



Shabtai Shavit, former head of the Mossad: "the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a greater threat today than in the past"

Shabtai Shavit, former head of the Mossad, participated in a panel on "Terrorist threats against Israel" at the 8th international conference of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism at IDC Herzliya

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"The conflict today is more complex and more threatening than at any time in the past", said former head of the Mossad, **Shabtai Shavit**. "In our case, it is not possible to disconnect terrorism from conventional threats, because our enemy is composed of countries that have both non-conventional and conventional abilities, as well as non-state elements making use of terrorism."

"The axis of evil is Iran – Damascus – Hezbollah - Hamas. These four entities work in collaboration. The main threat is their aim to break the backbone of Israeli citizens, and not necessarily to cause damage for its own sake. To this we must add the rocket and missile capabilities of Syria and Iran, and the advanced anti-aircraft missiles that will soon be deployed in these countries by Russia – even though Russia is still denying this."

Shavit related to the weakness of the Palestinian Authority, and the political crisis in Israel: "With regard to the political aspect of the conflict, there is a weak Palestinian leader whose future is unclear, and there is no indication with regard to his successor. Unfortunately, there is a deep political crisis in Israel and its implications are still not clear. We are also looking at the end of the Bush administration, and are in the

midst of an election campaign between two candidates whose strategic positions are completely different. In addition, the United States is in economic crisis, and we can see indications of the revival of a new form of cold war - on the one side, an assertive and strong Russia, and on the other side, a static Europe and the USA."



Shavit outlined two possible scenarios for the short-term future: the first, which he defined as "optimistic", is that the



political process of negotiations with the Palestinians will end without success at the end of the year. "Everyone will hold fire and wait till after the elections in the USA and the new government in Israel (whether by elections or not). During this waiting period, everyone will acquire greater military capabilities and upgrade their strength and readiness, hoping that neither side fires by mistake." The second option is that political negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will not come to an end before the end of the year (which includes the end of the Bush administration, the sponsor of the negotiations). " Hamas or Hezbollah will be tempted to provoke us and try and draw us into military action. This will result in rocket fire on two fronts (South Lebanon and the Gaza Strip), which will lead to massive intervention by the IDF, and we cannot rule out the possibility of military intervention by Iran or Syria. The rest, I leave to your imagination."

Shavit apologized for ending his words on a pessimistic note, but said that "it is better to be a realist than a crazy optimist!".