

Interview: Meir Pa'il



'Israel will not play the role of a dirty dog'

Colonel (res.) Meir Pa'il is a prominent and controversial figure in Israeli military, political, and academic circles.

Born in Jerusalem in 1926, Dr. Pa'il began his military career before the founding of the state of Israel. He was a member of the Palmach (shock troops) and the underground Hagannah organization. He fought in Israel's War of Independence and afterward joined the Israel Defense Forces as a regular. When he received an honorary discharge in 1971, he had served as a brigade commander, commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces Military Academy, and chief of the Department of Tactics and Operational Doctrine of the Armed Forces Supreme General Staff. He wrote manuals on tactical doctrine and methods of instruction for the armed forces. In addition, he wrote a book on the changing military doctrines of small nations in the nuclear era.

Dr. Pa'il was a member of Israel's Knesset from 1973 to 1980, representing the Zionist Peace Initiative parties. During the same period, he was a professor of military history at Tel Aviv University and at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His articles on modern Mideast history, battle morality, and military history, doctrine, and leadership are published frequently in Israel and abroad. His most recent book, dealing with the Israeli War of Independence, was published in April 1983.

The following interview with Dr. Pa'il was conducted in New York on Aug. 5 by EIR Middle East correspondent Nancy Coker.

EIR: Lebanon has been called Israel's Vietnam. Do you agree with that analogy?

Pa'il: I think that the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was from every point of view something that created a negative outcome for Israel. It proved to be a terrible political mistake, because Israel didn't gain anything. We didn't destroy the PLO. We didn't solve anything vis-à-vis the Palestinian

question, because the center of gravity of the Palestinian question is not in Lebanon but in the West Bank, under our own auspices. The invasion cost us at least 500 people dead. It demonstrated quite a lot of immoral activities by Israel, not only in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by politically sponsoring the Falangist massacre of Palestinians there, but even before that, by bombarding the towns and the Palestinian refugee camps. Whatever you say, the number of Arab people killed through the Israeli invasion is about 10,000 Palestinians, Lebanese, and others.

So for Israel it was a military achievement, not a military victory; a political failure; and a moral shame.

EIR: How typical do you think your views are in Israel?

Pa'il: I think that there is in Israel a small majority of about 60 percent who think that the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was a mistake, or a fake. And the sooner, the better we should get out, even without a Syrian withdrawal.

EIR: You have called Ariel Sharon, Israel's former defense minister and the architect of the Lebanon invasion, a modern-day Genghis Khan. As bad as Sharon is, many people say that Yuval Neeman and Moshe Arens are far worse in their own way.

Pa'il: You are right. Theoretically, ideologically, they are far worse. For example, Moshe Arens voted against the Camp David agreement, while Ariel Sharon voted for it. Yuval Neeman was not a member of the Knesset in those days, but he was against the Camp David agreement. So both of them, Moshe Arens and Yuval Neeman, were even against the very idea of evacuating Sinai, even for peace with Egypt.

But Ariel Sharon is much more dangerous than they are. He is not as radical, as fanatic, as Yuval Neeman or Moshe Arens. But in his pragmatic readiness to perform the kinds of atrocities he carried out in Lebanon, he is unique. Neeman

and Arens are not capable of this kind of behavior, even if their ideology is much more fanatic.

The government of Israel is too much influenced, or one would say drunk, with the very phenomenon that Israel is the strongest state in the Middle East. And instead of using our military superiority as a deterring stick, and offering our enemies some political deal to motivate them to approach the diplomatic table toward some compromise, Israel has preferred just to use the stick. Lebanon is a typical example.

EIR: If you were prime minister of Israel, how would you approach the current crisis in which Israel finds itself? And what do you think the United States should do in this situation?

Pa'il: I have the same advice for the United States President and for the Israeli government. The most important challenge for Israel politically in the coming 10 or 15 years is to establish peace with the Arab world. By establishing peace, I mean that the borders will be open, and commerce and transportation and economic exchange would begin functioning between Israel and the Arab world. As far as I know, Israel would turn itself into the economic, commercial, financial, and technological hub of the Middle East. So the challenge is to make peace with the Arab world, and to be accepted in the Middle East like a biological tissue.

