



Deputy Knesset Speaker Feiglin on Iran, Arab Spring, U.S. Aid, and More

JERUSALEM — Deputy Speaker of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) Moshe Feiglin, who leads the Manhigut Yehudit (the Jewish Leadership) faction of the ruling Likud Party, spoke to *The New American's* Alex Newman in late April during an interview at the Knesset in Jerusalem. (The photo shows MK Feiglin, center, with Newman.) While a controversial figure in Israel and still relatively unknown abroad after his successful election in January, the new lawmaker has developed a strong following among liberty-minded Jews.



However, MK Feiglin has also come under fire for statements about Arabs and Muslims perceived as incendiary — especially the idea that Israel should encourage non-Jews to emigrate, using financial incentives in an effort to create a more Jewish state. The war veteran and former army captain, also a father of five, shared his thoughts on the role of Israel in the world and much more.

The New American: *How serious is the threat from Iran? What should be done about it? Does America have any role, or is this just Israel's problem?*

MK Moshe Feiglin: The Israeli strategy is a mistake. I think our prime minister is probably the most capable man to do what needs to be done, but I have a different point of view on the strategy that needs to be taken over here. It seems like today Israel is focusing on making the issue a problem of the whole world, not only Israel, and I think it's a mistake. I think we should do exactly the opposite. It should start and end for us as an Israeli issue that is our responsibility to solve.

We are not spread in the Diaspora anymore. We are a sovereign country. When somebody is threatening a new holocaust on the state of Israel, it is very important to make it very clear that we are those who are taking responsibility for our own security and we are those who are going to solve the problem by ourselves. It is a crucial message. In the past Israel knew, but somewhere along the way we forgot it.

I think that when Ahmadinejad first — I think about eight years ago, or 10 years ago, I don't remember exactly when — but the first time that he came with this idea of the destruction of the state of Israel, just talking about it, I think the world was expecting a very immediate reaction — a military reaction — from Israel. When it was not done, the result of it was that the delegitimization of the state of Israel all over the world rose up, because when you are not willing to pay a price to keep your existence, when you show dependence on others to do the job for you, you lose your legitimacy to exist. It is true with every state, but much more than that with the state of the Jews.

If you ask me what should be done, first of all I want to explain that I see the delegitimization of Israel in the world — in the universities of England and France, and some of the universities in the United States as well, in the West — I see that as a bigger threat than the atomic bomb, than the nuclear threat. We should learn from our own Holocaust 70 years ago: The Holocaust did not start in 1939; it



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started with the speeches in the Reichstag of the Third Reich in 1933 until the war. Those speeches led to delegitimization, to a question mark, to arise about the right of the Jew to exist.

Those speeches of Ahmadinejad led to the question mark above the right of the state of Israel to exist. You can see the connection between Ahmadinejad, the fact that Israel did not react, and this question mark above our legitimacy to exist, and you can see that it comes all together, that's the connection. When the delegitimization was there all over Europe, the Holocaust was able to happen. So I see that — those speeches, the fact that the leader of a big country, a member of the UN, speaking like that and not being punished by us right away — as a bigger problem than the nuclear weapon itself.

Now, if you ask me how Israel should react — what Israel should do, should we bomb Iran, what kind of reaction we should have — I think the answer is that we should think outside of the box. We got used to the idea of soldiers and people paying the price for the cruelty of leaders, and this is the wrong way to look at it. I think that when a leader is saying that Israel, the Jews, don't have a right to breathe the air on the globe, he himself should lose that right. In other words, what I'm saying is that Iran is not the target, not even the nuclear reactors are the target.

Obviously it's going to be very hard and complicated to deal with that also, and it's going to cost a big price in Israeli soldiers and pilots and so on. The target should be the regime — the target should be the leaders; the target should be Ahmadinejad himself. We should ask ourselves how many millions would not have lost their lives if the Western world would have understood that concept with Hitler and acted at the right time.

TNA: *What are your thoughts, generally speaking, on the Arab Spring? What does it mean for Israel, and for the world? Considering that the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt and that there is a very real risk that anti-Israel and anti-West Islamic extremists might take over Syria, what are your thoughts on Egypt and Syria specifically?*

Feiglin: Our problem is that we're trying to force our Western way of thinking on reality, and it doesn't work. Reality has its own logic, and it is usually not our Western, scientific — and I would add Christian — logic. It works differently. The world works differently than what we try to force on it. It seems like God has His own will in the way He runs history. What do I mean?

Right after World War I, the empires — basically England and France — decided to force the concept of a modern national state on the Middle East, on the Arab nation all over the Middle East. They took a ruler and drew a straight line between Egypt and Sudan, between Syria and Iraq, and they created new countries and put some puppets as leaders. Out of nowhere, they took a civilization — the Muslim Arab civilization — and forced a Western concept of the modern national state on it.

