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Israel can't be destroyed, ex-Mossad director says

By **SHELDON KIRSHNER**
Staff Reporter

TORONTO - Israel is indestructible, claims the former director of the Mossad, Israel's fabled foreign intelligence agency.

"Israel's existence is not in question," Efraim Halevy said in a talk last week at the Windsor Arms Hotel, after describing Iran's nuclear ambitions and its enmity toward Israel. "It's impossible to destroy Israel – take it from me."

"Israel is indestructible for a variety of reasons," he added. "Israel can't be eradicated. Whenever Israel has identified a threat [to its existence], Israel has been able to take care of it."

Halevy, who was in Toronto to promote his newly published memoir, *Man in the Shadows* (St. Martin's Press), said Israel has adopted measures to ensure its survival.

"All threats today, including Islamic radicalism, will be overcome."

Halevy, the head of the Mossad from 1998 to 2002 and its deputy director from 1990 to 1995, spoke extensively about the recent war in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah.

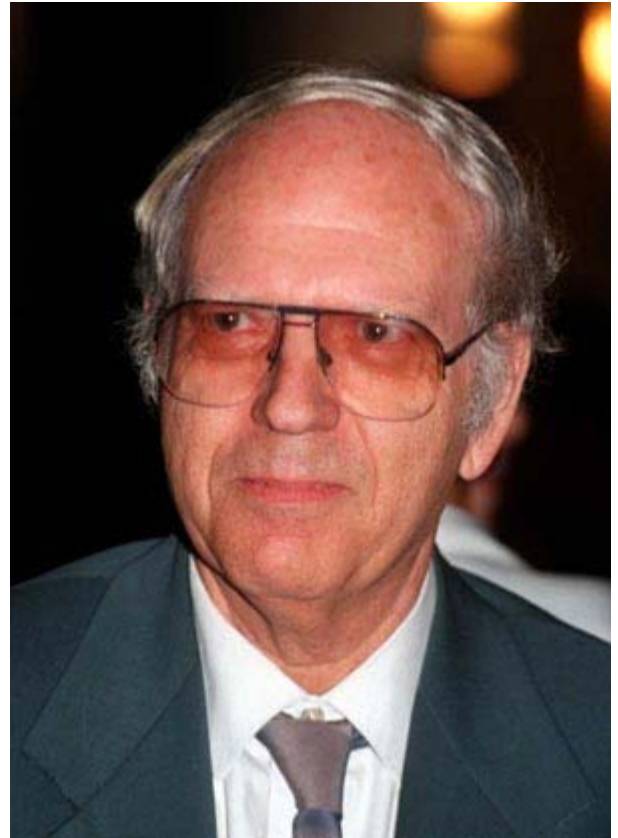
"I'm not sure either side understood what it was getting into," he said. "Both sides slipped into it by accident. It was not premeditated, and both sides made a mistake of assessment."

Israel and Hezbollah both suffered setbacks and neither achieved its objectives, he noted, saying, "Israel has reached some kind of stalemate with Hezbollah."

Yet Israel destroyed most of Hezbollah's long-range rockets and gave Hezbollah a "bloody nose."

Taking note of the fact that Hezbollah, along with Lebanon and Iran, requested a truce only four days into the war, he said, "He who asks for a ceasefire is losing something precious."

Halevy, who is currently director of the Centre for Strategic and Policy Studies at Hebrew University, suggested that the conflict was but "the first act" in a drama that may yet lead to "a



Efraim Halevy

second round.”

He added, “The next time, we’ll have to do much better, and I think we will.”

In his judgment, the war would have lasted much longer had Israel demanded the prompt release of the two soldiers who were kidnapped on the first day of the conflict.

Halevy, who was Israel’s ambassador to the European Union before assuming the directorship of the Mossad, claimed that Iran’s influence in Lebanon has been damaged by the recent war.

He also criticized France for apparently renegeing on its promise to send thousands of peacekeeping troops to Lebanon to augment the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

According to Halevy, Syria, with its antiquated army, fears a war with Israel. Even if Syria fires missiles at Israel, Israeli artillery can shell Damascus at will.

Asked whether Israel should resume peace talks with Syria or engage Hamas in negotiations, Halevy replied that the Israeli government should keep all options open.

When asked how well informed Israel is about internal developments in Syria and Iran, he said, “Israeli intelligence knows much more than you can imagine and much less than it would like.”

Although Iran considers Israel an enemy worthy of destruction, Israel should try to open channels of communication with Tehran, Halevy said.

“If we play it right, we can find a way to talk to Iran,” he commented, pointing out that Israel has no territorial dispute with Iran.

Halevy noted that Hamas and Al Qaeda look upon each other as adversaries, despite their common Islamic radical outlook, and that rivalry should be exploited.

As he put it, “There is a potential for gain here.”

Halevy, who was born in Britain and immigrated to Israel with his family in 1948 at the age of 14, remarked that Israel’s public relations efforts have fallen far short of the mark.

In an implicit dig at Israel’s current corps of PR people, he said, “Maybe the first thing to do is to present spokespersons who speak grammatical English.”

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