

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The Iran-Israel conflict, HC 1081

Tuesday 24 June 2025

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Members present: Emily Thornberry (Chair); Alex Ballinger; Uma Kumaran; Blair McDougall; Abtisam Mohamed; Edward Morello; Sir John Whittingdale.

Questions 34 - 58

Witness

I: Yair Lapid, Leader of the Israeli Opposition, Knesset.

Examination of witness

Witness: Yair Lapid.

Q34 Chair: Today, the Foreign Affairs Committee is holding a second one-off session into the Iran-Israel conflict. We have not been able to secure a witness from the Israeli embassy or the Israeli Government, but we are able to hear today from the Leader of the Opposition in the Knesset, Yair Lapid. We are aware that Israel is currently—or may be, we understand—subject to airstrikes, despite the supposed ceasefire. It may be that our witness will need to disappear at very short notice if they are under fire, and that the witness will need to leave immediately. I will then explain if he disappears.

We are really grateful for your time today. I wondered whether you might introduce yourself, please, Sir. We will take it from there.

Yair Lapid: Thank you for having me. Good morning. My name is, as you have said, Yair Lapid. I am the former Finance Minister, Foreign Minister, and Prime Minister of Israel. I currently serve as the Leader of the Opposition and chairperson of Yesh Atid, Israel's second largest party.

I will say a word about that last role, which has to do with the conversation we are going to have. As fellow politicians, I think you will understand. I am a vocal opponent of the current Israeli Government. Prime Minister Netanyahu is a bitter political rival. We loudly disagree on almost everything, but, on this operation to dismantle Iran's nuclear programme and eliminate the ballistic missile threat, we fully agree. I saw the intelligence. We were facing an existential threat. I supported the goals of the operation. We stood together as a country, as a leadership and as a people.

I welcome today's ceasefire. Now it must be translated into an effective agreement and one that creates a long-term solution. Iran must not be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon. Iran must not be allowed to build an arsenal of ballistic missiles that is larger than Russia's. Iran must not be allowed to fund and arm terrorist proxies across the region. Iran must not be allowed to threaten Israel, the region or the world ever again. On that, I hope we can all agree. Thank you. I know that the Iranian ambassador spoke for 10 minutes. I took less of your time.

Chair: You have different styles, perhaps. We would like to begin by asking you particularly about Iran. Obviously, many of the people watching, and indeed we, are also very interested to hear your views on Gaza. If we have time at the end, we would like to ask you a few questions about that as well.

Q35 Sir John Whittingdale: Mr Lapid, thank you very much. We understand that Israel has agreed to a ceasefire with Iran. Can you say whether you think Israel has achieved its ambitions as a result of the conflict already, or is there still a risk to Israel as long as the Iranian regime remains in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

place?

Yair Lapid: We have to make sure the ceasefire lasts. Just 45 minutes ago, which is three and a half hours after the ceasefire took place, two Iranian missiles hit the Israeli north. We have to figure out whether it is just a breach or something Iran is going to do, and then we cannot stand for it.

Basically, the answer to your question is no, because this is a ceasefire. It is not an agreement. We have heard about significant targets of the nuclear sites inside Iran. We know that the American attack on Friday night was very effective on Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. We are still gathering the intelligence on the enriched uranium Iran already had before this 12 days' war. We knew to begin with that it has collected enough high-level enriched uranium for something in between nine and 12 bombs. Some of it was smuggled. We do not know how much.

Of course, we hit the ballistic missile programme. Iran was going into manufacturing abilities that would have allowed it to have more ballistic missiles than Russia in less than two years. We have hit all this and it is a good thing. The world is a safer place than it was 12 days ago, but still we have to keep an eye on the intelligence. The next thing that needs to happen is to have a very solid agreement. In this, of course, the UK is going to play a role.

Q36 **Sir John Whittingdale:** There were reports prior to the American strike of nuclear material being moved out from those sites. Are you concerned that Iran may still have nuclear material and be in a position to continue its programme, despite the strikes that have taken place?