If I were prime minister, immediately I would develop a twofold policy vis-à-vis the east and the north. Vis-à-vis the east, I would declare immediately that the government of Israel views with favor the establishment of a national home for the Palestinian people alongside Israel, following two principles. Principle number one: We are ready to recognize the Palestinians' right for self-determination, not because they are pious, but because they are there. Principle number two: In order to enable them to accomplish their right for self-determination, Israel is basically ready to evacuate the West Bank and Gaza and negotiate the items with any Jordanian or competent Palestinian representation, including the PLO, not because I like the PLO. I hate the PLO. They are our enemies. But if you think about establishing peace, usually you do it with an enemy. And usually you hate your enemy, you despise your enemy.

As far as I know the facts, should Israel take this kind of initiative, immediately the Jordanians would rush to negotiate, and as far as I know, the PLO—half of them—would rush to negotiate.

Vis-à-vis the Syrians, I would tell them, "Israel is ready, basically, to evacuate Lebanon and even most of the Golan Heights. Let's make peace."

Now, let's go to the Americans. I think that if the American government considers itself a friend of Zionism, of the Jewish people, of Israel, they should adopt the same policy. If the Israelis won't make peace, I would like the Americans to do it, by manipulating the Israelis to do it. So the idea is to manipulate Israel, to pressure Israel, and to develop a mass media campaign to try to convince American public opinion,

Israeli public opinion, Jewish public opinion here. Because a real friend is not someone who just flatters his friends. A real friend is one who is ready to criticize his fellow man, and here and there even to kick him in the ass. And it's about time that the Americans would kick Israel—its existing policy—in the ass, or somewhere else.

EIR: Israel can play a key role in the development of the entire region. Could you comment on that?

Pa'il: Israel is now, no question about it, the strongest military community in the Middle East. Israel is also the most technologically advanced power in the Middle East. It is the most economically developed state in the Middle East. Israel has quite a lot of know-how, technological and scientific. We have excelled in the military sphere, but we can be excellent in other areas. Israel has developed very interesting agricultural innovations. If Israel would establish itself in the Middle East in some kind of a peaceful situation, Israel has a good chance of becoming the economic, technological, scientific, medical, and transportation center of the Middle East.

EIR: Do you think that because Israel has not been pursuing these policies of development, this has led to the brain drain, both on the Israeli and the Arab side?

Pa'il: If the existing policy continues, the brain drain will get worse. More Jews will emigrate from Israel than immigrate to Israel. Palestinian intellectuals will leave, and more and more Jewish intellectuals and others will leave. This would gradually lead to the fading away of Zionism. Israel would become an intellectual desert.

EIR: The irony of the situation is that the Christian fundamentalists here in the United States are actually attempting to hasten the destruction of Israel by trying to unleash Armageddon.

Pa'il: You are right. That is the main reason why these fundamentalists—I won't say all of the Christian fundamentalists, but too many of them—have found themselves lately cooperating with Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon. What is terrible is that Ariel Sharon and Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir and these leaders don't understand what they are doing, because the very idea of the Christian fundamentalists is to hasten the process of destroying Israel, because according to their faith, it would hasten the era of Armageddon, of the Last Days.

EIR: Henry Kissinger and his Kissinger Associates have been implicated in a rather elaborate scheme to purchase land on the West Bank in order to preclude settlement of the West Bank problem. In late June, he visited Israel to meet with top Israeli officials. He seems to have insinuated himself back into the center of Middle East policymaking. Do you think that his return bodes well or ill for the Middle East and for Israel?

Pa'il: Basically, I didn't like Henry Kissinger's policies from the beginning, since the time he started being important. I don't like his concepts. He's a pragmatist. Here and there, some Israeli nationalists and some Israeli chauvinists like him. I don't like him. I don't think we should ask his advice. I didn't like him in those days when he tried to manipulate Israel into fighting against the Syrians in 1970. I wasn't happy with the outcome of the talks with Kissinger and Yitzhak Rabin when Yitzhak Rabin was here as ambassador. They tried to manipulate Israel into concentrating forces in the Golan Heights to threaten the Syrians, who were poised to invade Jordan. I was against the Syrians, too.

I don't like Israel to perform the duty of a dirty dog. Kissinger and others in Washington have all too often used Israel as it would use a dirty dog. Usually, when a dirty dog is ready to serve his master, the master won't pay him in the long run. He will pay him in the short run with some meat. In the long run he will kick him.

EIR: The Israeli economic situation is a shambles. Yuval Neeman's and Moshe Arens's solution is to transform Israel into a world-class arms producer, under the rubric of the Lavie project, supplying weapons to warring factions in Central America and Africa.

