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SHLOMO RISKIN CLAIMS ISRAEL "LACKS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP" IN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW ON SHALOM TV

Also says that Israel military command proved "beneath contempt" in last summer's war against Hezbollah

Chief Rabbi of Efrat attacks Mahmoud Abbas and Middle East peace process, asserting that the Israeli government believes in "a false messiah called 'Peace' with people who do not want peace."

Also speaks out:

- On Israeli political leadership ("**I'm more than disappointed. I'm angered by the lack of leadership.**")
- On Israeli military command in last summer's war ("**beneath contempt,**" "**we lost the war *b'gadol*--in a terrible, terrible way.**")
- On the Orthodox establishment in Israel (**I am against monopolies...there should be strong Conservative and Reform here.**)
- On Israel's settlement policy ("**We have built settlements only on land that no Arab can ever prove was his.**")
- On a new era of Christian relations ("**Any generation in the last 2,000 years would gladly, gladly switch with us...for the first time in 2,000 years, much of the Christian community [is] holding out their hand in friendship.**")

In a Shalom TV exclusive interview, Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat, Israel, and one of the leading Modern Orthodox rabbis in the world today, offered a series of remarkably candid observations that included strong criticism of the Israeli government, Israel's military command in last summer's war, the peace process and Mahmoud Abbas, and the Orthodox establishment in Israel.



RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

"One rarely hears a person of Shlomo Riskin's stature be so outspoken and forthright in his criticism of aspects of Israeli policy," commented Shalom TV President Rabbi Mark S. Golub. "Rabbi Riskin is a courageous voice in the Jewish community today, and I'm especially pleased that people can hear his views on American television through Shalom TV."

Brooklyn-born Shlomo Riskin made aliyah in 1983 to help build Efrat, an Israeli city south of Jerusalem beyond the Green Line. In Israel, he has established a network of high schools, colleges, seminaries, and rabbinical schools; and has done major work on behalf of women's rights in that country. He has authored several books and writes a weekly column on the Torah portion of the week published in The Jerusalem Post and in dozens of Anglo-Jewish newspapers around the world.

Shalom TV is an American cable television network devoted to Jewish life and the Jewish community. Available on Comcast and Blue Ridge cable systems, the mainstream cultural service maintains a Web site at www.shalomtv.com.

Transcript highlights follow.

[Shlomo Riskin Interview Highlights](#)

On the peace process

I became bitterly anti-Oslo when I realized that it was not "land for peace" but it was "land for terror."

The tragedy of the Israeli government is that it believes in a false messiah called "Peace" with people who do not want peace.

I'm going to say the most damning thing of all: Mahmoud Abbas is no better [than Arafat]! Mahmoud Abbas is no "moderate." Mahmoud Abbas wrote a doctorate in which he denied the Holocaust and he never took that back. Mahmoud Abbas has never said in Arabic that he recognizes Israel's right "to be." Mahmoud Abbas still controls television and radio stations that are filled with hatred against Jews and Israelis. And Mahmoud Abbas is too weak to do anything even if he felt differently about it.

So the guns we are now giving to Mahmoud Abbas--and, mark my words, I don't want to be right, but I am certain I am right--will go to Hamas just as the guns we gave to Arafat ended up going to Hamas and being used against us.

On Israeli political leadership

SHALOM TV: Are you disappointed with Israeli political leadership?

"Disappointed" is a very kind term. I am much more than disappointed. I'm angered by the lack of leadership.

On last summer's war in Lebanon with the Hezbollah

Israel lost last summer's war *b'gadol*--in a terrible, terrible way. You can give a spin on anything. But you have to look at things squarely and the way they are, unfortunately. I had a son and a grandson in the front lines of the battle, both in a very difficult and very special unit.

And the fact is that the soldiers were very highly motivated. The leadership was beneath contempt.