Yair Lapid: Again, we are still assessing. It is a bit complicated. There are only a limited number of places Iran can smuggle the uranium to. It is not something you take in a suitcase to put at home until the fire stops. Since we hit all the major facilities, we think at least the majority of it might be gone, but not everything. We know that Iran is going to do its best to restore the ability and gather the material, because this is what it does. Part of the problem and part of the reason that we were forced into this operation is because this regime, like always, is lying, deceiving, cheating and doing everything in its power to hide it from the world. This is why, in any future agreement, the level of supervision is going to be critical.

Q37 **Edward Morello:** Mr Lapid, I am interested in your view, based on the intelligence that you have seen, on, time-wise, how close Israel believes Iran was to having nuclear capability prior to the strikes by Israel and the US. What is your assessment of how far that has been pushed out as a result of the attacks, or do you believe that it has been completely extinguished?

Yair Lapid: Everybody is throwing numbers on the table, but it is not years. Even if it is months, it is very few of them. Part of the intelligence we were seeing, and sharing with the Americans, of course—some of it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was your intelligence as well—is the fact that Iran has revived its weapon group that was out of the game since the beginning of the 2000s. This was done on the direct order of the Supreme Leader Khamenei. It was not only that it was enriching uranium or had developed the next generation of centrifuges. It was also reviving the weapon group and all the capabilities involved. It was running for a bomb.

I do not think that Israel and the world can afford Iran as even a threshold country, but this was more than a threshold country. This was running. We felt and thought, and saw intelligence that told us, that we can wake up one morning with a first experiment of a nuclear weapon in the Iranian desert. This would have thrown the entire Middle East into a nuclear arms race. If the Iranians have one, the Egyptians want one and the Turks want one. The Emirates might revive part of its nuclear programme that it already has, and of course the Saudis want one. We felt that the danger is closing down on us and everyone else in the region, and therefore we were forced into action.

Q38 Edward Morello: To the second part of my question, as a result of the strikes, what is your view on where Iran's capability is now in terms of timeline?

Yair Lapid: We do not know yet. It will take some time to assess all the damage, and this assessment will have to penetrate through all the future lying and deceiving of the Iranians. We are going to share information and intelligence with our allies and friends, the United Kingdom included. It is going to take some time to assess, but Iran was hurt and taken backwards significantly. We just do not know exactly how much right now.

I will give you an example. The Americans were using the MOP, the huge bomb that only they have, in Fordow. This is a bomb that penetrates the surface and then explodes 20 or 30 meters inside the facility. It takes time. You do not get to assess what happened from satellites. You have to figure out other ways to assess what happened there, and it will take some time until we know for sure. I do not know whether we will ever know for sure, but it will take some time until we know better.

Q39 Edward Morello: I am interested in your opinion. You can destroy facilities and set back its plans, but, ultimately, Iran still has the technical know-how, the scientists, the manufacturing ability and the uranium mines to rebuild the enrichment process over some period of time, should it wish to. In terms of what the desired outcome is, in your opinion, for Israel, is it enough to give up nuclear ambitions, or does Iran have to give up any desire for a civilian nuclear capability? What gives Israel confidence, because Iran will continue to be a regional neighbour?

Yair Lapid: There are five basic terms that need to be answered in any future agreement. I am not against all agreements. We always say that a good agreement is the best thing and a bad agreement is the worst



HOUSE OF COMMONS

thing. What has happened now is the in-between, or the sanctions were the in-between.

There are five basic terms that need to be answered in any future agreement. The first is no enrichment inside Iran, which is the gold standard of the Middle East that was set when the Emirates wanted to have its own nuclear programme. The second is no centrifuges. They all have to be dismantled. The third is no enriched uranium. All enriched uranium that Iran already has inside has to be deposited somewhere else. The fourth is no ballistic missiles programme and the fifth, of course, is unlimited supervision.

