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**ISRAEL: THE WAR AGAINST HIZBALLAH
AND THE BATTLE AGAINST HAMAS**

**WITH THE HONORABLE SHIMON PERES,
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL,
MEMBER OF KNESSET**

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*Transcript by:
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SHIMON PERES: I want to start from the outset that I read some article saying that Israel is in trouble; we don't win clear enough, soon enough. I don't share this view. There is a saying that says you are as great as your call. This time there is a great enough call and I'm sure Israel will emerge from it greater, not weaker in spite of all the problems that we have to negotiate. I shall start with the difficulties and then try to analyze what are the options.

From Israel's standpoint, difficulty number one, we have to fight on two fronts: in the south against the Hamas, in the north against the Hizballah. Then we have to fight in a disappointed situation because everybody in the world told us land for peace. We gave back the land; we didn't get the peace. We left Lebanon completely. There is no claim against Israel. Even we were complimented by the United Nations. We gave Gaza completely back to the Palestinians, and they are continuing to shoot. That is a problem for us.

Then again, it's hard for us to understand what are the reasons for the war and what are their aims? Why did Hizballah start all of a sudden to shoot and fire and try to take hostages from the Israeli army, and why do the Hamas people, the ones that were elected to the government, continue to fire? It's very hard, frankly, to understand what brought them to the point and what are they trying to achieve. That's another difficulty.

A third difficulty that we are facing is it is for the first time that the country, a democratic country, a responsible country, is at war with a terroristic group that doesn't have a uniform, doesn't have a rule, doesn't have a flag, doesn't have a border, but on the other hand, they are equipped with modern weapons, the first time that a terroristic group has missiles and has rockets, and they shoot at us every day from the north something like a hundred missiles or rockets a day, and from the south 10, 15 rockets a day against civilian life, against religious – schools, synagogues, it doesn't matter.

And I know some people say that this is proportionate – only our answer is proportionate. May I say on behalf of Israel, we feel this is enough for us from any proportion or point of view to have this sort of an experience and to keep a great part of our people in the shelters, and mothers should be worried about their babies, they won't be hit, or about their boys who serve in the army. It's not simple.

So that's one point. On the other side, I can't remember in Israel such a unified people as the Israelis are today. They feel there is no doubt about the war; we were attacked and we have to defend ourselves. It's a justified war. People are determined. They take the pains and suffering, which includes also an economic one. They have to close factories with great courage and understanding. And something strange has happened in our country. As difficult as the situation is, they stop to criticize the

government. (Inaudible, background noise) – difficult, my god, the government would be in trouble. But now they feel, that's it; we stand together, all of us, without an exception.

Then we try to analyze more carefully what is really happening around, and we feel that this is not just one war; these are four confrontations at the same time. One is a confrontation against Israel. I think the quartet of terror which comprises Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hizballah – namely two states, Iran and Syria, one state in being the Palestinians, another state within a state, the Hizballah – they really have hoped and they're hoping that Israel will be broken psychologically, maybe militarily, maybe economically, and they are waiting every day that Israel will lose her heart, and people will fall on their knees, and then the great victory will be realized.

And I think we know that the two leaders – one is Nasrallah of Hizballah, Khaled Mashal of Hamas – are waiting every day to see the great victory arriving out of the blue air and that's it. But there is another confrontation, and that is about the future of Lebanon. In the Middle East there were two non-Muslim, non-Arab countries, or basically non-Muslims – Lebanon Christian, Israel Jewish. Lebanon as a Christian state was destroyed. The Christians are no longer the masters of Lebanon, some because they themselves make mistakes – made mistakes. They didn't attention to the demographic proportions. The French offered them, under Sykes-Picot, a portion of the Syrian land that was peopled by Muslims, and when they wake up, it was too late. And still the changes because of the rate of build – the difference in the rate of build, and also because the immigration from the land is strengthening the Muslim side and weakening the Christian side. Anyway, it's no longer a Christian country. Israel takes that into consideration and we shall not permit the same story to happen to us.

