







QUESTIONS FOR TZIPI LIVNI

Leader of the Opposition

By DEBORAH SOLOMON
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The Israeli security cabinet just voted to ease the three-year blockade on Gaza, in the wake of the tragic naval attack on the Mavi Marmara by Israeli commandos. What does that mean in practical terms?

I've heard that the cabinet changed the list to allow more goods to enter. There shouldn't be any limitations on food, but things that can be used for terror cannot be permitted. The reason for the blockade on Gaza was not to punish the Palestinians but to continue to delegitimize Hamas. There is no hope for peace with Hamas, and we need to continue the peace process with the legitimate Palestinian government.

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Yoray Liberman for The New York Times

Many Americans agree Hamas is a disaster, but might Israel do more to show concern for the Palestinian people and the problems they face?

I know that there is no humanitarian crisis.

Why do you say that?

The crossings are open for humanitarian needs. I suggested in the past to put cameras online, on the Internet, for the world to see all the goods entering Gaza Strip. This was my suggestion when I was foreign minister.

You're the leader of the centrist Kadima Party, which is an opposition party. Yet you don't sound very opposed to the views of the ruling party.

On the right of Israel to exist and to defend itself, there is no opposition in Israel.

Have you met frequently with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of the right-wing Likud party?

Netanyahu is my next meeting.

When does his term expire?

About three years from now.

Do you think he will be pushed out before his term ends, as often happens in Israeli politics?

If he does the right thing, he has a future, but in

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order to do the right thing, he needs to make new decisions, new policy and a completely different coalition. Otherwise the Israelis are going to change the government.

By “right thing,” do you mean he needs to move beyond his longstanding aversion to a two-state solution?

Yes, he said a few months ago that he supported this idea of two nation-states, and now we are at the beginning of the proximity talks. This is going to be tested by decisions, not by words. It's going to be tested in the near future.

You lost to him in the race for prime minister last year. Will you run again?

I will be prime minister. It's about the future of my state.

Your parents were among the country's founders.

They were the first couple to marry in Israel, the very first. Both of them were in the Irgun. They were freedom fighters, and they met while boarding a British train. When the British Mandate was here, they robbed a train to get the money in order to buy weapons.

It was a more romantic era. Is your mom still alive?

No. She died two years ago. A few years ago, when I was interviewed on Israeli television, I said I support the idea of two nation-states. I was afraid that my mother was listening and hoped that she didn't open the TV when I was speaking. But then one day she called me and said: "Listen, Tzipi. I hear you. It gives me pain. But you need to make decisions about the future of Israel. We didn't establish this state for having just old people living here."

That could be a good slogan. Isn't your husband in advertising?

My husband is in branding. He brands places — cities, institutions.

Do you ever talk to him about improving Israel's image?

Yes, of course. I believe Israel needs branding. I want that the word "Israel" will relate not just to an Israeli soldier or a camel, but Israel as an advanced liberal society with a strong economy and great people.

Do your children agree with your politics?

They know that what I'm doing is for the sake of their own future. I want to know that when I die I leave them something more than a bank account — a state to live in, to be proud of.

Are you dying?

It's not part of my plan for now.

A version of this interview appeared in print on June 27, 2010, on page MM12 of the Sunday Magazine.

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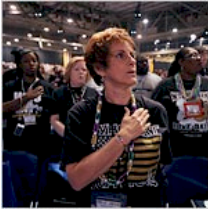
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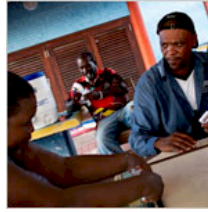
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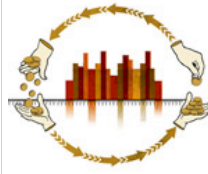
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