

So, to conclude, what we have to do is to bring an end, as soon as possible, to the conflict between the Palestinians and us. We have to tell our neighbors that that is our intention, and we have to help wherever we can to enable the people in the Middle East to escape their own poverty. Now how to do it? I know, and I actually speak very openly, that some people say, well, since the parties disagree, and Israel is intransigent and Israel says, the Palestinians are intransigent. There's not much trust between the two of us. Let's go to the United Nations. Let's go to the Security Council, there will be a veto. Let's go to the General Assembly, and then, should get a majority, should take a decision, and that's it.

Well, if I may say so, I don't believe that this is a solution, because in order that the Palestinians will have independence, we have to give back land, and we're ready to give back land, but we wouldn't like that the land that we shall give back will become another basis for aiming missiles against us. It would be a repeat of our experience in Gaza, ladies and gentlemen. We decided to leave Gaza entirely. We didn't ask for any conditions. We left it without conditions. It was extremely hard for our government. We had to mobilize 75,000 policemen in order to bring back the settlers. We have had to spend \$2½ billion to compensate for their places. We left Gaza, and when we left, we thought that, Fatah is there in charge, but the Hamas people have overpowered Fatah, doesn't, matter. And the Hamas people started to fire missiles against us. Why? This very moment, I can't understand what were the reasons, what is the purpose. What did they want? We left Gaza completely, and we say we don't intend to return there. So why all these acts of terror and shooting, I just got a piece of information that one of the missiles hit a bus of children, and two children seriously wounded.

And all these flotillas are nonsense because if you want to bring peace and openness to Gaza, the right way and the shortest way is to tell the people in Gaza, stop shooting, stop smuggling arms. And that's it. We don't ask for anything. We don't want to go back to Gaza. But we have to think very seriously what will happen in the West Bank, and here, the United Nations can provide us with answers on security, go ahead. But if you cannot provide, be careful. Can you provide, can the United Nations provide the guarantee there won't be missiles, there won't be terror, there won't be intifadas? And what then, what are we supposed to do with the United Nations resolution? I assume that you gentlemen represent a responsibility, not just an exercise in futility, and as we are ready to give back land, we expect that we shall guarantee our own people. We cannot have a crossfire from Gaza and the West Bank, and whoever wants to be serious must think that way. None of you would give away the security of its own people.

Let me tell you a private story. I was a member of the Socialist International, which was run at that time by three important leaders, Kreisky of Austria, and Willy Brandt of Germany and Olof Palme of Sweden, and there were fifteen, I believe, vice-presidents, I was one of them. Fourteen out of the fifteen demanded that Arafat become a member of the Socialist International. I was a minority of one. But we were fair enough not to overrule me. Privately, they called me in, says, "look, you must behave, you are a minority of one. You cannot hold back our decisions. You have to support it." I said, "I support. If you convince me, or convince yourself, that Arafat is a democrat and a socialist, I shall vote for, but as long as he is a terrorist and shooting indiscriminately, what, is there any justification to try and, this organization?" You know what they did? They felt that they cannot go longer with me, and instead of pressing upon me, they sought to press upon Arafat, and the results weren't good. I think they have changed Arafat. But look, he want to join in the scope, you have to declare that you are for peace, that you are against terror, that you are ready to negotiate.

And the same is today in Gaza. What do you want from Israel? If you want that Gaza will be open, sending ships is a demonstration of a search for headlines in the press. It doesn't mean we must be serious about it. And I'm speaking, with all due respect, on behalf of a small people that not only went through a terrible Holocaust, but also in the 63 years of existence of Israel, we have had to go through seven wars, seven wars, outnumbered, outgunned, alone, and if something would happen to us, that's it.

So if there are values--and let me say, and it is particularly painful to us about the United Nations. There is a member of the United Nations, the President of Iran, who threatens to destroy another member of the United Nations, which is totally against the charter of the United Nations. Why do you permit them to do so? Why is a member of this club, I can't understand it either, appearing here and calling for hatred and destruction? I mean, is there one thing what we say, and another thing what we think or talk?

And the same goes with the Goldstone report. Look, it's not because we were accused that we decided to investigate what happened in Gaza by our army. It was because of ourselves. We want to have an army that has not only rifles, but also values. We do not go for a show. That they

have strategy, but also ten commandments, and our soldiers should not hit any civilians. The investigation committee by the United Nations, putting in 400 accusations. We checked each of them, our army, for the reasons to be sure. They found three cases that were based on mistakes, and apparently, the soldiers that are responsible for it will be put to trial.

But whoever fights terror, whether they are Americans or Russians or French or any other country, or Italy, knows it's very complicated to fight terror. When a lawful country confronts an unlawful army, and when they fire indiscriminately and use human shields, it's a real challenge. So I want to say, too, and I saw that Goldstone expressed his regrets, well, unfortunately, libels are living longer than denials. To this... the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It's a joke. But it remains alive, and even back to have additional libels.

We consider ourselves a responsible member of the United Nations. There is no other organization that can offer a little bit of coordination in such a divided world. We would like to be a contributing member in any way we can, but neither would we like to become a victim, because in the membership of the United Nations, we don't stand a chance to enjoy a majority. The blocs in the United Nations are basically anti-Israeli, and we don't stand a chance for justice.

Anyway, I shall voice our principles and our support. We shall continue to fight for our defense. We shall continue to battle for peace. Right now, the top agenda is how to reach a responsible peace with the Palestinians so they will get their independence, and Israel will get her security. And there we are. Thank you.

RØD-LARSEN:

Thank you very much, Shimon, for those, as always, very eloquent, and as always, very frank and candid remarks. Before I open the floor for points of view and questions, I will ask the ladies and gentlemen of the press to leave the room, please.