But now, the Hizballah wants to finish the job and made Lebanon a Shi'ite country under the spell of Iran. They want to de-Lebanize Lebanon. And it's not necessarily on national basis, but it's rather on a certain religion concept that wants to reach hegemony in the Middle East, and Lebanon is a candidate to be converted from a multinational country into a Shi'ite land. There is the third confrontation, if you want.

There is a fourth one, and that is about the whole future of the Middle East – whether the Middle East will remain Arab, basically Sunnite, or the Middle East will be under the spell of Iran, basically Shi'ite. But I am not revealing anything. I think the Arab countries themselves understands it perfectly well and perfectly clear. That's the reason why countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf countries took a position against Hizballah, are terribly worried about their future. None of them, in my judgment, would like to see the Middle East becoming under the rule of a perishing tradition. So this is the fourth confrontation. And may I say there is a fifth one, and that is about Iraq. That is particularly a confrontation, in my judgment, between Iran and the United States to let the Shi'ites win to make the American presence there troublesome and show that they are strong.

To that framework, I have to add a new dimension that weren't used, and that is the weakness of the international community. Israel never enjoyed a more unified

support by the international leaders – I'm referring to the G-8 – than ever before. The G-8 took a clear position repeating actually every point that Israel insisted on, from the end of the fire, from the release of the soldiers, from forcing Hizballah out of the southern part of Lebanon, from calling the Lebanese to disarm. And that was done, let's not forget, with the participation of the Russians, of the Japanese, of the Chinese, that were not traditional supporters of such a clear policy. But as strong as the opposition is, the support is so weak until now they support us.

I don't believe that Iran is such a great or strong country. The only strength of Iran is the weakness of the international community vis-à-vis Iran. Iran, in my judgment, is a country great on rhetorics and deep in poverty. The population of Iran has grown over the last 15 years, from 1990 to this very day, by 40 million people. Fifteen years ago, a growing Iran was a country of 30 million people; today is 70 million people. They didn't create 40 million jobs; unemployment grew, poverty spread, corruption is deep, and economically, in spite of the oil, they are a country which is poor and becoming poorer, and also, from a national point of view, Iran is a multicultural country. The Persians are not more than 55 percent. The rest are minorities: 30 percent Azaris, 10 percent Arabs and so on.

So what is the strength of Iran? I think the way that the international community handled the nuclear problem. Again, in my judgment, what happened, the United States at the beginning wanted to take a very strong position, but maybe the United States held that in order to do so they need a coalition and the participant in the coalition felt that you have to use a greater dose of diplomatic pressure and to forget about any military threat. Finally the United States told the partners, okay, go ahead; we shall support you. If you'll be successful it's your success. If you will fail, we shall have to go together and look for alternatives.

What happened yesterday in the United Nations is the first indication of a coalition, so Article 7, which is the teeth of the resolution, was watered down. And unless there will be a unified world position and a world coalition to bring the Iranians down to the right dimension, Iran will run wild and make a mockery. In spite of the Iranian input in the Hizballah war, I think that the nuclear problem comes first before the Israeli or Palestinian problem. And what is needed – I mean, once George Kennan introduced his containment against a superpower, against Russia, now there is a need for containment against Iran.

Then again, the Syrians are not idle – a great land. The economy is poor, terrible. Their arms are obsolescent because Russia stopped to supply them modern arms free of charge. Their officers didn't become younger with age, nor is their diet very impressive, and their leader is the son of a wise man, which may be a problem. (Laughter.)

I am not impressed by the Syrian threat. It's not view of all my colleagues – I don't think Syria will go for war because they know the strengths or the weakness of their army because they cannot have a re-supply of modern arms and because they cannot go to war alone. Usually when there was an attack by the Arab countries, never was it done

by a single country. Now the Arab country that has the arms, Egypt, is clearly against a war. President Mubarak says, my army is for the Egyptian people, not for any other use. Jordan – (unintelligible) – for war. They think what the Iranians and the Syrians are doing is dangerous. And if Syria wants to go to war, they don't have the arms. And then generally people say it will become another world war. It won't because the time of classical wars are over. They're over because the reasons have changed. Most of the wars in history were about territory. They were about territory because territory was the supplier of human existence and human progress. The moment that science and technology replaced the land, territory is less important, and science and technology doesn't have borders and doesn't need armies. Armies cannot conquer wisdom; nor can they defend patents. It's a different relationship.

