

9 Statement in the Knesset by Prime Minister Begin at the opening of the Knesset-s summer session- 7 May 1979



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5/7/1979

► **VOLUME 6: 1979-1980**

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In the traditional policy address to the Knesset, given by the Prime Minister upon the return of the Israeli Parliament from its spring recess, Mr. Begin reviewed the dramatic events of the recent weeks and issued a call to the President of Lebanon and to other Arab leaders to follow the example of President Sadat and meet with him for peace negotiations. Excerpts:

Dr. Majid, the Egyptian delegate to the UN, handed the Secretary General a document in which he spoke of the "restoration of Arab Jerusalem to Arab sovereignty." Yesterday we instructed our UN delegate, Dr. Yehuda Blum, to hand the Secretary General, for circulation among member states, an Israeli document which states: "Jerusalem is and shall forever remain one city indivisible, the eternal capital of our nation, as it -was since King David transferred his kingdom's capital from Hebron to Jerusalem over 3000 thousand years ago. "Under Israel's sovereign jurisdiction, absolute free access to the holy places has been and shall forever be guaranteed to Jew, Christian and Moslem. This was not so during the 19 years of Jordanian occupation, throughout that era Jews could not pray at the Western Wall as was their wont for generations. "Now and forever, there shall be no man - whatever his religion - who will be prevented from worshipping at his holy site."

Mr. Chairman, the normalization process in Israel-Egypt relations is progressing. When I was in Cairo, I met with President Sadat and we concluded that as El Arish will be handed back to Egyptian sovereignty, the two of us shall proclaim open borders between the two states and the determination of direct air corridor - over Sinai - between Cairo and Ben Gurion airport. This we shall do on 27 May, when we meet in El Arish.

I wish to inform the Knesset that not only will the President of Egypt and the Prime Minister of Israel, together with the Foreign, Defence and Interior Ministers meet, but wounded soldiers of Egypt and Israel will also meet. The fighters will shake each others hand and will say to each other - No more War.

A ship flying the Israeli flag, called "Ashdod", recently sailed through the Suez Canal. Why? The first paragraph which went into effect upon the ratification states: "The state of war between the parties will be terminated and peace will be established -between them upon the exchange of the instruments of ratification of this treaty."

I wish to explain to the Knesset that this paragraph was proposed by us and met for some time during the negotiations with an opposition by the other party. The Egyptian delegation at the time did not want to accept the phrase dealing with the end of the state of war. We insisted on this formula, as we read a large number of peace treaties and in all of them as a principle in international law, when a peace treaty is signed, the first paragraph says that the state of war has terminated. This had and has practical significance...

There was a visit of the Defence Minister to Egypt. He was, received by President Sadat, the Prime Minister and the Egyptian Defence Minister. The talks he held were successful and advanced the peace making process in word and deed. I state with much satisfaction that the Defence Minister was warmly received not only by the Egyptian government but also by thousands of the Egyptian people, in Cairo as well as in Alexandria.

The Joint Military Commission, sitting in El Arish, began its work and it is conducting direct negotiations without a third party intervention and without a third party representative chairing the meetings. The chairmen rotate, and this joint, commission is busy at work on the implementation of the peace treaty in both the military and the civilian spheres.

Soon the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces will visit Egypt with senior officers of our army. This, too, will be a step towards the normalization of Egypt-Israel relations.

In the near future the Deputy Prime Minister will visit Egypt at the personal invitation of President Sadat; the Foreign Minister at the invitation of Egypt's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Agriculture and Energy as well. We shall, naturally, warmly receive the colleagues of these ministers who shall represent Egypt. Talks will be held between representatives of the two countries in areas relating to their specific activities, and thus we shall advance the peace process.

Mr. Chairman, with the signing of the peace treaty between ourselves and Egypt, a fundamental change in our country's international standing has occurred. We signed a peace treaty - not a cease fire, not an interim agreement, but a peace treaty with the largest and most powerful of our neighbours. The population of all our neighbours is barely half of that of Egypt. This is a turning point in the history of the Middle East. True, for the attainment of this lofty goal, making peace and signing a peace treaty between ourselves and Egypt, we made precious sacrifices. The negotiations lasted fourteen months and were tiring, there were ups and downs, hopes and frustrations, difficulties as well. But we signed a peace treaty, we concluded a chapter in the annals of Israel, we opened a new chapter in our national existence.

