

**Dr. Frank-Steinmeier**

**Chairman SPD-Parliamentary Group, German Bundestag**

**Former Minister of Foreign Affairs**

**Statement for Herzliya Conference, 1 February 2010**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**There were a lot of reasons during the last years to visit your beautiful country and the Middle East many times. If I am right, this is my 15<sup>th</sup> visit in this region within four years.**

**Four years that built lasting relationships and brought close friendships. For this reason alone, I am very happy to return to Israel today.**

**But moreover, I feel fortunate that this visit gives me the opportunity, for the first time, to take part in the Herzlyia Conference.**

**“This is about time...”, you might say. And you’re right!**

**This symposium is among the innumerable few security conferences standing in high international reputation and finding wide attention. I would like to thank Professor Reichman and Danny Rothschild for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to speak to you.**

**I was asked to talk about the United States’ role in the “new global order”. I am happy to do so – but, as you expect with a particular focus on the Middle Eastern region.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Henry Kissinger recently compared Barack Obama to a grandmaster of chess who has played his opening in six simultaneous games;**

**But we haven't gotten beyond the opening game yet and nobody knows how the game will end.**

**I have heard many comments of this kind – some of them with a somewhat scornful undertone.**

**I believe, however, that this skepticism stems from a spirit and style of politics which has lost its dominating conviction.**

**Ultimately, it stems from the old two-bloc-world and its old thinking.**

**Foreign and security policy today is more than a duel; more than the moving of figures on a chessboard.**

**The challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – from globalization to climate change, from international terrorism to energy security – force policy-makers to step out of the logic of “zero-sum-games”. The *objectives* of foreign policy may remain the same, but today they contain many more unknown variables and parameters.**

**The United States under the Bush administration have prolonged the old logic**

**for a while although its foundation had been eroded with the fall of the Iron Curtain.**

**With Barack Obama coming into office, the United States have embarked on a radically different course of foreign policy – away from an unrealistic unilateralism, away from a dangerous overestimation of one’s own capabilities. A policy with many chances and certainly not without risks. Obama’s presidency marks the beginning of a new era for the United States of America, involving closer cooperation with its partners and the understanding, that competition with others must not exclude cooperation in fields of common interest.**

**I welcome this change greatly! I think it is beneficial for the U.S. as well as for international politics as a whole.**

**During the first twelve months of his presidency, Barack Obama has successfully overcome entrenched attitudes and managed to bring about a new dynamism in international policymaking.**

**He approached Russia and resolved tensions that had been provoked hazardously.**

**He revived long-neglected issues such as nuclear disarmament. The START- negotiations are apparently about to be successfully closed.**

**He put climate change on top of the U.S. agenda – against many reservations and resistances at home.**

**But, without doubt, one of the most remarkable aspects of change in U.S. foreign policy is the fact that President Obama – other than his predecessors – faced up to the Middle Eastern challenges right from the start of his presidency.**

**No-one who knows this region and its conflicts could ever be boundlessly optimistic about it. It is a long, a grave and immensely complicated conflict, with hardened, not to say sclerotic, positions on all sides.**

**We remember all the promising and hopeful efforts to reach a peaceful solution – Camp David, Oslo, and many others that stayed unnamed.**

**Therefore I never belonged to those who saw peace in the Middle East as good as realized only by Obama's coming into office.**

**Meanwhile, President Obama himself has frankly and openly acknowledged that his own expectations and others' judgments about what would be possible were too optimistic, too high and have raised unrealistic expectations!**

**At first sight, there may be some reason to be disappointed about the state of the peace**

**process, the futility of all American efforts so far and about its further prospects.**

**And it is true: there is not much to be optimistic about at the moment. But more important is: pessimism and inactivity is not the alternative. Generations before have faced up to their responsibility and they have struggled to find ways toward peace in a time when the world wasn't exactly easier.**

**Please consider where we are coming from!**

**What was the situation only a few years ago?**

**Not only the Eastern Block was standing against U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East! Still in the 90s, almost the entire Arabian world was standing hermetically**

**against Israel. Fortunately, this is no longer the case. The Arabian attitude hasn't become easier, but it has become more differentiated.**

**The signals that President Obama is sending toward the Islamic world may open up new opportunities. Opportunities that Israel will seize and realize once the progress that has failed so far will be achieved.**