If you have those five terms that make sense, the majority of which were already answered in the JCPOA—the former agreement that the UK was part of as an E3 country—but just performed better and in a more strict way, you have an agreement that we can trust and there will be no future necessary Israeli operations, American operations or joint operations. Nobody wanted it. Nobody wanted to fight.

Sometimes the absurdity of this hits me. We have no border with Iran. We have no historical conflict with Iran. The Iranians are sympathetically mentioned in the Bible as our friends. In the Middle East there are only four real historic nations that were not the Sykes–Picot western geographers drawing a map, which are Israel, Iran, Turkey and Egypt. There is no reason for this ongoing dispute. Alas, this regime has decided that all it wants is to develop a nuclear programme in order to have a bomb, in order to throw it on Israel. We had to act.

Q40 Alex Ballinger: You mentioned the JCPOA, Mr Lapid. Thank you for that. In 2018, when the last Trump Administration pulled out of that agreement, it was understood that that was because of Israeli pressure. I wondered whether you thought that that was the right decision at that time. Do you agree that we now need a negotiated situation close to the JCPOA again in order to make sure that Iran is not able to covertly develop this capability again?

Yair Lapid: In my opening remark—it was not even opening remarks; it was an opening remark—I said that I disagree with Prime Minister Netanyahu on most things. One of them was the way he acted opposite the JCPOA. Getting rid of the JCPOA without a clear plan of what we wanted to have instead of it was wrong. Doing this without our European friends—this was back in history; I do not know whether you remember this, but England used to be part of Europe—was a mistake. It should have been a co-ordinated effort and not one-sided.

The JCPOA had its flaws. I used to discuss this with our American friends at length. Making it disappear, without a coherent plan of what should come instead of this, and just saying, “We are going to have full sanctions, but the full sanctions does not include our European friends, so it is not full sanctions”, was not the right way to go about it. We need an



agreement that is better than the JCPOA, stricter, with better supervision and tougher terms.

- Q41 **Alex Ballinger:** That is very helpful. Another criticism that has been made in the international community is around international law and the initial strikes made by Israel in this round of conflict. Many people have said—we have spoken about this—that Iran may have been months or years away from developing a nuclear bomb, so there is no clear international legal precedent for the attacks. What is your position on that? Do you think that it is damaging for Israel to be seen again, after so many occasions, to be breaching international law?

Yair Lapid: What is the Committee's position on an atomic bomb exploding in Israel, in terms of the international law?

- Q42 **Alex Ballinger:** It would of course be a disaster.

Yair Lapid: Yes. It is always a conflict whether or not to raise holocaustic arguments in discussions like this. We saw; we did not speculate or feel, but we saw the intelligence that tells us that Iran is rushing into the bomb, and international law or the international community cannot do anything about it, or it does not have the willpower to do something about it. We thought, "We cannot sit on our hands".

We are a law-abiding country, but the right of self-defence is part of international law, especially opposite existential threats. This is why we have operated in the way we did. Let me remind you, if we are talking about the international law, that there are only two member states in the United Nations where one is openly saying that its goal is the total destruction of the other. The Iranians have said it again and again on public platforms.

Alex Ballinger: There have been Israeli Ministers who have said similar things about the population in Gaza and Tehran, if we are picking out individual statements.

- Q43 **Chair:** Let us not go into that rabbit hole at this moment. Can I perhaps approach it from another way? Let me see whether I can put it this way. We have heard your evidence that Israel was under threat, and certainly the bellicose language used by Iran was something that we put to the ambassador. The fact that it had nuclear material that seemed to be much purer than 3.6% without any kind of explanation for it is also very threatening to Israel. We appreciate all of that, but the evidence that the threat was an imminent one is an important point.

Although it is something that the Israelis have said, and sometimes some Americans have said—some Americans have said many things within a few days—what we have not had is any evidence. I wondered, if the Israelis believed that they were under imminent threat, why it was that they did not produce that evidence before the international community. Do you not regret not putting that evidence before us all so that we could understand why it was an imminent threat, as opposed to a threat that



may happen within a few months or a few years? As my colleague has said, if it is a question of a threat a few months or years ahead, we will get back to that position again unless we have negotiations.