So the war is of a different character, namely individual terror, suicidal bombers, the use of missiles. If I can say it almost in a joking way, the lack of importance of space is so evident that when the terrorists attack you, it's either by a knife – between the territories and the old settlers there was a knife, not a land – or they attack you by a missile, and between the launching of the missile and the target of the missile, land is unimportant. So it's a different war.

And there is no doctrine how to fight it. Israel is the first to experience it. We learn, and we learn fast, and the results won't come late. Some people want us to – (unintelligible). It's difficult. But don't have the slightest doubt: We are learning, we are progressing and we shall make it. People are impatient. We are impatient, I – (unintelligible). But we have to do it and we shall do it.

The present tactics of Israel in the war consist of two major efforts. One is by bombing through the Air Force and the other is by ground forces. When do we bomb; when do we use ground force? We bomb when there are headquarters like in Beirut. There was a whole cartier (ph), a whole suburb in Beirut that hosted the headquarters of Hamas – several buildings fortified who shelled us. We decided to bomb them out. People said, why do you bomb Beirut? We didn't bomb Beirut; we bombed the headquarters of Hamas, of Hizballah, and the fact is that no single man was killed. If it would have been civilian life, many would have been killed. It wasn't killed because the people were away. We knew it's empty, but still we decided to destroy the logistics of it. The same goes for Tyre. We bombed the headquarter that, again, was empty, and we shall do it wherever there are concentrated headquarters of Hizballah, wherever they are.

I'm sorry that some of the bombs misfired. And by the way, I don't think there is any Israeli that doesn't feel saddened so when we see a child being killed, no matter Arab or Jewish. When I was the foreign minister I suggested actually to provide all the children of the Middle East with an international passport. We build a new hospital for children and say whoever the child can come; it doesn't matter his nationality.

But there is no war without mistakes. The greatest mistake is the war itself, but once you're at war you commit mistakes. Look at Kosovo. I don't think that anybody wanted to bomb the Chinese embassy, for example. And you can condemn. And also, a

great deal of civilian life was lost, by the way; close to 10,000 people lose their lives. Nobody was talking about proportions. But I can tell you for sure that we, which means the political level, and we, which means the military level, are extremely careful not to take unnecessary risks, but I mean, risk is not to kill the civilian people. When do we do the grand action? When we know about villages or towns where missiles and rockets are being hidden, or what we call the human shield. Again, we told them, gentlemen, either get rid of the missiles or get out of the home. We cannot agree that you will be the protector of the missiles which are going tomorrow night, tomorrow morning, hit targets in Israel.

By the way, it's considered an international crime to use human shields for protection. And on many occasions, our soldiers and officers really took the greatest measure not to hurt anybody who is innocent. So we went to Bint Jbeil to clean the place. There was a concentration of rockets and missiles there. I think the army did a fine job. I can't tell you exactly how many missiles or launches we destroyed already, but quite many. And we shall continue that way.

There was unfortunately the story in Kfar Kana. So the Israeli government, with the participation of the advisor, Condoleezza Rice, says let's take a day or two days to check what happened. But whoever suggests a ceasefire, he doesn't have to suggest it twice. The minute the Hizballah will stop firing, there will be a ceasefire. We don't have any purpose in the war because we didn't go to achieve anything specific. We are at war because we were attacked, and we were attacked in a different way so we have to handle it in accordance.

There is a proposal of having an international force. The problem about the international force is not the force but the mission of the force. We have had the UNIFIL, for example, for many good years, thousands of them, but they didn't have the right to intervene in any confrontation to prevent it. So the Israelis served as observers, which means if you have a sick person, instead of providing him with medicine you provide him with a barometer, or thermometer, to see what is the temperature. That's not the solution.

