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MA'ARIV' INTERVIEWS ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER SHAMIR

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[Interview with Foreign Minister Yitzhaq Shamir by Dov Goldstein: "I held contacts in the United States with African representatives, and there is hope that more countries from the continent will renew their relations with us soon"--date and place not given]

[Text] If Foreign Minister Yitzhaq Shamir has anything in his heart about Defense Minister Ari'el Sharon, because of his anti-U.S. statements, he will not say. If he thinks that the statements have damaged Israel, he will not say so in public. If he thinks that he was right at the time in voting in the Knesset against the Camp David agreements, and that the current state of relations with Egypt is proof of this, he is holding his tongue.

He has never regretted words left unspoken. Anyone, from his own experience, can bear witness to one superfluous word.

[Question] According to descriptions in the press, when you returned from your trip to the United States, you gave the cabinet a very optimistic report about your talks with U.S. administration leaders. Does this originate in your basic optimism, as a character trait, or are U.S.-Israeli relations really as good as that and we did not know?

[Answer] I do not think that I gave an optimistic report. I reported matters as I felt, as I heard, as I saw and as I experienced them. I reported a change in the atmosphere in various fields and spheres. I told about a certain calming down in relations between the two countries, with what is in common being prominent, and it is perhaps likely to soften the future confrontation over disagreements.

We have common problems that must be solved urgently--together. Their successful solution could create a better atmosphere in the relations which would, perhaps, prevent sharp confrontations over disputed matters.

[Question] Such as, for example, the Reagan plan about which the Americans are repeatedly saying that they will not give it up, and Israel is repeatedly declaring that it will reject it?

[Answer] Yes. The issue was discussed at length. My interlocutors did not conceal from me their _____ to the president's plan, and I did not conceal from them Israel's opposition.

[Question] Were there or were there not hints that economic aid to Israel would be affected by a softening of Israel's opposition to the Reagan plan?

[Answer] No, under no circumstances! Neither a hint nor half a hint!

[Question] Maybe, with your permission, you could provide a basis for your optimism about the change in atmosphere, with some examples?

[Answer] Everything is relative. When I say that there has been an improvement, I mean compared with the situation a short time ago, when all our friends in the world, and particularly in the United States, were certain that Israel and the United States were in a situation of sharp confrontation that would become sharper and deeper. Such a situation--and it is even sufficient for people to believe that it really is the situation--has a bad affect on our friends' moods. It depresses the Jews and encourages people and bodies throughout the world to "get at" Israel. Our international status is being weakened in any case.

[Question] Do the grave accusations made by the U.S. secretary of defense over and over again serve Israel's interests, as you described?

[Answer] When there is an atmosphere of confrontation, expressions of this sort are heard....

Of the sort you asked about...when the atmosphere clears, those rumblings disappear. Altogether, today there is a more realistic assessment in the United States regarding the positive results of the peace for Galilee campaign, since the tragic events are behind us. The great benefit and the outstanding advantages that the United States is drawing and will continue to draw from that campaign can be seen by all.

[Question] By all Israelis, or by Americans?

[Answer] Americans, Americans! I was told this specifically, in the clearest way. After all, it is impossible not to see and feel the satisfaction, satisfaction of administration officials, when representatives of all the governments of the Middle East go to Washington for discussions about the solution to the Middle East dispute. They are not going to Moscow; only to Washington. The U.S. status in the Middle East, which is today stronger than ever before, was undoubtedly achieved thanks to Israel's action in Lebanon, and because of the special relations between Israel and the United States. People in the United States know this, and they also know how to appreciate it.

[Question] Is this also being expressed in the media?

[Answer] This time I met with many journalists, with many editorial boards. There is a certain change in tone and spirit in the editorials on and reporting of our affairs. There is a more sober way of looking at things, and more objectivity.

[Question] Did you speak with the U.S. administration leaders about increasing aid to Israel?

[Answer] No. I did not ask for anything. We spoke about common interests. We discussed and planned maneuvers for the campaign against Israel's expulsion from the UN General Assembly. The Arabs' striking failure is the result of a considered and purposeful effort in which a great deal of diplomatic work was invested. The Americans assess the result as a great success by them, and they regard this as the beginning of an aggressive line in the United Nations concerning all issues. They are tired of being walked over by the third world. They pay for most of the UN expenses--and in most of the votes they are defeated. Now Nicaragua has also been elected to the Security Council and this is "eating" at the Americans.

[Question] Were there any absolute expressions of friendship for Israel in what was said by administration leaders?

[Answers] Definitely. They often used the expression: "In relations between friends and allies." And I added: "Between friends and allies differences of opinion are revealed. You have differences of opinion with friends and allies in Europe. That is natural."