Yair Lapid: It is a fair question. When you are presenting to the world the factual imminent threat, usually it is too late. Of course, you are always limited by the fact that you do not want to surrender your intelligence sources. The entire international community is a bit post-traumatic from the United States going to war against Iraq based on information that is flawed. This is not the case.

Q44 **Chair:** How do we know that? How do we know that you are not going to war on the basis of flawed evidence? We have not seen anything at all, flawed or not.

Yair Lapid: You saw Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. We have shown the Americans, of course. The co-operation or sharing of information was quite extensive. I am going back to the beginning of our conversation. I am no fan of Israel's Government. I do not know whether I am going to have an easy time discussing Gaza with you, but I will have an easier time than the Government, because I completely disagree with what they are doing there.

Chair: We will get on to that.

Yair Lapid: On this one, at one point or another, you will have to decide who you trust. I am telling you, if you want to know who you trust, Israel or Iran, on this, you should trust Israel.

Q45 **Chair:** Let me see whether I can approach it this way. We talk about trust and we seem to all be agreeing that, in order for there to be a long-lasting peace in the Middle East, we need to have a negotiated settlement. It needs to be negotiated, and there needs to be a clear agreement with the Iranians on what they can and cannot do. It needs to make sure that it is enforced, and enforced clearly. Exactly what comes out of the negotiations is obviously subject to negotiation, but in order for there to be a proper negotiation there needs to be trust on both sides.

The Iranian ambassador—I think I should put this to you—essentially said, "We agreed to JCPOA and the Americans walked away from it", egged on by the Israelis, he believes. "Then we are in a second lot of negotiations and, in the middle of those negotiations, the Israelis start bombing us, when we are going into those negotiations in good faith". He was not here to say this, but I imagine he would now say, "Then the Americans say that nothing is going to happen for two weeks and, within a few days, the Americans are bombing us". In those circumstances, one could understand that there would be quite a lot of work needing to be done to get the Iranians to be able to trust the Americans and the Israelis if there are to be negotiations. Do you accept that?

Yair Lapid: I have a problem with the premise, if I may. The Iranians are lying, and the Iranians are doing this using a language and a vocabulary that the western world is fond of. They are talking about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

international law while oppressing the young, the women and the LGBT community. They are talking about democracy when they are not a democracy. They are talking about the two sides of this equation, while there are no two sides of an equation.

This is a regime we have no problem with that says it wants to kill all the Jews because they are Jews, because this is the deep, radical, twisted version of Islam. I do not think that this is Islam. Islam is something different, but it has twisted Islam into this radical version. It knows that, when it is talking to the oldest Parliament in the world, it needs to say things about its rights and our duty to recognise its side of the story. I do not accept this premise.

- Q46 **Edward Morello:** Thank you, Mr Lapid. I am interested in following on a little bit from the Chair's point and going back to the five things that you outlined in terms of what Israel is looking for Iran to agree to. I am struck by the fact that having just been bombed by two nuclear powers would not seem to incentivise the Iranian regime to give up its nuclear ambitions. I wonder whether you think that it is possible to reach an agreed peace with Iran based on the five principles that you outlined, or does there need to be regime change in Iran for Israel to be able to achieve those five things?

Yair Lapid: I have nothing against the idea of a regime change in Iran, but this is for the Iranian people to decide. I think that they will take into consideration the fact that, in these past 12 days, they have just realised that billions and billions of dollars were taken from schools, hospitals, roads and housing into a nuclear programme that disappeared within a week and a half. This is a calculation for the Iranian people to make.

In terms of the agreement, yes, I think Iran is going to be forced into this agreement. If we were still trying to play nice and discuss with it what it is willing to give opposite what we are willing to give, and what it is willing to do opposite what kind of pressure the Americans are willing to force, this would have gone nowhere forever, as it did before. This is a regime that needs to understand the consequences when it declines the necessary supervision or the necessary terms of a future agreement. Otherwise, it will never do it. I do not want to say things like, "Iran understands only the language of power", because things are always more complicated than this, but we are not far from it.