But again, if the European community, the United States, the quartet, thinks that an international force can help, okay. What we shall not permit is that if Hizballah were in a town to the southern border of Lebanon and again continued to fire against Israel or take hostages – what we shall not consider an end of the fire if they continue to send rockets and missiles. We shall continue to act in order to bring back the two soldiers that were taken hostage on our land, violating the agreement we have had with Lebanon because we left Lebanon completely – the land, the water, the politics. We didn't really ever think the United Nations has decided, and there must be a control over the arsenal of the missiles and rockets, and clearly the use of it. And also they mention they need to disarm the Hizballah because it destroys Lebanon. The Hizballah doesn't serve anything which is Lebanese, anything which is Arab, anything which is peace. People like the sarala (ph) make strong speeches. We're used to them. You can even hear them today in

Latin America and many countries – very impressive speeches. The problem is not rhetoric but peace.

And finally, military purpose is to make peace. They aren't looking for just a shining military victory. Nothing works that way. The victory will be to make peace. And in spite of our disappointments, and we were disappointed many times, we will continue to negotiate with the Palestinians for peace. We said already we agreed to a Palestinian state. We indicated that we are ready to give back most of the territories, almost all of the territories. We want to live in peace with the Lebanese. They are fine people. We have nothing against them. We used to live with them in peace, even in friendship. There is nothing we want from Lebanon. I can't see anything that the Lebanese want from us. And we shall remain determined in the two senses of determination: to win the war and to win peace. And our heart didn't fall down; we feel united and strong. It takes time, takes time; it's painful, it's painful.

Before I came here I visited a hospital and there was a woman that just came a couple of years from Russia, single woman, and she lost her leg. I asked her how does she feel, if she doesn't regret – she wants to go back to Russia. And her answer was, I got one leg, but I shall remain with my two legs in this country. She expressed our spirit. Thank you.

(Applause.)

ROBERT SATLOFF, moderator: Shimon, thank you very much for these very important remarks.

I would like to open a question-and-answer session by asking you a couple of very more specific questions because I think it was very useful outlining the objectives that you have just described of Israel's operations in Lebanon. And I would like to connect them to the diplomacy for a moment. Could you tell us more specifically, is it Israel's position that a ceasefire resolution is only acceptable if it includes in it an immediate deployment of international forces and the disarmament of Hizballah under international and Lebanese supervision?

MR. PERES: Our position is to have an international deployment without a ceasefire is meaningless. It's the permission to continue to fire. It must come together. But there is another point. I mean, there is a ceasefire that doesn't depend upon us. The minute that the Hizballah will stop firing, there will be a ceasefire, the very same minute. You don't need us.

MR. SATLOFF: I'll open the floor to questions. If you could please identify yourself when I point to you and please wait for a microphone to come to you so that we can get the full text of your question for all of our viewers.

Jaap van Wesel from Jerusalem Report.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. SATLOFF: Speak right into it.

Q: Mr. Peres, the European Union Foreign Minister Solana was recently in Jerusalem. He was told by Prime Minister Olmert to keep the door open to Damascus, which would –

MR. PERES: What?

Q: To Damascus, to Syria, which would indicate that Israel realized that in some way Syria should be involved in whatever would be the settlement. Could you elaborate on that, if you think that Syria should be involved in any political deal?

MR. SATLOFF: Your view on whether Syria should be involved in a settlement.

MR. PERES: The answer is yes because Syria has today two headquarters of terror. They have a double standard. They have the headquarters of Hamas and they should be involved by bringing an end to it. Then they have – they are supplying the missiles to Lebanon and they should stop it. Syria until now enjoys the patience of the world by conducting a double-standard policy. It won't fly. The Syrians have to decide in which camp are they members of: in the camp of terror or the camp of anti-terror. And it is time for the Syrians to decide.

MR. SATLOFF: From Al Ahram, Khaled Daoud in the center, please.

Q: My name is Khaled Daoud from Egypt Al Ahram, and I have actually two questions. The reports coming out from South Lebanon today indicate a major ground offensive inside South Lebanon. So my question is does Israel plan to keep a certain amount of Lebanese land until the international force is deployed? My second question, concerning your statement about if the missiles stop –

MR. PERES: About the what?

Q: The missiles, Hizballah missiles – Hizballah rockets stop falling on Israel, the war will stop, but isn't Israel also intent on weakening Hizballah, hitting its headquarters, so it's like a closed circle here? Thank you, sir.