Mr. Chairman, I come now to explain the principles of Israel's policy towards Lebanon. Firstly, I am honoured to invite Lebanon's President, Mr. Sarkis, to come to Jerusalem to meet with me. For my part, I am prepared to leave in a civilian plane for Beirut. The subject of our conversation, whether held in Jerusalem or in Beirut or in a neutral place will be one: the signing of a peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel. I announce on behalf of the government of Israel that our state has no

territorial claims in Lebanon. We uphold the territorial integrity and state sovereignty of Lebanon We are prepared to sign a peace treaty on the basis of the Israel-Lebanese borders. This goal can be achieved in but few days. This is my call to the President of Lebanon and its government....

Thirdly, murderous attacks on Israel and on Jews from Lebanese territory. We shall not tolerate, under any circumstances, a situation in which murderers, baser than at any time since the Nazis, shall operate, shedding innocent blood of men, women and children. And in Beirut they continue to boast of these murders and promise to continue and to intensify them. There are those who make these repeated announcements, and they must realize their consequences. We shall not wait for another incident. After Nahariya, the murderers' organizations announced that they will continue their barbarous acts. This is the constant threat of terrorist actions. We shall hit these murderers at all times, in all places, with all our might, by sea, by air, by land, until they are no longer able to carry out their murderous schemes against Israelis only because they were born Israelis, against Jews because they were born Jewish. We shall give them no rest. We know where their headquarters, artillery and arsenals are. We shall strike to destroy and scatter them, the enemies of mankind, commanded by the Palestinian "Iddi Amin" - Yasser Arafat. I wish to inform the Knesset that yesterday we struck at the murderers, and only half an hour ago we again struck at them and all our aircraft, thank god, returned safely. We shall give these murderers no rest until they end murderous acts in our country and the murder of Jews...

Fourthly, Mr. Chairman, Israel desires cooperation with all of the units of UNIFIL, the force fulfills an important role in Lebanon...

Fifthly, the Syrian occupation forces must leave Lebanese territory and return to their country, Syria. This army of occupation is no longer under the guise of a Pan Arab peace keeping force. The Saudis have already left Lebanon, as did the Kuwaitis. There remain only the Syrians with their Soviet tanks and artillery, with which they wreak havoc from time to time upon the civilian population, men, women and children who live in Lebanon and are of the Christian faith. I fully agree with President Sadat who stated that the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, is according to him, a fiasco, or failure, and is the source of all trouble in Lebanon. Damascus must put an end to this failure and the sooner the better.

Sixthly, Mr. Chairman, we, the small Jewish state, rescued the ancient Christian community in northern Lebanon and the Christians and Shiite Moslems in the south from the danger of genocide. Let it be written in the annals of nations: great and mighty Christian nations did nothing to prevent the crime of genocide on their correligionists. And as usual, the UN stood idly by. We aided and shall continue to help the Christians and Shiites to maintain their lives in security and peace. The government headed by MK Yitzhak Rabin, started this blessed activity. The present government continued and intensified it, and if need be, will intensify it in the future. Let it be known that because of our aid we can influence our Christian friends in Lebanon. We cannot give them orders. One day Major Haddad said: "We are not a part of America. and neither of Israel. Our lives are on balance. We shall decide." I accepted this statement with respect and understanding, and I suggest to all of us to take it in this vein. We shall continue to influence, when need be, to prevent unnecessary conflicts. But all the factors in and out of the UN must know, as I wrote in my letter of reply to the appeal of the UN Secretary General, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and to the Prime Ministers of Norway and Eire, that the Lebanese Christians are fighting for their lives and we cannot give them directives.

But in Damascus and in Beirut there are plots being hatched against the life of Major Haddad, a Lebanese patriot, as he was termed by our Defence Minister - a brave fighter for the existence of his community. They seek his life. I myself heard these threats. Therefore I shall reiterate to all factors what I said to the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Mr. Lewis, in a formulation known to every educated American from the days that preceded the Freedom Act of Abraham Lincoln: "As far as Major Haddad is concerned, we shall, under no circumstances, sell him down the river..."
