
Interview: Moshe Amirav

Israel's 'new voices' seek policy change

On June 6, 1988, *Middle East Insider (MEI)*, a weekly subscription newsletter issued by *EIR* in Western Europe, conducted the following exclusive interview with Moshe Amirav, the spokesman for the Israel Council for Peace and Security, which was created last April. Until earlier this year, Mr. Amirav had been a member of the Herut faction of the Likud. He was stripped of all responsibilities inside the party and forced to leave after having met with Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) representatives.

In the interview, *MEI* asked him the main aims of the Council, whose membership reads like a Who's Who of Israel's military establishment, with members such as Gen. Aharon Ya'ariv of Tel Aviv's Institute for Strategic Studies, Gen. Shlomo Gazit, formerly of military intelligence, Gen. Yitzhak Hofi, formerly of Mossad.

MEI: How would you define the aims and activities of the Council?

Amirav: The main target is to be active as a group in the political life in Israel, not as a party—we are not running for parliament—but as a pressure group on the idea that we have to go toward a settlement that will need to bring concessions, political concessions, territorial concessions, with the Palestinians. . . . We consider Israel to be strong enough to negotiate with the Palestinians and the Arab countries, and that the time is ready now, to have peace in the Middle East. The group consists of about 400 people, 100 of whom are retired generals, and the rest are academicians, professors, from all kinds of layers, industries, and high officials, former high-level officials within the government. The group is mainly engaged in propaganda, against what we call the propaganda of the right. The propaganda of the right today in Israel tries to separate peace from security. The Likud, the Takhya [Meir Kahane], and other elements, they say that there is a camp in Israel which is the peace camp, and they [the right] are the camp of Israel's security. What we are trying to say—and the people who are saying it, are people who had responsibilities in the army—is that not only will Israel's security not be harmed by a peace settlement, but to the contrary, a peace settlement will be the only security for Israel.

Unlike many others in Israel, we believe that there is

somebody to talk with, and there are partners who are ready to have peace with Israel, and we have to go and check it. We do not have a plan or a definitive solution, but what we have is a line of what we are saying; we cannot keep the status quo anymore, we have to give settlement a chance, and there are some of us who are raising questions. That is another aim of the Council, we have to raise new questions in Israel—not necessarily always give the answer. The questions that we raised in our meetings . . . [included] for instance, is a Palestinian Independent State really a danger to Israel? Because you know the consensus in Israel is that an independent state is a mortal danger. . . . So we raise such questions not in the detailed political aspect, but in terms of security. . . .

We ask ourselves if it is not better to have a demilitarized state in the West Bank and Gaza, rather than to give part of it to Jordan, which might in the future lead to a situation in which Syrian troops will be in the West Bank. . . .

We ask questions about the PLO: Is it really that the PLO doesn't want peace, is it really that the PLO is not ready for a concrete solution? Maybe there are elements in the PLO, in the mainstream of the PLO, who are ready today—maybe they were not ready before—to recognize the state of Israel. We would like to check it, we are not sure of it; the common consensus in Israel is that there is no one to talk with in the PLO. Maybe that is right but we raise questions . . . about what is said here, that the security line of Israel, on the East, has to be the Jordan River. We are not sure this is so, we have to see. Maybe in a peace settlement with Jordan, we can discuss to reduce the numbers of Jordanian brigades, of divisions, let's say from 26 to 10. It might be a better solution in a peace agreement, than to have the Israeli army on the Jordan line.

All these are questions that we are raising and many others, because we want them to be in the focus of public concern, of the public discussion right now. and it will be very difficult for those who are against [this] to say, "These are leftists, these are people who have not served in the army, these are no patriots." But we are patriots, we have served in the army, we are the mainstream in Israel, and we are raising these questions, because we think that this is the time for revolutionary thinking in this country and what we are going to do in the very near future, besides discussing these things,

is to explain and go on an offensive toward the Israeli public in the cities, in the small cities; we will send generals and professors to small places to speak out for our ideas. We won't give solutions in terms of what kind of maps there will be in the future, what kind of settlement, but we will raise all these questions, and we will say one definitive thing: It is time now for a settlement.

MEI: Will you ask each of the Knesset candidates in October to take a stand on what you are saying?

Amirav: We speak to the Israeli public. We are not a party, we think that all the parties speak only in slogans, we think that they are giving the public what they think the public would like to hear. They speak in slogans, and images which have nothing to do with the facts. In a time like this, it is very important to raise intelligent discussions with facts, analyses, and conclusions.

MEI: When the Council was created, there was talk that it also represented the views that the active military leadership cannot express.

Amirav: I don't know. I am not sure about what the active people in the army think. I do not think it is important, because the army does not think. Officers of the army in Israel are trained to obey orders from the political leadership, so they do not speak about politics in the army, and whoever is in the army has his own thoughts. . . . We are not trying even to say that we represent what the army thinks, because no one knows what the army, what the people in the army, think. What we are trying to say, is that when you speak about being strong, when you speak about security, when you speak about national security, the fact that you have a background in the army gives you a better basis to judge, and that's what we bring with us . . . the people who come from the army, and they bring that with them, but they are speaking as civilians. We are not dealing now with the army. . . .

MEI: You are making the point that Israel is strong enough from a military standpoint. Have you already looked at the economic side? There have been various proposals, such as a Marshall Plan for the region, stressing that common economic development would create the necessary bonds between the countries of the region.

Amirav: We will be organizing a symposium on this aspect that you are raising. . . . It will be at the Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv, next month. . . . Some of the most prominent Israeli economists will be attending this meeting, and some generals.

MEI: How do you analyze the recent superpower summit and their talks over the Middle East?

Amirav: We responded to it yesterday. We gave a very

positive response, especially to the situation in which the Soviet Union declared that it is standing for the security of Israel. And that in any arrangements in the future, the security of Israel will have to be taken into concern. We see that as a positive aspect from the Soviet Union. And we are very pleased with the pressures that the Soviet Union is putting on the PLO to recognize the State of Israel, because we see this recognition as a very important first step to pave the way for possibilities of negotiations between the PLO and Israel. The minute the PLO recognizes Israel, we believe that 70% of the population in Israel would be ready to speak with the PLO. Today, there was a survey in which 30% of the Israeli people said that they were ready to talk with the PLO. We are sure that this number will be doubled, even more than that, if the PLO recognizes the State of Israel.

MEI: In the next few days, the Arab summit will take place in Algiers. Do you expect the PLO to make such a step then?

Amirav: We hope that the Arab summit will listen to the *new voices* that are coming out of Israel. We think that, the same way we are listening to the new voices in the Arab world, they have to listen to the new voices in Israel. One of these voices is the voice of our Council.

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