- Q47 **Abtisam Mohamed:** Thank you, Mr Lapid. I would like to refer you back to an interview that you gave last year where you said that Netanyahu is "not working for the country. The only thing he cares about is staying in power...He is for himself...He lost his soul". Is the endless fight for wars and constant wanting to keep the extended war in Gaza continuous just an existential fight for survival for Netanyahu?

Yair Lapid: I feel a bit uncomfortable discussing this with a foreign Parliament, even if friendly. On a personal note, I am so tired of analysing his psychological motives. This has become an international



HOUSE OF COMMONS

game like they do with President Trump. Basically, when something he is doing is the right thing to do, as he did in Iran, it is the right thing to do. When something is wrong, such as in Gaza, it is the wrong thing to do. I can give you an endless list of reasons why I think he is the wrong person to lead the country, but I think you will understand if I would rather do it in Hebrew to the Israeli voters.

Q48 Abtisam Mohamed: In relation to the current conflict in Gaza, what do you think should happen to bring the war to an end?

Yair Lapid: Are we there yet?

Chair: We are probably there. We only have 15 minutes. We have done half an hour on Iran, so let us go on to Gaza.

Yair Lapid: No. 1, as I said numerous times, including twice this morning, we need to get to an agreement in Gaza, end the war and bring back the hostages, because this is going nowhere. That raises the question of what needs to be done in Gaza. I presented a plan to the American Administration. I have discussed this with your Foreign Minister and others. What needs to be done is to let the Egyptians run Gaza for the next 15 years. I will explain, because this is not an instinctive solution and it is not a flawless solution. It is just the best solution out of many bad ideas.

Right now, the problem we have is that we have no one to give Gaza to. Everybody understands why it is that Israel is saying Hamas cannot stay. The Palestinian Authority is too weak and incompetent. We thought in the beginning that some sort of coalition of Arab countries—Sunni, moderate Muslim countries, such as the Saudis, the Emirates and others—would be the right coalition to run Gaza, but right now it does not seem possible due to other things that are going on in the region, which I am not sure we are going to have time to discuss.

Egypt has run Gaza for 19 years, between 1948 and 1967. It knows how to fight terror. It knows how to fight the Muslim Brotherhood. Again, that is a radical, twisted version of Islam; it is not Islam. Egypt knows how to cooperate with us. We have fought together against ISIS. It can function as a guardian for the Palestinian people. I am not saying that we are giving Gaza to the Egyptians to become Egyptian. I am saying that they can have—I do not know—a symbolic branch of the Palestinian Authority on the civic side of this, but, basically, the only body around us that can run Gaza is Egypt.

This should answer another problem we are preoccupied with, which is the fact that Egypt is in trouble after five years of covid and then war. Egypt's two main sources of income, which are the Suez canal and tourism, are hurt significantly. Its external debt is about \$155 billion. It is growing at 1.7% a year and therefore it cannot feed the mouths that are born there every year. We think that this could be arranged in such a way that the international community will help the Egyptians with their



HOUSE OF COMMONS

internal problems, while Egypt helps the international community and the Palestinians by taking Gaza to be managed for a limited period of time.

This is the solution I have offered. I am still discussing this with others. Ridiculously enough, while I have discussed it with the Americans, with the European Union, with you a little bit and even with the Egyptians, the only body I did not discuss it with is our own beloved Government, for reasons of mutual dislike.

Q49 Abtisam Mohamed: Under what conditions would Palestinians themselves be, in your view, able to run Gaza or the West Bank?

Yair Lapid: You have to clarify for me. When you are saying "Palestinians", which Palestinians? There is the Palestinian Authority, there is Hamas and there is Islamic Jihad. There are so many bodies that are calling themselves the real representatives of the Palestinians.

