

go in parallel but they are not to be mixed together. Each is separate from the other.

## ISRAEL

**C1. GERSHON BASKIN, "GILAD SHALIT, HAMAS, AND OLMERT," *JERUSALEM POST*, 9 FEBRUARY 2009 (EXCERPTS).**

*Less than a month after Operation Cast Lead (OCL) ended, an Israeli peace activist who had occasionally served as an unofficial emissary between Israel and Hamas revealed that ten days before the operation's launch the Olmert government had rejected Hamas's back-channel offer to negotiate the renewal of the interrupted cease-fire, as well as a prisoner exchange involving captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Gershon Baskin, co-founder and director of the Jerusalem-based Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, wrote a detailed account of the episode in the Jerusalem Post, concluding that it gave the lie to the government's claim that OCL was a "war of no choice." The full text of this article can be found online at [www.jpost.com](http://www.jpost.com).*

Two weeks before Israel launched its attack on Gaza in response to a breakdown of the *tabdiya* (cease-fire) with three weeks of barrages of Qassam rockets and mortar shells against its civilian population, I met with a senior Hamas personality in a European capital. This person is connected and in contact with the Hamas leadership in Gaza and in Damascus. Over the past 950 days since the abduction of [Gilad] Shalit, he has transmitted messages for me back and forth to the Hamas leadership in Damascus, including a letter from Noam Shalit to Khalid Mishal on 8 September 2006 that led to the release of the first sign of life from Gilad . . . [to] the Egyptians on 9 September 2006.

We spent several hours talking about the conditions to renew the *tabdiya*. Since the abduction of Shalit on 25 June 2006, my involvement behind the scenes has been in holding unofficial talks with various Hamas leaders in Gaza, Damascus, and elsewhere, all seeking to advance the negotiations to bring Gilad home. For two and a half years I had been trying to bring about a direct secret back channel bypassing third-party mediators in order to speed up the process.

Initially, when Hamas proposed such a channel about one month after the abduction, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert rejected it

with a knee-jerk response that "we don't negotiate with terrorists." About a year later, I received permission from the government to see if it was possible to open up the direct secret back channel. Until two weeks before the Gaza war, Hamas refused.

My talks with the Hamas leader in Europe [in December 2008] focused on two main issues: convening a secret direct back channel and linking the prisoner exchange for Shalit's release to the renewal of the cease-fire and the ending of the economic siege on Gaza. For about two years Hamas had rejected the linking of the prisoner exchange with the cease-fire and the end of the siege. Since, however, this had been the initial position of Hamas immediately following the abduction of Shalit, as was communicated to me some three weeks after the abduction (a call for a cease-fire, opening the borders, and the prisoner exchange), I appealed to the Hamas leader to go back to the original demands but to include an agreement to bypass the Egyptian mediators through a direct secret back channel.

Our talks led to his agreement to get the approval of the Hamas leadership for this proposal. We concluded our talks with a note handwritten by him on the new proposed framework. We agreed that I would approach the Israeli leadership, and he would get the approval of the Hamas leadership. We further agreed that both of us would be directly involved in the talks along with others who would be appointed by the leaders on both sides.

I returned to Israel and ten days before the war broke out I wrote to Olmert, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that Hamas was willing to open a direct secret back channel for a package deal that would include the renewal of the cease-fire, the ending of the economic siege, and the prisoner exchange for the release of Shalit. I further indicated that Hamas would be willing to implement the agreement on Rafah, which included the stationing of Palestinian Authority personnel loyal to Pres. Mahmud Abbas in Rafah and a return of the European monitors. I communicated the same message to Noam Shalit and asked him to make sure that Ofer Dekel, who is charged with the Shalit file by the government, received the Hamas "offer."

I waited for a response from one of the people who received my letter. Nothing. No response. When the war broke out I understood that the decision to go to war had already been taken, and that the

government preferred to teach Hamas a lesson rather than negotiate a new cease-fire and the release of Shalit. I understood that the leaders believed that they could bring about a regime change in Gaza, even if this was not the stated goal of the war. Why would we negotiate with Hamas if we expected to bring about the fall of Hamas?

Over the past days the media has been filled with reports that there is a new breakthrough in the talks for the release of Shalit: "Hamas is willing to link the end of the economic siege with the release of Shalit." When I read this, I said to myself—enough lies and spins. . . .

If the transition government of Olmert does bring Shalit home before the new government is formed, it will pay the exact price that it could have paid nearly 950 days ago. The price then was as unreasonable as it is today; the problem is that there is simply no other way of bringing Gilad home. Hamas has not changed its price. The war in Gaza did not create any positive developments. It has not changed the price. It has not enabled a new breakthrough. It has weakened the moderate leadership of Abbas. It has weakened the moderates in Gaza. It did not achieve the goals that our leaders hoped it would.

The war was supported by 94 percent of Israelis because they really believed it was a "war of no choice." Lies, lies, and lies. There was a choice. That choice was made—our leaders preferred war regardless of the cost. We don't negotiate with terrorists. We won't talk with Hamas. . . . That is the doctrine of the government. Now we can talk with Hamas? Isn't that what the government is doing today? Perhaps the talks are not direct, but we are negotiating with Hamas. The agreement that will be reached will be exactly what I proposed to Olmert, Barak, and Livni ten days before the war began.

**C2. AVIGDOR LIEBERMAN, INAUGURAL STATEMENT AS FOREIGN MINISTER, JERUSALEM, 1 APRIL 2009 (EXCERPTS).**

*Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu ("Israel Is Our Home") party, was appointed foreign minister in March 2009 in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud government coalition, which formed nearly six weeks after the Knesset elections of 10 February 2009. Lieberman, who ran under the slogan "no loyalty, no citizenship"—demanding that Arab citizens of Israel*

*pledge allegiance to the Jewish state or be expelled and calling for the "annihilation" of Hamas—won an unprecedented fifteen seats, beating out Labor to become Israel's third-largest party in the Knesset.*

*Lieberman, a settler and immigrant from the former Soviet Union, caused a stir with his first speech as foreign minister, in which he declared the road map to be the sole document binding Israel to its pledges post-Oslo. The full text of the speech can be found online at [www.mfa.gov.il](http://www.mfa.gov.il).*

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The claim that what is threatening the world today is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a way of evading reality. The reality is that the problems are coming from the direction of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq.

What is important is to maintain global and regional stability. Egypt is definitely an important country in the Arab world, a stabilizing factor in the regional system and perhaps even beyond that, and I certainly view it as an important partner. I would be happy to visit Egypt and to host Egyptian leaders here, including the Egyptian foreign minister—all based on mutual respect.

I think that we have been disparaging many concepts, and we have shown the greatest disdain of all for the word "peace." The fact that we say the word "peace" twenty times a day will not bring peace any closer. There have been two governments here that took far-reaching measures: the Sharon government and the Olmert government. They took dramatic steps and made far-reaching proposals. We saw the disengagement and the Annapolis conference.

Yisrael Beiteinu was not then part of the coalition, Avigdor Lieberman was not the foreign minister and, even if we had wanted to, we would have been unable to prevent peace. But none of these far-reaching measures have brought peace. To the contrary. We have seen that, after all the gestures that we made, after all the dramatic steps we took, and all the far-reaching proposals we presented, in the past few years this country has gone through the second war in Lebanon and Operation Cast Lead—and not because we chose to. I have not seen peace here. It is precisely when we made all the concessions that I saw the Durban conference, I saw two countries in the Arab world suddenly sever relations, recalling their ambassadors—Mauritania and Qatar suddenly became extremist.

We are also losing ground every day in public opinion. Does anyone think that