Pa'il: Yuval Neeman and Moshe Arens are two dangerous people. They are trying to seduce the American administration more or less like this: "Give us money and some raw materials, and we'll manufacture armaments and sell them to many places all over the world which the American Congress is not ready to allow your administration to do."

So the Israelis are ready to do these kinds of dirty jobs indirectly for the Americans—no, not for the Americans. It's not for American interests, really, because if I were the President of America, I would establish very good economic and commercial relations with Nicaragua, for example, and this is the best way to manipulate Nicaragua out of the Soviet orbit, instead of sending armaments. But Israel is ready to perform this kind of a dirty job.

You know, Israel is a Jewish state. It is not Belgium or Holland. Holland can sell armaments to Honduras or to the rebels in Nicaragua and Chile. It won't be nice; perhaps some Dutch socialists or progressive people would make some noise. But Israel is a Jewish state. The more you are helping these kinds of dictatorial, unsympathetic states, we have problems, Jews all over the world have problems, confronting anti-Semites. They say, "What kind of a state is your Israel?" This is the most important aspect of the problem.

I would prefer that the United States push Israel into a peace system in the Middle East rather than its current policy of pushing the Israelis into adopting the behavior of a crazy dog, which will hurt totally the interests of the state of Israel. I don't like the behavior of Israel in Latin America and South Africa, not because I am that kind of an ethical, naive person. Here and there a state can maintain these kinds of relations.

But if Israel had excellent relations with all the countries of the world, including the whole spectrum of the Third World, then okay, you can maintain different kinds of relations, even with those who are not that much respected. But in the existing situation, Israel is a member of what I call the Less Respectable League of Nations, the Leper League of Nations.

EIR: Throughout the course of history the Jew has survived by developing his potential for making contributions for the general advancement of all of civilization. This is the "genius" of Jewish survival over the centuries. It seems that the Jew in Israel can play a most important role in uplifting the Middle East and, in particular, the Arab population there.

Pa'il: The real challenge of Zionism is how to continue this Jewish tradition, this Jewish uniqueness, while maintaining an independent Jewish state. Until now, we have succeeded to be unique in our military performance. And regretfully, too many Jews all over the world are very much proud of the Israeli strength, and they think that the most important phenomenon of an independent state is being strong. But being strong is just an instrument. It's not the main destiny, the main role of a state. For me, for Zionism to continue Jewish tradition is first of all to turn Israel into an excellent social system, in which, whatever one may say, more equality would be established.

Secondly, this state should be some kind of a cultural state of which every Jew and everyone would be proud.

The third aspect is that Israel should turn itself into the most important economic and social phenomenon in the Middle East, so that every neighbor of Israel would look towards Israel with some kind of astonishment and satisfaction with this kind of a state, a state that can help them and support them economically, socially, technologically, in peace. This is the third challenge.

And the fourth challenge is that everyone would say, everyone, "Israel is the best country in the world for me," so that more and more Jews, and perhaps even others, would like to come and join us.

The terrible phenomenon now for me is that we have lost our desire to be "a light unto the nations." They claim, "We just want to be a normal state!" I say, "If you want to be normal, you must be abnormal! If you want to be a genius, maybe you'll be normal! But if your idea is just to be normal, like others, they say, like the Turks, like the Egyptians, like the Italians—I don't want to be normal, I want to be the best! The best, not the strongest!"

So they have lost their honor. In putting "just to be normal" as their ideal, basically they're acquiescing to being very subnormal.

I watched here the Fifth Avenue parade on May 1 celebrating Israel's independence, and I was terrified. I was terrified. You could see that the Jews in the diaspora are maintaining a cult to the god of war, to Mars. It's real idol worship. They are not moving to Israel. They idol worship Israel as

the god of war. This is why for many of them Ariel Sharon is important. His image is very interesting. For me, it's terrible. To turn Zionism into this kind of an idol of power—I call it a Goliathic Samsonite modern Jew—for me it's terrible. So they are disrupting the very idea of a Jewish state. And I think it cannot continue. It is doomed to be eliminated, because it is totally against the vision and the tradition—spiritual, moral, and ethical—of Jewishness.