**Whether or not these opportunities will become reality, also depends on the central threat that has been menacing Middle-Eastern politics for years: the Iranian nuclear policy, along with its aggressive stance toward Israel.**

**I am well aware of Israel's fears about Iran and partly also about the new accents that the U.S. set in its negotiations with Iran. And I understand these fears.**

**Only a few days ago, the Israeli President, Shimon Peres, gave a most impressive speech before the German Bundestag, warning that we must "never again ignore blood-thirsty dictators, hiding behind demagogical masks, uttering murderous slogans".**

**To us Germans, this warning is an obligation. Whoever calls into doubt Israel's right to exist, will meet our fierce resistance. This applies to all responsible nations. But it applies to Germany more than to anyone else! We are conscious of our historic**

**responsibility. You *have* relied on this. And you *can* rely on this in the future.**

***If* Iran refuses the U.S.'s and the U.N.'s offers to negotiate: *if* Iran does not desist from its actions which are fatal for its own people, for the Middle East and the world as a whole: then there must be graver and harder sanctions.**

**Allow me one additional thought: *If* Shimon Peres is right about the magnitude and gravity of the Iranian threat, *if* it is really the gravest concern of all, if he is right, that all matters have to be subordinated under the Iranian case: what is the consequence? In my view: this makes all endeavors to ease the Israeli-Palestinian relations all the more important. In my view, it would be a bad**

**mistake to use the Iranian menace to justify the paralysis of the Middle Eastern peace process. The opposite is the case!**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**In the Middle Eastern conflict, President Obama has had to learn that even he cannot work wonders. Nonetheless, I strongly hope that the new administration will not be led away from this path by the occasional setback. For a strong and active role of the United States in the Middle East is without alternative.**

**Germany and Europe can assist and support. This is what we do and will continue to do: politically, economically and**

**through active contributions to security in the Middle East.**

**But without the determination and dedication of the United States there will not be a two-state-solution – and this remains – I think this our common understanding - to be the only reliable way to lasting peace.**

**I do not presume to know the definite solution in a situation where so much is being discussed and planned, attempted and dismissed.**

**But I am convinced that at the beginning of all efforts for peace must be the understanding that no one can be satisfied with a standstill. Neither the Palestinians nor Israel. The status quo must not be the goal**

**of politics. The status quo gives an illusion of security under which we are drifting toward new insecurity and unrest.**

**The group of Arabian states who do not only want peace between Israel and Palestine but who even want to step into political and economic exchange with Israel has never been so large. And this is an advantage we must not miss! Also because the Palestinian side will hardly find their way back to serious negotiations without Arabian support.**

**What is even more important is to keep one's promises and to guarantee that nothing will be done that undermines the objective of a two-state-solution. The promise of a settlement freeze must be**

**reliable. Negotiations will not be credible when things are done at the same time which subvert the chance of a viable Palestinian state.**

**On the other side, we must expect that the Palestinians continue on the route of developing and expanding civil security and administrative structures, which Prime Minister Fayyad has begun.**

**I understand the reservations on the Palestinian side against entering in negotiations. Tomorrow Salam Fayyad will bring them forward again emphatically.**

**But the truth is: also for the Palestinians a standstill is dangerous. And refusing talks,**

**staying away from negotiations, is not a sign of strength yet.**

**I do not see any other chance than to clarify in proxy talks as quickly as possible what would be a sufficient basis of mutual trust for a time-limited negotiation process, including more tangible details about the settlement freeze Israel has announced.**

**But it has to happen quickly. What isn't done until the American mid term elections, will get unrealistic afterwards.**

**Only if both sides act credibly and reliably they can build up the trust which is necessary for further progress on the way to peace.**

**To repeat myself: We must not allow the various efforts of the last weeks and months to be followed by a standstill. That is why the resumption of negotiations must have first priority. And everyone who can must work to build these bridges.**

**I am confident that there is a great willingness to support all parties on their way back to negotiations. Europe, the United States, the Quartet work for this priority. And everyone, not only the conflicting parties in the region, are responsible for success or failure!**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Let me finish on a personal note. On my many visits and travels, I have come to appreciate your country, and the entire region and its people. This is why I say from the bottom of my heart: I deeply hope, for the sake of the people of Israel and for the entire region, that there will be progress on peace during the next year. That, step by step, it will be possible to overcome the mental Roadblocks and rifts, and to move significantly closer to a fair balance of interests. I assure you all that Germany is ready to provide all the energy and support it can give in this process.**