

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2012 10:58 AM
To: H
Subject: FW: WP: Israeli official says priority is peace process, not attack on Iran

FYI

From: Vinograd, Samantha [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, June 19, 2012 10:36 AM
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: FW: WP: Israeli official says priority is peace process, not attack on Iran

B6

I think she is seeing him today so wanted to flag for you/ your team.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-israel-shaul-mofaz-brings-dissonant-voice-to-netanyahu-coalition/2012/06/19/gJQAbGuRnV_print.html

Israeli official says priority is peace process, not attack on Iran

By Karin Brulliard, Updated: Tuesday, June 19, 6:30 AM

PETAH TIKVA, Israel — On his debut trip to Washington as an Israeli vice prime minister, career military man Shaul Mofaz says he will appeal this week for American support in ending the greatest threat to his country.

It is not Iran's nuclear program, Mofaz says: What keeps him awake at night is Israel's drawn-out conflict with the Palestinians and the prospect that it could cause the demise of the Jewish state if Arabs eventually outnumber Jews in Israel.

"Time is not in favor of the state of Israel," Mofaz, 63, said in an interview in this central Israeli city, where Kadima, the centrist political party he leads, is based. "The generation of the leaders today should decide. This year, next year — we have to decide."

It is a dissonant message here. Though Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators are said to be quietly meeting, official talks have basically been frozen since 2008. These days, domestic concerns top the agenda in Israel; discussions involving the occupied Palestinian territories generally center on controversial court-ordered settlement evacuations in the West Bank, not peacemaking.

Mofaz, a former army chief and defense minister, argues that should and can change. In a sudden move that rocked Israeli politics, Mofaz and hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu struck a deal last month to form one of Israel's largest-ever governing coalitions. That gives the government a rare and fleeting power, Mofaz asserts, to overcome dissent and push through a peace deal before elections in late 2013.

“It’s about time,” Mofaz said repeatedly, as if practicing a talking point ahead of his visit to Washington, where he is scheduled to begin meetings on Wednesday with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. security officials.

He said he will pitch to them a peace plan he first unveiled in 2009, which envisions an interim Palestinian state with temporary borders on 60 percent of the West Bank and continued negotiations. It would eventually end with Israel keeping the main Jewish settlement blocs, the evacuation of almost 100,000 Israeli settlers outside those, and land swaps giving Palestinians 100 percent of the territory they demand.

‘On the cheap’

The question is whether Mofaz’s opinion matters. Many analysts say no, in part because of the timing of his alliance with Netanyahu’s conservative Likud Party, something he had vowed never to do. Mofaz sealed the deal after polls showed that his party, Israel’s largest opposition group, would have fared badly in early elections.

Yossi Alpher, a strategic affairs analyst, said those circumstances allowed Netanyahu to win Mofaz’s partnership “on the cheap,” mostly by promising progress on two of Kadima’s domestic priorities: changing the military draft to recruit more religious and Arab soldiers, and overhauling the electoral system.

But Netanyahu’s official stance on the peace process remains unchanged: He wants a two-state solution but will negotiate only if the Palestinians drop all preconditions. Those include the demand for a halt to settlement building, which the Palestinians say they will not abandon. And the Obama administration is considered loathe to touch the issue in an election year.

Alpher deemed Mofaz’s peace pitch “innovative.” But under the circumstances, Alpher said, “if he actually thinks he’s going to get somewhere, then he’s truly delusional.”

Ghassan Khatib, a spokesman for the Palestinian Authority, dismissed as “rhetoric” the idea that the formation of a more centrist Israeli coalition might heighten the prospects for peace.

“We tend to take them more seriously on what they do than what they say,” Khatib said of Israeli leaders. “I open my eyes every morning and see new settlement building in the West Bank.”

Unintended consequences

Of more interest to Israeli prognosticators is Mofaz’s influence on the topic of Iran, the country from which he immigrated as a child. In some respects, the Kadima leader echoes the position of the Netanyahu-led government — all options must be on the table, Iran is buying time. But he also echoes several former security officials who have deemed the push by Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak for military action as reckless or, in the words of one, “messianic.”

Mofaz has been quoted as calling the idea of an Israeli attack on Iran “disastrous.” In the interview, he was more diplomatic, saying an attack could bring unintended consequences. Asked whether Netanyahu appeared to weigh such counsel, Mofaz avoided specifics.

But he made clear that he does not consider the Iranian threat as urgent as Barak or Netanyahu do. Preventing an Iranian bomb should be the “acid test” of the Obama administration, Mofaz said.

“Speaking about an Israeli use of force, it is only when the sword will be on our neck and we see that no one is going to act and there is no other option. And today this is not the situation,” Mofaz said. “There is, today, time and room for diplomacy and for sanctions.”

For now, he said, Israel’s international priority should be safeguarding its peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt. Israel should work closely with whoever ends up leading Egypt, Islamist or otherwise, he said.

As turmoil and uncertainty pulsate through the Middle East, Israel’s strategy has been to hunker down and wait. Mofaz, however, said he believes “tectonic change” in the region is the precise reason to make peace with the Palestinians.

“If we are able to achieve these two issues,” Mofaz said, referring to a temporary deal on borders and security, “I am certain that the relationship with the Palestinians and with other Arab states, including the Arab League, will be changed. The atmosphere will be changed.”