

The Iran Distraction: a view from Israel on Palestine and the elections

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Polis Intern Phoebe Amoroso reports on a talk by veteran Israeli political journalist Emmanuel Rosen, currently Chief Political Correspondent for Israel TV Channel 2.



Emmanuel Rosen

With tensions escalating between Israel and Iran as the international community watches anxiously on, it's a good time to hear direct from someone at the heart of Israeli media. On January 22nd next year, Israel will hold national elections and Iran's programme of nuclear enrichment is one of the big issues on the agenda.

However, Rosen's agenda doesn't coincide with that of the Israeli government. For him, the forthcoming elections are not centred on the most important issue: the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Describing the current election campaign as a "disappointment", Rosen argues that the focus on Iran represents a familiar tactic of distraction. When the economic situation is difficult, it is much easier for leaders to focus on security and unite the nation against outsiders. Rosen describes this strategy as "convenient", especially when contrasted with hard-hitting facts, such as the 2,000 people who die every year in Israel due to a lack of doctors.

For Rosen, the path forward for Israel is clear-cut but difficult. "Everyone knows what will be agreed in the end," he told the audience. Israel will be split into two states; the agreement is 'already written and is waiting to be signed'. Rosen acknowledges that both sides will need to reduce their demands, and there will be a big compromise on the part of the Israelis for they will have to give up territories. The crucial problem, he argues, is that the Israelis and the Palestinians do not have the leaders to deliver them the agreement.

Examining the past two decades, Rosen illustrated how the peace treaty has almost been signed twice before. The first time was the famous handshake of 1993 when Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords, but the assassination of Rabin in November 1995 stalled further breakthroughs. President Clinton subsequently laid out an agreement in 2000, but in Rosen's words, Arafat got "cold feet"; he didn't want to be the leader to give up some of the Palestinian demands. The leaders to deliver this kind of resolution still aren't there, he argues, and the issue of Iran means that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been dropped from the headlines.

Rosen recognises that the issue of Iran does need an urgent resolution, describing it as a threat to "the free world, the Western world and the Islamic world." Iran is therefore a "worldwide problem" and not one that Israel should, or is even able to, tackle alone. He contends that conflict would only increase Iran's efforts and the international community should continue with sanctions as the most effective course of action.

As for the coming elections, Rosen was pretty confident that Benjamin Netanyahu will be re-elected. This would put him in the unique position of spending a third term in office, a position which, in Rosen's view, should be used to take crucial steps towards peace. However, for Rosen, when there isn't courage, then force is an easy way out. For this reason, he is not optimistic for the future.

This report by Polis Intern Phoebe Amoroso