MR. PERES: On the first question, we didn't leave Lebanon in order to return there. We don't have the slightest intention to occupy Lebanon or part of it. There are military incursions when we have the information that the southern place, there are hidden rockets and missiles, and then the army goes to clean the place. They did it in 24 hours or 36 hours in Bint Jbeil and they will from place to place and clean it. But we don't intend to remain there in any place.

On the second point, we wouldn't touch Hizballah if they wouldn't attack us. They collected missiles and rockets for six years, 12,000 of them. We didn't touch them. As now the Syrians are producing them, we didn't touch the Syrians. Israel has a clear definition: We go to war only when we are being attack. We never took an initiative and we don't intend to. In this war there is a clear aggressor.

And by the way, who is Hizballah? We recognize Lebanon. Who does recognize two states in one state? I don't think that Egypt does; I don't think that Jordan does. You cannot have two states, two armies; one army fighting, the other army preying. They have 80,000 soldiers, the Lebanese government. What for? Where are they? I don't suggest that they will defend Israel, but let them defend their land. The United Nations called upon them to deploy the border between us and them. Hizballah doesn't let them.

This is an unprecedented situation in history. I don't know anything like it. When the Hizballah has 14 members in the parliament and they have an army that shoots without asking either the parliament nor the government, what sort of history is that?

MR. SATLOFF: Shimon, just on this point, is it your view and Israel's view that the international force can be deployed only with Hizballah's acceptance and understanding, or is this an international force that will go in to forcibly disarm Hizballah?

MR. PERES: I never thought that the purpose of the international force was to recognize Hizballah. That's new to me.

MR. SATLOFF: David Makovsky on my left from the institute.

Q: Two quick questions. Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora – Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora has said – repeatedly called for the revival of the Israeli-Lebanese Armistice Commission of 1949 as a way of reviving contacts with Israel. Is this something Israel would welcome, A? And B, the second question – you said that a deployment without a ceasefire is meaningless. Would you say the reverse, that if there is a ceasefire but there is no deployment, that Israel has to keep going until there is the international deployment on the ground?

MR. PERES: No, I said clearly if they stop shooting it will be the end of the war. I made it very clear. Now, I don't know why does the prime minister of Lebanon wants to go back to this ceasefire. He has a much better deal. They are out of Lebanon. And by the way, I mean, he has to show that he is the prime minister of Lebanon. The ones who frustrate his position is Hizballah, not Israel.

And if really he wants peace, let him do what President Sadat did, what King Hussein did, what even Arafat did: say I want to meet the Israelis and discuss peace. We shall never object to it. But he cannot all of the time, you know, to say I have an army but army is too weak to fight; I have a government, but my government is not disciplined

so I can't govern; I have Hizballah that I don't like but I must tolerate. I mean, this is a little bit of a complication for peace negotiations.

MR. SATLOFF: On the left, Ziad Asali, on the left side. Stand up please.

Q: Thank you. Ziad Asali from the American Task Force in Palestine. On the issue of the radicalization of the Middle East, with the prominence of the extremists at the expense of the moderates, do you feel that the lack of progress and concessions made to moderates like Abu Mazen, for instance, have led to the significance tone of the non-state actors of Hamas and Hizballah, and is this a consideration for future amendment of policy and a future goal for Israel?

MR. PERES: My answer is no. I mean, what surprised me concerning the Palestinians is not the radicalizations. I mean, you cannot radicalize radicals. We have had them all the time anyway. What is interesting is among the Palestinians there are half at least of them who would like to make peace seriously. And the Fatah lost – maybe I am unfair but I have to say honestly the story. And what happened is the world decided to help the Palestinian people. They donate a billion dollars a year – over \$10 billion. I'm afraid that the money corrupted the receivers, and I'm afraid that Fatah lost because of it. I don't think Fatah lost because of its ideology, but Fatah lost because there was a perception of corruption. So in a strange way, I mean, what you wanted to help finally turned out as a failure.

What are the consequences as far as I'm concerned to change the system? You know, foreign aid, we learned, is to take the money of the poor people in the rich countries and to hand it over to the rich people in the poor countries. (Laughter.) Then you create corruption. And I think instead of financial aid, go for economic aid. I think the greatest success in the Middle East is the QIZ that was built in Jordan. It employs today 135,000 people. What we are now trying to do is to say, well, if it – you know, Israel fights when we don't have a choice, we negotiate when we have an opportunity, but now we have to build economically in spite of the lack of negotiations and in spite of the violence.

