

## EZ – אקטואליה

### **New tunes, bad timing**

By Uzi Benziman

Let's all recite together the "Shekheheyanu" - "Blessed is He who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this moment - in which Benjamin Netanyahu has not completely ruled out the Saudi initiative." In an interview with Aluf Benn in this paper, the Likud leader said, as if brushing off his prime ministerial suits, that "the Saudi initiative cannot be implemented in terms of its details but...blah, blah blah... we have to come to an arrangement, get to the end and then go backward."

Which means, not all the details of the Saudi initiative are acceptable today to Netanyahu, but there are parts that seem alright to him. This is a far-reaching innovation, since in the past Netanyahu utterly rejected such a position. Here, for example, are statements he made to Ynet on March 4, 2002: "My opinion on the initiative is negative: This plan would bring us back to the 1967 lines - a plan that will help Arafat destroy Israel. The initiative is flawed also because of those who raised it - a regime that funds terror and terror organizations."

Netanyahu's positions are not often discussed here, nor are his motives; Netanyahu is just a metaphor for the amazing sense of timing of Israel's leaders: The penny drops for them fatefully late. Thus Golda Meir, in the way she read Anwar Sadat's intentions; thus, Ehud Barak in his contacts with Hafez Assad; and Ariel Sharon in his conduct vis-a-vis Mahmoud Abbas.

Five years after the Saudi initiative was rejected by Israel, it has become a costly die on the game board on which Israel's future is determined, and the country's leaders are working hard to hold on to it. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, in an interview with Channel 10 last week, said she thought Saudi King Abdullah's original plan was a positive one; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, in a speech at Ben-Gurion's tomb three months ago, cited the plan as a possible basis for the beginning of regional talks; Minister Meir Sheerit announced last month that he had proposed that Olmert invite all those involved in the Saudi initiative to begin negotiations on parts of it. These are new tunes.

For those who have forgotten: When the Saudi initiative was first revealed, prime minister Sharon declined to respond to it. The sophisticated excuse was that it had not been officially presented, it was only a proposal brought up in a newspaper. A few days later it was reported that Sharon had asked the United States to find out the details of the plan.

Sharon's intention was transparent: not to appear to be entirely negating the move, but to avoid discussing it seriously. Sharon's motive was also clear: In those days he was in favor of achieving a long-term interim solution.

The Saudi initiative threatened this goal, because it sought to take the bull by the horns: to bring about an actual end to the Israeli-Arab conflict on the basis of Israel's withdrawal to the '67 lines (with the possibility of small border adjustments through exchanges of territory).

Jerusalem's response was essentially to ignore the dramatic turning point embodied by the proposal and the chance it represented for a historic change in Israel's relations with its neighbors.

Five years have passed. In Iraq a conference is being held, in which enemies and rivals are meeting, and Riyadh is to host a pan-Arab conference at the end of the month, at which the Saudi initiative will be raised again.

In Israel, however, the strong man no longer sits in the prime minister's chair who could have, if blessed with the right vision, picked up the gauntlet thrown down by the Saudi crown prince (now king). Ehud Olmert is a weak leader, lacking public support, and the hesitant agreement he is voicing to the Saudi plan sounds like grasping at straws. Time is once again working against Israel.

## VOCABULARY

recite - לקרוא, לדקלם	bring about - לחולל, להביא לידי
Shekhehyanu - "שהחיינו"	withdrawal - עזיבה, יציאה, נסיגה
sustain - לשמור, לקיים, לממן	adjustment - התאמה, תיקון
ruled out - לשלול, לפסול	exchanges of territory - חילופי שטחים
Saudi initiative - היוזמה הסעודית	first and foremost - ביטוי- בראש ובראשונה
implemented - מיושם, מבוצע	essentially - ביסודה, במהותה
acceptable - מקובל על הדעת	embodied - מגולם, מומחש
far-reaching - מרחיק לכת	rivals - מתחרה, יריב
innovation - חידוש	picked up the gauntlet - להרים את הכפפה
utterly - ביסודיות, לחלוטין	hesitant - הססני
flawed - פגום, לקוי	voicing – להביע חוות דעת
regime - שלטון, משטר	grasping at straws - להיאחז בקש
motives - מניעים	
The penny drops - ביטוי- "נופל האסימון"	
fatefully - באופן גורלי, באופן בלתי נמנע	
vis-a-vis - ביטוי- בצרפתית פנים מול פנים	
determined - נקבע, מוחלט	
Foreign Minister - שרת החוץ	
regional - אזורי	
sophisticated - מתוחכם, מורכב	
excuse - תירוץ	
transparent - שקוף	
entirely - לגמרי	
negating - לשלול, להפריך	
avoid - להימנע, להתחמק	
long-term - ארוך טווח	
interim - תקופת ביניים	
threatened - איים	
sought - לחפש, לבקש	
take the bull by the horns - לתפוס את השור בקרניו- לגשת ישר לעניין	