Q50 Abtisam Mohamed: Let me rephrase the question. Under what conditions would you see the recognition of a Palestinian state where the Palestinian Authority would be the ruling body? Under what conditions would you see this?

Yair Lapid: It is tragic. When I was Prime Minister, I gave a speech in the United Nations General Assembly, which is the biggest stage on earth. Against the advice of every person in his right mind, I declared the fact that I am a supporter of the two-state solution. Tragically, this has been postponed significantly after 7 October, because fear has become a huge factor in any way we look at it.

In order to discuss the two-state solution, the Palestinians have to prove to us now that this does not become another failing terror state that will be the base of the next attack against the Israeli people—against the innocent, the women and children who were attacked on 7 October. Fear, suspicion and human tragedy, unfortunately, have pushed back the idea of the two-state solution.

We need not to give up on the future possibility of peace between our peoples, because this is the right thing. Two major things happened to me in the last year. One is this war and the other is that I have my first granddaughter. I wish for her that, in her future, there is peace between these two agonising, suffering peoples.

Q51 Blair McDougall: Thank you for your time, Mr Lapid. It is a matter of regret for us that the Israeli Government have not been willing to talk to us, so we thank you for coming before us. Can I go back to something you said a moment ago about how it is for the Israeli voters to decide? Unfortunately, people in Gaza cannot wait that long. You, this morning, called again for an end to the war in Gaza. You have called for that many times. You have offered Netanyahu political cover for that. You have urged him to distance himself from extremists such as Smotrich and Ben-Gvir. What needs to change before any election and change of leadership for Netanyahu to answer that call to end things in Gaza, do a



deal to bring home the hostages and stop the killing?

Yair Lapid: The reason I said it again this morning is that, as I said, he did not want to do it while he was still trying to regain his political power after the tragedy of 7 October, which his name is written all over. Now that he is on top, after a very successful operation in Iran, he might understand or relate to the idea that this is the right thing for the country. You know what? It is also something that will be extremely popular with the people of Israel.

As you do in the Opposition, you have the right idea and you push it and push it, trying to make sure that, at the moment it becomes relevant, you will be out there with the right call. This is what we were trying to do.

We have a better chance today for an agreement in Gaza, which of course has to start with returning our hostages, than we had 12 days ago, before the operation in Iran. I will discuss this, of course, with the Prime Minister and the coalition in the future, not weeks, but days.

Q52 Blair McDougall: To go back to your original premise, I represent a very large Jewish community. Many of them have been obviously deeply traumatised by the pogrom on 7 October, but also deeply shocked by everything that has followed as well. They worry deeply that Israel's international reputation has been deeply damaged not just by what has happened in Gaza, but by what is happening in the West Bank as well with settler violence. If you were Prime Minister tomorrow, what would change? What would change in terms of humanitarian access in Gaza and challenging the violence in the West Bank?

Yair Lapid: If I may use the example that is in front of me, you have said that the Government refused to talk to you and you thank me for being here. If I was the Prime Minister, I would have talked to you and the Government would have talked to you. The Israeli Government were way too busy victimising themselves instead of explaining to the world what it is that we do, what kind of enemy we are facing and what the circumstances are that led to the tragedy in Gaza.

I will tell you something more. They have neglected their duty, not only as a Government, but also as human beings—you have mentioned the Jewish congregation in your area, and this also has to do with Jewish morals—to say, "We are sorry for the loss of life in Gaza. We are sorry for every child who has died in Gaza. Children should not die in grown-ups' wars and we are going to do our best to prevent this. When that does not succeed and it happens, because we are fighting a horrible enemy in a very densely populated area that is using its own children as human shields, we are so sorry about this. Our heart goes out to them and we have to make sure we find ways to be helpful to them".

The reasons that our Government have neglected their duty to say so are cynical and political in ways that I find hard not only to relate to but to forgive. You see, I tried not to attack my own Government in the British



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliament. I could not do it because this is so emotional for us all. This is one.