The idea today is take the whole length of the border between us and Jordan and the Palestinians from the Red Sea up to the – (unintelligible) – up to the Syrian border, and convert it into an economic zone, economic corridor, jointly done by the Jordanians, Palestinians, and us. We have the agreement of the Jordanians, the agreement of the Palestinians, the agreement of the Israelis.

Out of the 400 kilometers, 320 are with the Jordanians where we don't have any problems. There are no fences, no barriers, no minefields, no terror – totally open and free. We have 80 kilometers from the northern part of the Dead Sea after Bet She'an with the Palestinians. There we want to build – help to build a QIZ for the people in the West Bank. They are unemployed. They are in a terrible shape. I mean, we have to go for economic aid.

And I think we shall try to do the three things simultaneously – we are doing it – and by the way, to do it by privatization. You know, governments are very good for war; they are very problematic for peace because when it comes to war, governments are united, and they're in our budget. If you have a sick person in the family and you need medicine, you have the money, even if you are poor.

But when it comes to peace, governments have budgets; they don't have money. Every minister is short of budget, so nothing is being left for the generosity of peace. And then when it comes to peace, everybody is for peace but not everybody is for the cost of peace. When it comes to the cost, the governments, and the ministers are being criticized. They say, well, why did you give away so much? You could have done better. And there is no measurement how to show that you did your best.

And then governments are protecting what they have. Private business is not living on what they have accumulated, but on what they are able to penetrate, to create potentially. So we have to privatize peace, and the whole length of this 400 kilometers will become a privatized economic peace. The companies are interested in it. The governments agree, and we are working very hard to create this third dimension. To balance it, it will be the gloomy situation which exists either way.

MR. SATLOFF: Shimon, not to bring you back to the gloomy situation which exists right away, but can you say a word or two about American diplomacy. I know that you have met with American diplomats in the region, and I know that the president and the secretary of State have spoken about American diplomatic initiatives. What is Israel's view toward the American diplomatic initiatives that are currently being formulated?

MR. PERES: We are grateful for the American diplomacy. We are grateful to the American people for their moral support which is very meaningful. This time we don't ask from the United States to send soldiers to defend us. We never ask – shall never ask. We don't ask for money. We shall fight it out, and we finance it with whatever we have. But we think that without the United States, I don't see any other power that can create the coalition against world terror with all of the dangers I have described. In my judgment, the world is no longer divided between the East and the West or North and South, but between terror and anti-terror; it's a new division.

And I think that if it is not for the United States, I can't see how anybody taking the lead. It is not simple because there is a great deal of skepticism, of variation, and I appreciate the efforts which are being done. So as far as I am concerned, I have only thanks and no criticism.

MR. SATLOFF: Thank you.

In front – Professor Bob Lieber – the microphone in front, please.

Q: You have spoken of the two-front war that Israel faces right now and made a reference to the custom rockets. Israel has been hit by rockets ever since the withdrawal from Gaza a year ago. Could you elaborate on what can be done since at the moment the rockets are still continuing?

MR. SATLOFF: We are doing something similar in Gaza what we do in Lebanon. We go to any place that serves a base for the rocket to destroy the bases of the rocket. And also we think that the Hamas is also out of power. One day Mashal, who is the leader of Hamas, will wake up. He will open his eyes and he will see that Israel wasn't destroyed. Then everybody will ask him, well, why are you firing – (unintelligible)? Why don't you use the money for better purposes? So there are things that we have to withstand and tackle every issue separately. There was no average answer to all of them. And then sooner or later we shall restart our negotiations with Abu Mazen.

Look, the story is really unbelievable. Mr. Olmert met with Abu Mazen. He told him, look, I am going to release hundreds and more prisoners. Why did Hamas took hostage the Israeli soldier? What is holding back the release of the Palestinian prisoners is the fact they took an Israeli hostage. It is so foolish. Can they explain why did they do it? And who is going to defend them?

