

Ex-spy chiefs in Herzliya discuss prospects for peace and conflict

• By YONAH JEREMY BOB

Israel will not achieve any real progress in its relations with moderate Sunni states until there is "real movement" by Israel "on the Palestinian issue," former Mossad director Tamir Pardo said on Wednesday.

Pardo added that "there might be excellent intelligence cooperation" and some coordination of security issues regarding Iran, but "no major change" beyond that without progress toward peace.

Pardo, who ran the Mossad from 2011 until early 2016, made his comments during a panel discussion at the Interdisciplinary Center's Herzliya Conference.

"I advocate peace with the Palestinians to help solve Israel's problem," he said. While that might help with overall stability in the Middle East, he said, people should not disillusion themselves, as peace with the Palestinians "won't end the conflicts in the Middle East."

Discussing US President Donald Trump's recent alleged leak of Israeli intelligence to Russia, Pardo was surprisingly low key, saying, "Many people make mistakes. If he did, he was not the first to do it and will not be the last."

The former Mossad chief said that the political echelon "must use intelligence correctly," but that, "yes, politicians have shared intelligence against our advice before," even leading to sources being compromised.

He affirmed that this was the right of the political leadership, which might want to achieve other legitimate goals – as long as the goals are in a country's national interest.

Pardo's comments ran count-



WHILE PEACE with the Palestinians might help overall stability, people should not disillusion themselves, as that won't end the conflicts in the Middle East, Tamir Pardo said in Herzliya yesterday. (Interdisciplinary Center)

er to opinions of two other former Mossad directors, Danny Yatom and Shabtai Shavit, who both said Israel had to reevaluate how much intelligence they could share with the US under the current circumstances.

Former MI6 British intelligence chief Sir Robert John Sawers, also on the panel, was harsher with Trump for the intelligence leak than Pardo.

"Clearly Trump made a mistake by leaking Israeli intelligence," he said, and warned that "it can be used skillfully by Russia," which could also indirectly help the Assad regime and Iran.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sawers said, " Hamas has done terrible things against Israel and against its own people. But they rule Gaza. We must accept that."

Sawers also advocated supporting eventual national unity talks between Hamas and the secular Palestinian Fatah movement, which runs the West Bank, in the interest of trying to moderate Hamas.

Continuing the theme of being pragmatic about who to work with in international relations, Sawers urged the West to be careful about permanently allying itself with Saudi Arabia against Iran.

He said, "Iran has better prospects than Saudi Arabia. The US and EU do not want to be committed to a country that has failed at reform and is at odds with the country emerging as the most powerful in the region – Iran."

The former MI6 chief went on to say that the greatest current threat to security is "the US withdrawal from leading the world and alliances" with Europe, Asia and in the Middle East.

He added, "I have reservations about Trump, but Trump is not the cause." Rather, he explained, the US was discouraged by the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and that the last decade's economic crisis and forces of globalization had convinced much of the US population that it must draw inward.