

Beilin: Facing the Challenge

These are excerpts from the opening remarks of Yossi Beilin, member of the Israeli Knesset (parliament), to a conference call sponsored by the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, Aug. 20. The transcript and an audiotape are posted at <http://btvshalom.org/resources/transcripts.shtml>, under the title "After the Ceasefire: What Comes Next?"

I believe that we find ourselves—in the beginning of the ceasefire after 33 days of the second war in Lebanon—in a very strange situation. One of the most interesting results is that it is a kind of a meeting point of weak leaders. . . . The question I am asking myself, and I am asking you, is whether in certain situations one can hope for a change just because of this weakness. Is it possible to use . . . this weakness so that decent leaders will understand that they might find a common denominator by going for something big enough, which might serve the national interest and save their political lives?

I do believe that the role of the peace camp, wherever it is—Israel, Palestine, in other places, in the United States—is to try and push for this big thing, and one of the options for such a big thing is to have a second Madrid Conference 15 years after the first one, which took place on Oct. 31, 1991. My idea is that we should push for something like this so that Syria, Lebanon, Palestinians, Israelis, and of course America, or the Quartet, will participate in such a conference, will launch bilateral talks between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinians, and try to suggest that in a few months it could be possible to have peace treaties with our neighbors.

I must admit that right now it might seem quite detached from reality. The reality seems very gloomy when you think about Israel. . . .

So the question right now is whether the embarrassment, the confusion, the gloomy feelings, and the weakness of the leaders, might lead us, at the appropriate time, to go toward something which will attract the attention of the peoples in the region, of the peoples in the world, away from this sadness, or darkness, into a hope and into light. This is the question. . . . I don't want to analyze exactly what went wrong. . . . I can only tell you, that had we only been wise enough to make peace with Syria and with the Palestinians and with the Lebanese when it was possible years ago, we wouldn't have found ourselves in this situation and in war with Lebanon at the beginning of the 21st Century.

But we failed in the past, we made our mistakes, and we have to face the future and the new challenges, and ask ourselves whether it is possible now. . . .