Those 22 Arab countries that were created this way — of course they were supposed to serve the empire. It was a new version of the old imperialism of the time before World War I — those 22 Arab countries were never real countries, and they never will be. This makes a big joke out of the concept of creating another Arab country, a so-called Palestinian country.

However, when the riots started in Tunisia, later on in Egypt, those Western minded immediately spoke about the Arab Spring, thinking that here we are dealing with a Western country fighting for its freedom, which was ridiculous. I immediately understood what was going on, but it took the world another three years to realize that it's not what's going on.

What we really see is that the Arab nation, the Arab world, is getting back to its basic way it's built, which means this Arab-Islamic culture is not built to function in a state. There are tribes, there is one



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huge nation, but the concept of a state does not fit their way of thinking — that culture.

So, it's going to continue, and we are going to see one big Gaza all around us. There will be no return address for the missiles that will fall here from Syria, or from Jordan, or Iraq, or from anywhere else. It's going to be exactly the same as Gaza, like the Hezbollah in Lebanon; they are not countries and they never were.

Now, there are three forces in the Middle East that can take responsibility for the situation and actually save the Middle East. None of them is Arabic. There are two leaders looking to be the new Saladin that unites the Arab nation behind them, taking the new opportunity and becoming the new Saladin.

One of them of course is Ahmadinejad, and the other is [Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan. Neither of them is Arabic, both are Muslim but not Arabic. The way to do it is to fight against the Jews — when you fight against the Jews, you unite the Arabs behind you. That is what explains both countries' activism against Israel, each one in a different way but making very clear to the Arab people that they are in a war against Israel.

The third country that can take over the Middle East and take responsibility, and make the Middle East flourish, is, of course, Israel itself. But the Israelis don't have those kinds of ideas anywhere in the horizon of their mind, right, so we're stuck with these two options.

TNA: *What are your thoughts on Obama's Middle East policy and his attitude toward Israel versus, for example, the administration's policy on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which is receiving F-16s and tanks, or the Islamist rebels in various countries receiving U.S. aid?*

Feiglin: It was obvious in the first years of Obama diplomacy that the strategy was to throw your dice on the Muslim side — it was very obvious. Today I don't know if there is a strategy at all. Time will tell. But what counts is not Obama's strategy; what counts is Israel's strategy.

I think we live in a great time of opportunity. It's not about Obama, it's not about — with all due respect — it's not about any other country, it's about ourselves. We should make a strategy that fits our interests.

TNA: *What should the relationship be between the U.S. government and the Israeli government?*

Feiglin: The fact that the United States of America and Israel have common values is not just lip service — it's true, it's very true and it should be developed. As strong morally and militarily and economically as Israel will be, the connection and our ability to become a real good ally to the United States will grow. So we should focus on that.

I don't know what's going to happen with America — I'm more worried about America than about Israel. I know it sounds maybe a little bit crazy. However, we are a nation of 3,300 years. We have our little ups and downs over our history, but it seems like physically we are stronger than ever.

History shows that big empires fall, and it doesn't look like America today is on the rise. So there's more — from my historical understanding — there's more to worry about now for America than about Israel. I think — and again, excuse me for saying so — I think America needs Israel not any less than Israel needs America.

I know it sounds a bit funny because we are maybe seven million people; the Americans are almost 350 million people. But even though I'm aware of the numbers, I'm still saying what I'm saying because I think that Israel carries moral weight, and also technological and strategic and territorial weight, that is much bigger than its size.



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Yes, I would like to see America coming out of its problems.... I'm totally against this [U.S. foreign] aid [to Israel]. It cannot be when, first of all, the Americans are standing in line like two or three miles in the snow to get a job. To get any kind of aid from America when, economically, we are in a much, much better position doesn't look moral to me.

But it's much more than that. This aid is not in our favor, not economically, not militarily, not in any way. This aid serves psychological purposes, not anything else. We are talking about 1.5 percent of our income, of what Israel is producing — we can definitely deal without it.

TNA: *A former GOP presidential candidate, Ron Paul, argued that the U.S. government is actually using this foreign aid to obtain leverage over the Israeli government when Israel should be thinking about its own interests rather than what Washington thinks. What do you think?*

Feiglin: I 100 percent agree.

TNA: *The United Nations has a tendency to create resolutions condemning Israel. What do you think about that?*

Feiglin: Well, tomorrow I'm having here in the Knesset a gathering of a few Knesset members and we're having an official hearing on Chinese refugees from China — they are cutting their organs out over there from their own people and selling them. What happened under the communist regime in China is horrible. Human rights all over the world is *the* issue. We should deal with it, Israel, as a Jewish state, should deal with it.

We are the people that brought the Bible to the world. We have a moral message to the world. That's the real reason for our existence, and when we are being attacked on those issues in the UN, I think the real reason is that, when we're running away from our mission in life, in the world, we are getting it back in our face.