We had to have gotten at Hezbollah. There was even a hope that we would have gotten at Syria. And then there would have been a clear message: you can't mess with us. They have to believe they cannot defeat us militarily. That's what we should have done this past summer. If we couldn't have done that, we had no business going to war.

On Gush Katif (the Jewish community in Gaza that was forced to leave its Gaza settlements)

The [Israeli] government lied to us; they said there was resettlement. These Jews were banished from their homes; 60% have still not been resettled; 60% of them still do not have jobs. No one so much as said "I'm sorry."

On Israel's right to build settlements

These are not "conquered" lands. We did not conquer or occupy anybody else's territory. The Treaty of Versailles promises it to us and this has been our homeland for 4,000 years. If anyone, they occupied us; we never occupied them.

Nevertheless, we were willing to compromise and on this disputed land we have built settlements only on land that no Arab can ever prove was his.

Now, they're still building settlements; why can't I build settlements? This is not "occupied territories;" this is "disputed land." You want me to stop building settlements? Make peace with me and stop sending Qassams. Wherever we build settlements, it's on "no man's land"--it doesn't belong to anybody--where no one has lived for thousands of years.

On who is exciting on the Israeli political scene

Moshe "Bugey" Alon [Israeli Chief of Staff under Ariel Sharon 2002-2004] is one of those attractive. Yuval Steinitz [Likud] is a very attractive young man, is very intelligent and sees things clearly.

And I think also BB Netanyahu has learned from his first term in office; Churchill the second time was better than Churchill the first time. But he's also been right-on on what I consider the most important issue: he's been saying from the beginning of our struggle with the Palestinians, "Certainly make concessions; only after they show goodwill in actions. Our concessions must come in response to the Palestinian actions." And he's been absolutely correct.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Islamic Fundamentalism

Just as I said the fight is not about the West Bank, don't believe for a moment that the conflict in the Middle East is a conflict of Palestinians and Israelis. We are "the excuse" in the middle of a world conflict between Islamic fundamentalism--which is the heir to Hitler Nazism and Stalinist communism--that wants to take over the world! We [the Israelis] are "small change."

On Jewish life in Israel

I think there are aspects within the religion that I love very much which is problematic to a large degree because of the way it is being interpreted, or is not being interpreted, by the rabbinical establishment. For example, "women" and their right to a divorce and the right of women to sue for divorce. The lack of the right of women to sue for divorce bothers me very much. And this is one of the things I have been fighting for, women's rights, since I came here.

I am against monopolies. I believe monopolies lead to bad thinking and a false sense that you have all the answers. No one has all the answers.

So I'm one of the Orthodox people who believes very strongly that there should be strong Conservative and Reform here. I think it's very healthy. I think it adds to the flavor and to the texture and to the religious dialogue--and I think it's very positive.

I think that about marriage, also. I think people should have the right to choose different ways of getting married. And there should not be a monopoly.

In terms of conversion and divorce, the issue is much more serious because I want every Jew to be able to marry every other Jew. So I have been working very hard to try to find the proper commission of having Conservative and Reform rabbis do the teaching and the actual ceremony of the conversion being done by the Orthodox. And I'm still in favor of that because I think we have to be able to marry everyone. It has to be one country where everyone can marry everyone.

On the wonder of Jewish life today

The Jews have it better in our generation than we've had for the last 2,000 years. Any generation in the last 2,000 years would gladly, gladly switch with us. We're living in our own homeland. People are speaking Hebrew again. IDF soldiers are protecting us--for 2,000 years we had no one to protect us when there were pogroms against us. So in a very fundamental way, there is reason to be optimistic.

Yes, there are a billion Islamic fundamentalists against us and there are less than 13 million Jews. But for the first time in 2,000 years, much of the Christian community--and there are a billion Christians--are holding out their hand in friendship. That's the Evangelical community; a great many from the Catholic community; and that's more and more from the Protestant community.

I think what Israel has created in less than six decades is absolutely wondrous in the history of nations.

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