

**Former IDF Chief of Staff Lt-Gen Moshe Ya'alon: Even if we don't reach a peace treaty, renewal of dialogue with Syria will weaken Iran and Hezbollah**

No way to go to war

By Ari Shavit Haaretz Magazine 15 September 2006

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**Did you favor negotiations with Syria?**

**"Yes. In the summer of 2003 I suggested to prime minister Sharon that he accede to the requests of Bashar Assad and enter into negotiations with him. I thought that the very existence of negotiations with Syria on the future of the Golan Heights would crack the northern alignment of Iran-Syria-Hezbollah and perhaps also cause its dismantlement. Sharon rejected my suggestion outright. He preferred the disengagement."**

**Would you be ready to cede the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria?**

**"I never sanctified any piece of ground. If a territorial concession will bring about true peace and full recognition of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, I am not against that. However, even if we did not reach a land-for-peace agreement, the very fact of the renewal of the dialogue channel with Syria would have distanced it from Iran and would have weakened the northern alignment, which I defined as a strategic threat."**

Nevertheless, the rockets kept piling up and you did not take action against them.

"You have to understand the limitations of power. Those who do not understand them must not be in command of power. At this moment Syrian missiles are aimed at Israel. Why don't we attack them? Why don't we attack the Iranian Shihab [missiles] already today? One could argue that we should also attack the Egyptian missiles. Egypt has a large army and many missiles, so why shouldn't we attack them now, because who knows what will happen 10 years down the line?"

**"You have to understand that the use of military force is a last resort. You don't use it offhandedly. And in order to use military force a legitimate strategic context is required. There was no such context regarding Hezbollah. However, beyond all that, it was clear to me that Hezbollah is a rooted phenomenon and will not be eradicated by military action. It was also clear to me that there is no unequivocal military solution against the rocket deployment. I therefore encouraged political activity, which in the end would lead to the disarming of Hezbollah as a result of an internal Lebanese process, and concurrently I drew up a military plan intended to address a scenario of a Hezbollah offensive that would oblige us to deal with the organization militarily."**