

## Ballistic in Brussels

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A new Israeli rocket was unveiled over the weekend at NATO headquarters on the outskirts of Brussels, where the international organization's foreign ministers gathered as is customary each year in early December. The rocket - a "Tzipi Livni" model - was fired at a high speed with sirens wailing at the close of the luncheon of NATO ministers and their counterparts from Israel and six Arab countries. The fuel that powered it was the fear of a cabinet crisis if Livni tarried at the luncheon, which was dragging on, and only arrived at her hotel in the center of the Belgian capital after the Sabbath started. She rose to the challenge with only a few scant moments to spare.

While Livni was making her panicked way to the Brussels Hilton, a professional colleague, Condoleezza Rice, was making hers to the Joseph Luns Press Theater, where she revealed publicly what she had told Livni privately: Don't build at Har Homa, Rice said. Don't expand the settlements, don't obstruct the political process.

That's contemporary diplomacy for you: Even before the Israeli foreign minister had had a chance to update her ministry officials as to the content of her conversation with her American counterpart, Rice took pains to broadcast to the whole world, and particularly to the Palestinians, that the conduct of the Israeli government after Annapolis is continually being monitored. The verbal "promissory notes" signed there will be redeemed; what will happen if they are again received with an evasive response will soon become clear. Everything is in a friendly tone, there's no pressure yet - but the operative word is "yet." Another colleague of the two women, Sergei Lavrov, took advantage of his turn in the Luns Theater to emphasize another message: In the post-Annapolis period, Russia sees great importance in encouraging Israel-Syria talks "about the Golan Heights." Lavrov described the goal of this type of communication - that is, the price Israel will pay has already been determined, but this is not the case vis-a-vis the Syrians.

This is only the second time that Israel and the six Arab countries in the Mediterranean Dialogue (Jordan, Egypt, Tunis, Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania) have been invited to send foreign ministers to dine with their 26 colleagues from NATO, under the leadership of their former colleague from Holland, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. This is the diplomatic version of speed-dating: Every Mediterranean minister has eight minutes to present his or her position (the Israeli delegation to the European Union institutions and NATO took advantage of its connections to arrange an uninterrupted 15 minutes for Livni), in addition to exchanges via chance encounters and back-room channels, in accordance with one's personal abilities and national standing.

Livni does good work at these events. She is perceived as energetic, fair and practical, not like those ministers who come to the European capitals looking for a good time and a hand-out.

Last week she spent her nights flying to Slovenia and to Belgium in order to devote her days to work. In Brussels she found a convenient infrastructure for action. The Israeli delegation to NATO and the EU, now headed by Ambassador Ran Curiel, has become over the last decade one of the most efficient of all Foreign Ministry delegations. Some 70 percent of the

mission's effort is invested in the EU, and the rest in NATO; the chance of achieving something with the EU is still greater than with NATO, where Israel is linked to the Arabs almost in the way the wages of our teachers are to those of engineers.

The overlap between the two frameworks is great - almost as much as the competition between them. Although the source of the authority is different, the forces that the European countries contribute come from the same pool. Since France is a political but not a military member of NATO, Nicolas Sarkozy is expected to prefer that a French battalion be included in an EU expeditionary force rather than one from NATO - the same thing in a different guise.

In summing up the Mediterranean Dialogue, Scheffer, an efficient and better-liked secretary general than his predecessors, hinted that progress in relations must be made on two tracks: practical and political. The practical track depends on the ability of each country and the needs of NATO. Regarding the political track, he said the Israeli-Arab conflict was not a matter for NATO, but NATO would follow it closely, because when an Israeli-Palestinian or Israeli-Syrian agreement does finally come about, someone will have to protect it. NATO will not bring peace, but if peace comes, it will accept an invitation to keep an eye on it. However, to reach that goal, Israel will have to make good on the poetic statements it is making.