Two, I would finalise a deal in Gaza a year ago. There is no reason on earth why this has been going on for six hundred and twenty-something days, not to mention the fact that we are an island economy based on high tech with an army that is based on the model of reserve. Therefore, long wars are a very bad idea for Israel, even strategically, not only morally.

Q53 Uma Kumaran: Thank you, Mr Lapid. I do not know whether you will recall, but we had a chance meeting in Hostages Square when we were visiting earlier this year.

Yair Lapid: Yes.

Uma Kumaran: You said that it was good to see that Israelis have friends who are coming there to see the pain and the suffering. There are a lot of us around this table who have been asking the difficult questions for nearly a year now of how we get to a resolution to this bitter and painful war where there has been a lot of loss on both sides.

Yesterday I met with the wife of a hostage whose body has not yet been returned to her. She said that her son is struggling to process the fact that his father is dead. She has had it confirmed, but she asked, without a body or a funeral, how they can move forward. She was pregnant when he was kidnapped, but she has now since given birth.

She was pleading with me to do everything I can, and for us to do everything we can on the Foreign Affairs Committee, to use our voices to call on the Israeli Government to do everything they can to bring the hostages home, and the bodies as well. We know that is a sticking point for ceasefire negotiations and things moving forward. Why is it, in your view, that Benjamin Netanyahu and the Israeli Government have not put further pressure on bringing the hostages and the bodies home?

Yair Lapid: I do not know. I have been asking myself this question every morning, every night when I go to sleep, and then every morning again. Why is it that they do not understand that there will be no healing process in Israel before the hostages are back? There will be no healing process in the region before there is an agreement to end the war in Gaza. The only thing that will happen is that we will live 7 October again on a daily basis.

My sister is a professor of psychology and works in the hostage headquarters. In Jewish families, they always send the bright ones to study and the stupid ones to work, so I went to work and she went to study. She is telling me that we do not even scratch the surface of the psychological effect on the people of Israel of the fact that our children are still there and the war is still going on. Why it is that our Government are not willing to take the extra effort and finish this is beyond my comprehension.



Q54 Uma Kumaran: The view is really clear from when we were there, even though for a short time. A lot of the Israeli people, the general public, are quite tired of the situation and they want this to end. A lot of them have real sympathy for the plight of the people in Gaza, including some of the hostage families we met who were worried about the women and mothers in Gaza. They have seen them struggling without food, aid and medical supplies. There is a feeling in the Israeli public that this has gone on for too long.

The members of the Knesset we met when we were there were unwilling to even see that point of view. They were solidified in their mindset. How are the Israeli leadership and the politicians of the day going to meet where their public are? There is no point in the general public protesting or speaking up if those in power are not shifting anything. How do they get to a different point at this stage?

Yair Lapid: Since you missed your bus, you missed the part when I was saying—

Chair: She did not miss her bus. Her bus was slow.

Uma Kumaran: It was the train.

Yair Lapid: You missed the part where I said that I am not going to defend the Government. It is beyond my comprehension. Why is it that they do not understand? Why is it that, when talking to lawmakers from other countries, they do not show sympathy? Why is it that they do not feel it? This is the worst interpretation of Jewish morality. This is the worst interpretation of what your duty is as leaders. I am not going to spend my time or yours defending something I deeply believe is hazardous to the soul of my country.

This is not what this country is all about. This is not why my father came here from the Holocaust to build a nation. This is not why people fight wars: to become a heartless country. We are a country with a heart in a difficult situation, surrounded by bitter, terrible enemies, fighting the worst kind of terror on a daily basis, but this does not justify becoming like them. This only comes to emphasise the necessity and the duty to be different. Not everybody in our Government remembered this.

Q55 Chair: Can I ask you a question about your plan? We probably ought to, for the sake of completeness, put this aspect as well. The Egyptians do not agree with it, do they, which is a big problem?