I use the term “idol worship” because I really felt it, when I saw these people from the JDL [Jewish Defense League]. And from the Flatbush Yeshiva! It's a typical diaspora yeshiva. They are marching in the streets, some of them with weapons, and crying, “Flatbush for Israel!” You should have seen them! Very nice Jewish youngsters, Orthodox ones, are courting an idol of power! And if Jews don't understand that this is a real danger, they will find themselves very much disappointed after some generations, and even shocked, not only disappointed.

I am a Jew who spent 28 years of his life as a military man, so I know the military profession inside out. And I know that the military profession is important just as an instrument, as a means, not as a destiny unto itself.

I think that Israel is sufficiently strong to be moderate. This is my formula. We are sufficiently strong to offer the Arabs a nice deal. If we weren't that strong, maybe I would be a fanatic, too. But we are sufficiently strong to make a deal. We shouldn't wait for Mr. Arafat or for Mr. Assad to take the initiative, nor for the United States President to pressure us. We should take the initiative on our own. If we are not sufficiently smart to do it, let our friends do it for us, or help us to do it. It's a *mitzvah*. You know, in Yiddish we say *mitzvah*. It's an obligation for a friend to do something for his fellow man. So for those for whom the state of Israel is important, either from the Jewish point of view, which is important, or from the Western point of view, which is important, or from the American point of view, which is important, it's quite time for those who are friends of Israel to understand that if you don't push Israel into a peace rapprochement, you are destroying Israel.

EIR: What special role do you, as a former military man, think that the Israel Defense Forces can play in saving Israel?

Pa'il: In Israel, we are still maintaining the system of a people's army. So a coup d'état is impossible in Israel, thank God. We think that the military circles, especially the high command, are much more rational than people think. They are much more prepared than people think for long-range political and economic adventures—but by adventures I mean positive adventures, that is, to really talk big about political and economic and scientific considerations in connection with all the Middle East and the Mediterranean. You might think that in Israel after a generation or two, most military men have become as square-headed as you in the Western world think military men are. They are not that square-headed, even here in America, because basically most military

people are trained and educated to use their rationalistic, systematic mind to solve complicated problems. And this is why I think that an Israeli peace gesture vis-à-vis the Arabs would be much more accepted in military circles than among the politicians.

EIR: To the degree that Israel continues on its present course, it seems that the extremists in the Arab world, such as Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, will have much more maneuvering room to unleash mayhem. Would you agree?

Pa'il: Yes. There is an unholy alliance of the fanatics. Mr. Qaddafi and Mr. George Habash and Mr. Assad—perhaps he's not as terrible as Mr. Qaddafi—anyway, the behavior of these kinds of people supports Menachem Begin and Yuval Neeman and Moshe Arens and Geula Cohen and these kinds of people. Their policy, in the West Bank and Gaza and in Lebanon, helps Mr. Qaddafi and the fanatics there, George Habash and others, to fight against those who are trying to find some moderate rapprochement. It's terrible.

For example, Abu Nidal. I don't know who is financing him. But by murdering the first secretary of the Israeli embassy in Paris in April 1982, and by trying to murder our ambassador in London, Abu Nidal directly supported Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon. He gave them an excellent pretext to invade Lebanon, even if it was a real pretext.

Let's look at the case of Issam Sartawi. By murdering Issam Sartawi—and let's assume Abu Nidal's people murdered Sartawi—they helped the Israeli fanatics to raise their voice. Even if there is no actual, on-the-ground cooperation, they are supporting each other, de facto.

EIR: Many people in Israel are disappointed with the peace with Egypt, in that they had thought that extensive economic cooperation between the two states would be forthcoming and would help stabilize the region as well. The Egyptians are also disappointed. How do you view the Israel-Egypt peace arrangement?

Pa'il: First of all, I must praise the Egyptians. In June 1982, we—the Israelis—gave them an excellent pretext to break the peace agreement with Israel by invading Lebanon. Egypt would have improved its situation within the Arab world immediately by breaking diplomatic relations. They didn't do it. It means that they have an interest, a real interest, in maintaining the peace. So I have hope. But I know that a full-fledged peace agreement won't develop between Israel and Egypt—by full-fledged, I mean economic relations, technological relations, transportation relations, etc.—before another breakthrough is established vis-à-vis some settlement of our eastern question, the Palestinians and the Jordanians, at least.

I respect the Egyptian president, President Mubarak, for keeping the peace. If nothing develops between Israel and its eastern problem, sooner or later, I think, Egypt will spring out of the peace process. That would be terrible. Israel would be pushed a whole generation back.