[Question] But is it clear to both of us and the Americans that differences of opinion exist and are outstanding?

[Answer] That is clear. On the issues in dispute we walk on tiptoe, with great caution. I repeatedly explained our adherence to the Camp David Agreements: Only adherence to them can bring the chance of peace closer, while any attempt to deviate from them, to "cut through" at once and decide now on the future of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, will only cause a dispute and deadlock inside Israel, a dispute between Israel and the United States, and perhaps within the Arab world as well--and this will not lead to peace.

[Question] And what do the Americans say?

[Answer] I did not come up against any questioning of these assumptions, although the U.S. side claims that it has not under any circumstances conceded the Reagan plan, and that this plan does not violate the Camp David Agreements and is not a deviation from them.

[Question] You often met with Jews during your current trip. Did you form the impression that the U.S. Jews support the policy of the government of Israel?

[Answer] Well, the U.S. Jews are an enormous community. It is impossible to speak about them all, in general. There are some who support it and some who oppose it. Even the opponents among them--or, at least, most of them--should not make their criticism heard in public. You know, I will disclose to you: This time, more than ever in the past, I understood in the most pointed way that it is of the most supreme importance to speak with Jews, to explain our moves to them, our positions and our actions. Like others, I, too, in the past met with the feeling: "Why do you demand that everything be explained to them? After all, they live there, in the United States?" We must not think in this way.

[Question] You said that you held several secret talks in the United States. Perhaps you could now reveal about what and with whom?

[Answer] The time has not yet come. This will be publicized when the time comes, when my interlocutors agree to lift the cover of secrecy.

[Question] Were the talks serious, with genuine chances of success?

[Answer] The chances are very important.

[Question] Were there any contacts whatsoever with the Soviet Union?

[Answer] No. Not this time.

[Question] Despite the publicity in the United States that the Soviet Union is interested in renewing relations with Israel, and that there were various contacts on this issue?

[Answer] We were informed that there were thoughts and second thoughts in the Soviet bloc about the logic of severing relations with Israel. This act was what took the Soviets out of the entire peace-making process in the Middle East.

[Question] What was your reaction?

[Answer] The well-known reaction: They severed relations and renewal depends on them. For our part, there is a decided willingness to maintain normal relations with all countries of the world, including all the Soviet bloc countries. At my meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko last year, I told him: "After all, you preach the maintenance of relations with all countries of the world, including relations of commerce and culture, without any connection with the nature of the regime." He looked at me and said: "There is something in what you say, but it is different in the Middle East."

[Question] There is no doubt that without Israel, Amin al-Jumayyil would not have been elected president, nor would there have been any chance of Lebanon being an independent country. Even today, if the IDF were to retreat from Lebanon, as he is demanding, unconditionally and without anything in return, Lebanon would rapidly return to the status of a nonstate, whose territory is conquered by the Syrians and terrorists. Why, then, does he express himself

in such a hard way against Israel, and what does Israel intend to do on this matter?

[Answer] There is a great deal of logic in the descriptions you use. It is not for me to analyze the Lebanese president's reasoning behind his statements. We still hope, despite the statements, that we will find a way to settle relations with Lebanon in such a way as to guarantee security on our northern border and open up a pathway to peaceful relations between Israel and its northern neighbor.

[Question] Would you agree with the assumption that al-Jumayyil is ungrateful?

[Answer] I do not need to characterize him and analyze his behavior.

[Question] The prime minister, so it has been publicized, said at the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that in talks not for publication, the president of Lebanon speaks differently....

[Answer] I would not say that. If, indeed, there are talks that are not for publication--why should I publicize them? We will judge the president of Lebanon according to acts in the field, not according to his statements.

[Question] Please, according to acts in the field: If al-Jumayyil and his government stand firm in their refusal to sign an agreement with Israel about the security agreements, will the IDF not retreat from Lebanon?

[Answer] We will conduct negotiations about the security arrangements.

[Question] With whom?

[Answer] With Lebanon: With the participation of the United States, because that is Lebanon's wish and we are not opposed to it. I hope that we will sign an agreement with Lebanon worthy of its name.

[Question] Must the agreement be signed with Lebanon?

[Answer] Yes. With Lebanon! With whom would we sign such an agreement?

[Question] Israel's most authoritative spokesmen have repeatedly announced that Israel will not permit the positioning of Syrian anti-aircraft missiles on Lebanese territory. Such missiles have now again been positioned in the al-Biqa' region of Lebanon and north of the country. What will Israel's reaction be?

[Answer] This has happened several times in the past, and what happens afterward--is known.

