

The annual conference in memory of Israel's 11th Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, took place on February 25, 2025, under the title "We Do Not Leave the Wounded Behind," and was dedicated to the topic of the return of hostages, prisoners, and the missing. The conference included fascinating discussions about the challenges and dilemmas in managing hostage and prisoner crises, emphasizing the leading values in the legacy of the IDF and Israel's security policy according to the guidelines set by Ariel Sharon.

The conference opened with a short video featuring excerpts from Ariel Sharon's speeches regarding the return of hostages during his tenure:

- First excerpt: "I am not willing to leave an Israeli citizen, a soldier or a civilian, in the hands of an Arab state, certainly not in the hands of a terrorist organization, and more so not in the hands of Hezbollah."
- Second excerpt: "I have no other word to define the decision to bring the boys home to the land of the homeland, except a Jewish decision. This is a fundamental moral commitment to every person in Israel, whether Jewish or someone whose life is tied to ours."

Link to the video >> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D9Rs6pozKZjpYAUkONcq-hYgaXukF-sw/view?usp=sharing>

Following the video, several speakers took the floor: Gilad Sharon, on behalf of the Sharon family, Professor Uriel Reichman, Founding President and Chairman of the Board of Reichman University, and Professor Liza Saban-Irani, Dean of Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy, and Strategy.

Former Defense Minister, **Major General (Res.) Yoav Gallant**, was interviewed by Dana Weiss and shared his experiences as Ariel Sharon's military secretary, participating in critical decisions regarding the release of hostages and the missing soldiers. He said "The priority order of Ariel Sharon would lead to the same conclusion I reached. It's possible to align the objectives of the war, to destroy Hamas and bring back the hostages, but there is only one way, and that is to begin with the return of the hostages. First the hostages, then the continued destruction of Hamas."

The full excerpt of his words: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KT9LYLvZLCuC4oi-EGfRVCLusyl7Fltq/view?usp=sharing>

Publication of his statements in the media:

- <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/bk1111qvi51x>
- <https://www.i24news.tv/he/news/news/politics/artc-9e6d3b8a>
- https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/article-1175827?utm_source=whatsapp

Brigadier General (Res.) Ofer Winter spoke about the inspiration he found in Ariel Sharon's character, particularly in the areas of tactics and leadership, and the responsibility to also take ownership of failures. Winter emphasized that he does not wish to go back to October 6th, and what interests him now is Israel's unity. "It is allowed to argue, even necessary, but we do

not tear down the house. I entered the lecture and said that this deal is disgraceful. A national disgrace. Then they told me I am against bringing back the hostages, but that is not true. I think they should have come back a year ago. It's not binary, it's not zero or one. There are other ways to bring back hostages in my opinion."

The full excerpt of his words:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/14_CtKkCxqngHxYEsrksdDVj8HfPlcwlZ/view?usp=sharing

Publication of his statements in the media:

<https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/local/article/17434870>

During the conference, a fascinating panel took place on the negotiations and challenges in releasing prisoners. The panelists were **Major General (Res.) Ilan Biran**, former Director General of the Ministry of Defense and Prime minister's special envoy for POW, MIA and abducted citizens during the tenures of Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon. **Mr. David Meidan**, a former senior Mossad officer and former Prime minister's special envoy for POW, MIA and abducted citizens. **Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Lior Lotan**, former Prime minister's special envoy for POW, MIA and abducted citizens, and Head of the Sheleg Chair for Crisis Management Research at Reichman University. **Mr. Roi Kays**, Head of the Arab World Desk at Kan 11.

Ilan Biran discussed Sharon's clear policy and leadership ability as Prime Minister. He noted that during Ariel Sharon's time as Prime Minister, "everything was clear and direct," and he had the ability to make immediate and decisive decisions.

David Meidan mentioned the differences between Netanyahu's approach in the Shalit deal versus his current approach, where he sees the issue of hostages as "very political," unlike in the Shalit deal, where Netanyahu sought a quick solution.

Lior Lotan discussed how, since Operation Litani in 1978, Israel has not developed a strategy for dealing with prisoners captured by terrorist organizations. He argued that due to Israel's lack of a clear policy on prisoners and the missing in action, repeated mistakes are made, and the country resorts to hasty actions, such as using intermediaries.

Roi Kays pointed out that Hamas understands Israel's weaknesses very well and knows how to exploit them. Hamas sees negotiations on hostages not just as a means of gaining immediate benefits but as part of a long-term strategy to survive and maintain its power and position.

The full panel excerpt: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NNidG62sR-1_ijbEPtjjx1Zp66nf9Qw/view?usp=sharing

At the end of the conference, a discussion took place with **Ms. Nili Margalit**, a member of Kibbutz Nir Oz, who was abducted from her home on October 7th and released in the first prisoner exchange deal. Nili described her complex feelings after her release, including feelings of guilt and concern for those who remained in captivity. She mentioned the difficulties of dealing with life after captivity and the traumatic experience, including the uncertainty about the future and the mixed feelings about the release of the hostages. Nili said she is unsure if she will return to live in Nir Oz, as she feels there is no security there until an agreement is reached.

The full excerpt of her words: https://drive.google.com/file/d/15Nq_1VkN-i90YoC1576AXDVsgOyHAizD/view?usp=sharing

The conference concluded with a summary by Mr. Shalom Tourgeman, Director of the Chair for National Leadership and Military Thought at Reichman University, who highlighted Ariel Sharon's legacy regarding decision-making, Israeli citizens' security, and the release of prisoners and the missing soldiers.