So I mean, we unfortunately – Hamas is more of a religious party than a political one. In politics you reason and you make compromises and concessions. In a religion you are becoming holy so you don't have to be reasonable. But they have to explain what are they doing? What for? They could have had many prisoners right away back home. They could have continued the negotiations about the West Bank in spite of our disappointment in Gaza. So, I mean, look, I can't justify things that are not based on logic. I cannot reason with unreasonable people.

MR. SATLOFF: Yes, on the left here, please.

Q: (Unintelligible) – with Turkish NTV Television. Mr. Prime Minister, would you comment on the kind of multinational force and its composition that you want to see in Southern Lebanon at some point? And Turkey has said it may join the force. Would you like to see Turkish troops in particular?

MR. PERES: Well, you know, the idea of having an international force is not an Israeli initiative. We didn't put in any conditions about compositions and this sort of things. And I think there are still a great deal of difficulties to compose such a force. It may take days and even weeks; however, it will be short.

About Turkey, we have the highest esteem for Turkey. We think Turkey, being a Muslim country – two things they have shown: that you can be Muslim and modern at the same time. There is no contradiction between the two. And secondly, I believe that Turkey and the prime minister are very sincere in looking at ways to end the

confrontation. And we appreciate their role, even if from some to time we have different ideas. But I wish that many other countries will become like Turkey.

MR. SATLOFF: Yes, sir, right here.

Q: (Off mike.) Mr. Peres, I would like to ask you first, who is behind the steering wheel in this war – America, as some people say – it's a proxy war between Iran and the United States and Lebanon – or Israel, which puts its eyes also in a far – or a long-term co-resistance in the region.

A second question: When you mentioned that –

MR. PERES: I didn't understand. What is your definition of the Israeli –

Q: Some people are saying it's a proxy war between the United States and Iran in Lebanon, and now Israel – it is difficult for Israel now to retreat because the American goals –

MR. SATLOFF: People are saying that?

Q: Many commentators actually in American newspapers. If you met with people at The Washington Post and The New York Times, they say – (inaudible).

Also, when you talk about the new support for this war inside Israel, does it mean that end of the peace camp in Israel? Yourself, you have the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. Usually there is criticism as far as the Israeli community, society for war. It makes that there is maybe much hope for coexistence in the Middle East for the future generation. Thank you.

MR. PERES: Well, I shall start with Israel. Israel has the same strategy vis-à-vis Lebanon as vis-à-vis Egypt. It's hard for us and maybe for many Egyptians to understand, why did we have to have four wars because we made peace? I heard President Mubarak saying that a 150,000 young Egyptians lost their lives. Thousands of Israelis lost their lives. Why? Let's be courageous and honest. What for? The same as with Jordan.

You know, there was almost an agreement with the Syrians. President Clinton flew to Switzerland to meet Assad. To this very day he doesn't understand – nobody understands – why did Assad say no? We wanted to end – you know, Sadat invited President Assad to go with him to Camp David and stop it. So Assad says I have time, I have time, I have time. Israel doesn't have time when it comes to peace.

And I reject all of the suspicion. We gave back the land, we gave back the water, we gave back the oil – they are a small country – in spite of the fact that we won the war. And I don't take any suspicion. Now, I can tell you that the United States never asked from Israel anything to do but to defend ourselves. And there are no stories.

Who initiated the war? A crazy gentleman by the name of Ahmadinejad. Listen to his speeches. Where does it come from? From a dark age. He declares he wants to destroy Israel. He calls the United States the big Satan, Israel the small Satan, and then he said he will fight everybody that participated in the crusade. But among the crusaders there wasn't a single American or a single Jew, as you know. So whom does he want to fight?

He's a fanatic man, old-fashioned, that thinks he can live on tradition and on oil. Unfortunately oil occasionally is better than democracy. It's cheaper. It brings more income. And then he has the three followers, the four musketeers: he, Syria, Hizballah, and Hamas. You can't escape it. You won't find the slightest weakness in the present history.

MR. SATLOFF: Ladies and gentlemen, I am afraid that is going to have to conclude our session today.

Shimon, on behalf of the institute, I would like to thank you very much, and I wish you safe travels back to Israel. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

(END)