[Question] The missiles were destroyed....

[Answer] Destroyed.

[Question] And now?

[Answer] There is no need to predict. The reports will be examined. The initiative is in our hands.

[Question] It is sad to say about Israel's relations with Egypt that almost all the gloomy predictions have come true: noncombat--at this stage, this is still the case. Peace--no. Normalization--no. The return of the Egyptian ambassador to Israel--not yet. Tourism--one-way traffic, only from Israel to Egypt. And the Egyptian papers are again showing hatred and calling Israel a "fascist state." Why is Israel refusing to open talks with Egypt about the Tabah area, near Elat? Maybe an agreement about the future of the region at dispute would actually be an opening for a lull in some of the bitterness and for a gradual search for the normalization process?

[Answer] The negative phenomena in Egypt toward the Camp David Agreements and the peace treaty with Israel did not begin yesterday. The Egyptians; proposal to open talks about Tabah, as was agreed upon by both countries, has only arrived over the last few days. So there is no connection between matters. We are, of course, interested in the existence of reasonable relations with Egypt, which is to this day preserving the basic principal points of the peace agreement. There is no connection between this and the differences of opinion over the Tabah area. That is a separate affair. We will find the time and the way to conduct negotiations over the Tabah area.

[Question] Why must we find the time? Why not now?

[Answer] There are various considerations. We have not said not now. There is no official announcement about this by Israel. But it seems strange that when Egypt is not keeping all the agreements that were signed about all the normalization issues, there should be treatment of and negotiations over just the Tabah issue, and only it.

[Question] Is Israel making the talks about Tabah dependent on the Egyptian ambassador's return to Israel?

[Answer] We have not said that. However, it would be easier and more convenient to conduct contacts on that issue when the relations required by the peace agreement are maintained.

[Question] You have not reacted to the assumption that in fact all that remains of the Israeli-Egyptian relations is a state of noncombat, without peace....

[Answer] There is a peace treaty. It is basically being kept. There are embassies. There are flight links. There is tourism.

[Question] Unilaterally....

[Answer] Yes. At this stage, unilaterally.

[Question] Did you speak with the U.S. administration leaders about the freeze in normalization?

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[Answer] Yes. I told the Americans that it is their duty to bring Egypt back from that path. The Americans, I reminded them, are partners in the Camp David Agreements and it is their duty to persuade the Egyptians and bring them back, lest they deviate from the Camp David Agreements.

[Question] About a year ago, in a MA'ARIV interview, you said that some African countries would renew their diplomatic relations with Israel. In the meantime only Zaire has done so. What is the chance of other countries joining it in the near future?

[Answer] All the time, constantly, close contacts with various African countries are continuing. There are difficulties and obstacles. I hope that we will overcome them in the near future. When I was just now in the United States, I held contacts with the representatives of African countries. There is an appreciable improvement in the African countries' voting on various issues--and not only on the question of Israel's expulsion from the UN General Assembly.

[Question] Is there any truth to the reports published that you wanted to visit more Latin American countries, not only Costa Rica, but they refused to host you?

[Answer] Nonsense. Rot. I spent almost a month away from home and that was the maximum I could permit myself. Some countries in Latin America invited me to visit and I was unable to respond to them because of lack of time. I intend to visit the countries that invited me soon.

[Question] From my past experience I can say with certainty that you consistently refuse to reply to questions involving internal struggles within your party, Herut. Will you also behave in the same way this time, or is it worth my trying?

[Answer] It is not a matter here of a refusal to answer questions. It is simple: There is nothing to which to reply. There are no struggles within Herut. All the struggles are on the pages of the press. Inside the movement not only are there no struggles, there are no issues to struggle over. There are no matters being disputed inside the Herut movement.

[Question] Just like that?

[Answer] Just like that--and that is true.

[Question] Your name is being brought up in various contexts of the struggle, whose existence you deny out of hand. It is being said, for example, that you will be the interim candidate for the premiership after Mr Menahem Begin, in order to curb Arik Sharon. Are you playing this sort of role, of a curb?

[Answer] Really, really...all this talk is ridiculous. To contain...a curb... the problem of candidature for this role does not exist and is not topical, and no serious person deals with it. What candidature? Candidature for what? I do not understand all the speculation about this. Perhaps because there are no other issues about which it is possible to tell about internal struggles in Herut, so they come up with this sort of nonsense....

[Question] In your opinion, when the time comes, after the Begin period, is Arik Sharon suitable for the post of prime minister?

[Answer] The problem is not topical. We are not going to elect a candidate for the premiership. We have no need for a candidate. There is a prime minister who is working and functioning.

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