Yair Lapid: It depends. When I was in Washington discussing this, I said to them, "You have to understand, because we know the Egyptians pretty well, that the first thing they are going to say is no. Then they are going to discuss it". We have been working with them. It is an encouraging thought that wars come and go in the Middle East, but, if you are looking at this, agreements survive. We have had a peace agreement with the Egyptians for 50 years now and with the Jordanians for almost 40. The Abraham accords, which everybody thought were really fragile, have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

survived the last two years of what happened in Gaza. The agreements we are signing seem to be more solid than the fighting that came before them. We know how to close a deal, especially if it takes into consideration the internal problems that preoccupy Egypt and the Egyptian leadership.

People need to remember, and I reminded the Egyptians, that the reconstruction, rebuilding and rehabilitating of Gaza is going to be the second-largest economic project in the Middle East after the rebuilding, reconstruction and rehabilitating of Syria. It is big business. It is the right thing to do. It brings Egypt back to the position it always had, which is the most important Arabic country. It has so many advantages to Egypt that I believe we can find a way. You know what? It does not even contradict the plan that the Egyptians themselves have presented in the last two Arab League meetings, because it is going to be some sort of an interim stage towards the plan they have presented.

Q56 Chair: You mean the plan that the rest of the world believes is the way forward, which is two states.

Yair Lapid: No, the rest of the Arab world.

Q57 Chair: Yes, but they also want two states.

Yair Lapid: There was a funny—it was funny to me; I do not know whether you are going to find it funny. Before the conference in Saudi Arabia, when President Trump went to Riyadh and everybody was invited but us, somebody asked me about this. I said that it was weird, because the only thing the Saudis wanted was for Netanyahu to say something about the possibility that, somewhere down the road, in the far future, if all Palestinians convert to Judaism and become blonde, we will agree to a two-state solution, and he refused. I have said on Israeli television that this was the very first time ever that everybody was asking Benjamin Netanyahu to lie, and he refused.

Yes, eventually I want peace with the Palestinians. This should not be off the table ever, because this is what I want for my children. Not being able even to say it out loud is not only ridiculous but also cowardly. This is not going to happen in the near future, but we have to have a future. On top of this, of course, there is the necessity not to take steps in the West Bank that will make things irreversible. Hopefully, or naturally, we are going to wait for the next Government in order to do so.

Chair: Your staff are sending messages to mine to say that we ought to wrap up, but I am going to ask for just one more question for Uma.

Q58 Uma Kumaran: Thank you, Mr Lapid, for your evidence today. You said that you wish for peace between the two peoples, as do we all, and I think so too do the rest of the world. To get there, we need to see this two-state solution. It has been kicked down the road for quite a long time. The situation in Gaza is perilous. The hostage families are crying out for an end to this. The people of Israel have suffered for a long time



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and the Gazans are suffering daily. How do we get to the two-state solution if the Knesset is not willing to say this out loud or have this conversation?

Yair Lapid: It is not all the Knesset, as you just heard. It is interesting. There was a huge discussion here about Churchill, because Netanyahu's followers said all the time, "He is the new Churchill. He fought Iran. He was the one who was walking alone in the dark, saying that Iran is the biggest threat and now the entire world understands, as Churchill did before World War II". Then some of us said, "You know, after the war, Churchill lost the election. Do you know why? Attlee was less impressive, but had a plan for the future of England". We have a good plan for the future of Israel.

I do not know how much you follow Israeli domestic politics. I know, Uma, that you, as a Parliament Member, do more than others. In every poll in the last two years, this coalition is going to lose. It is going to lose because it has no plan for the future of Israel. It is just selling fears all around. The world is in the midst of an international struggle between populists, alarmists and people who are just making sense and trying to build a better future. The only principle in politics that works is the pendulum principle, and the pendulum now is moving our way.

I am optimistic about the possibility of a Knesset with a majority of people who are saying, "Yes, we want to have a better future for our children, and this better future includes peace with our neighbours".

Chair: Thank you very much. We will put your staff out of their misery and allow you to go. Thank you very much for your time today. We really do appreciate it. If there is anything that occurs to you that perhaps you would also like to put before us, please write to us after this session. Thank you again.