The international court should not be in The Hague, it should be in Jerusalem, and deep in the back of the mind, all cultures based on the Bible know that — Christians, Muslims, and the Jews.

TNA: *Beyond just the government, what is Israel's role in the world as a people, as a nation, as a culture?*

Feiglin: I think we should focus — instead of on how to deal with a nation that does not exist, Palestinians and so on, dealing with the so-called peace process that brings only wars, and so on — we should focus on our own on developing a real Jewish state that radiates the moral message of freedom to the entire world.

I think this potential — the old people of the Book that came back to the Promised Land have that potential in them — and I think the whole world, deep in their mind, in their soul, are waiting for that message to come out of Zion. I think this is the reason for the existence of the Jewish state.

TNA: *Maybe you don't feel comfortable talking about America, but what are your thoughts on where American foreign policy has gone? Is it appropriate? Is there a better way to do things?*

Feiglin: You're right that I don't feel comfortable, not because I'm afraid politically to say something, but I truly don't care so much. If you notice, I'm saying again and again, it's not about what the American policy is. It's not about what they will do. I'm waiting to see an Israeli policy.

When we will know and be very fair and very clear what we want for ourselves, everything will be OK — we'll have peace, the American policy will be very positive toward us, it's all about us.



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TNA: *Speaking about domestic issues, the word that comes to my mind is libertarian, even though I haven't heard you described as that and I haven't heard you describe yourself using that term. What are your thoughts on libertarianism and the idea that government should pretty much leave people alone?*

Feiglin: You see what I drew on the wall over there, the graffiti (points to picture of graffiti hanging on his office wall). Can you read Hebrew? What it says is "Judaism means freedom." That's the way I understand what Judaism is all about; it's the message of freedom. None of us is a slave, we all serve one God, and therefore, we cannot be slaves one to the other.

This is the deep message that the Jewish people brought to the world, and it is very similar to the libertarian concept, but it comes from a deep faithful point.

TNA: *Translating that into policy, what does it mean?*

Feiglin: Everything that I do, everything that I'm trying to do, is to translate what I just said into politics. All of the files you see here (points to stacks of papers on various desks and tables), everything I'm trying to push ahead in Israel is exactly that: to draw the lines, to draw the picture, to build the puzzle, of a real free Jewish state — a Jewish state with a message of freedom.

TNA: *So what does that mean, for example, for the economy? Should the government shrink? Should people pay less tax?*

Feiglin: Of course, of course. I'm sure you've heard of the RaMBaM [Rabbi Mosheh Ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides], the famous Jewish philosopher that lived about 1,000 years ago. He was a doctor and a philosopher. The RaMBaM — he wrote all the laws, all the Jewish laws, in one famous book.

When he came to the law of kings, he said, "What are the obligations of a king," OK. He said there are two obligations: wars and trials. In other words security — external security and domestic security. These are the obligations of the state: to bring security to the people. Everything else should be, in principle, the obligation of the people. It should be left for the people.

TNA: *Before arriving for our interview, your assistant told me you were coming from a meeting with the health ministry seeking the legalization of medical marijuana. Why do you think that is a good idea and how would it benefit Israel?*

Feiglin: Again, from the point of view of freedom, I don't think the state has the right to tell me what's good for me and what's not good for me.

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While time constraints made it impossible to address all of the questions TNA had during the in-person interview, MK Feiglin has also taken bold positions on other key issues. In a follow-up e-mail, TNA asked for his thoughts on two important policies.

TNA: *What do you see as the benefits for Israel and its armed forces of abolishing mandatory service? Would Israel still be adequately protected, or would security be even better? How tenable is this politically?*

Feiglin: Politically, this would solve the problem with the [conservative Orthodox Jews known as] Haredim since now there will be one law for all. No more exemptions for certain groups — including Israeli Arabs. Those who want to serve *will* and the others will not be required to do so. Hatred and jealousy starts when you grant special privileges to some and not to others. One law for all will settle



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this long-standing battle.

As far as enough soldiers; the answer is yes. Today, there is a huge surplus of soldiers since much of our defense is based on hi-tech, and no longer needed are the foot soldiers. Sure, you need them but not nearly as much.

The chance politically? Like anything else: If the politicians want to *solve* the problem they will do this, if not, it won't happen. But here's the key point: We *never* look at the chances of success or polls — we do what is right. Many issues may take 20 years to happen, but it is our job to break the ice and speak about what needs to be done.

TNA: *In the April 27 Manhigut Newsletter, you wrote: "Another money drain is the creeping inflation: the cumulative effect of printing money. There is no difference between a state that prints money out of thin air and a private counterfeiter who prints some bills and buys a car or house. In both cases, the counterfeiters gain and everyone else has to work longer and harder to fund them." What type of monetary system would serve Israel better than the current one?*

Feiglin: We are looking for a Jewish-based economy, which is based on gold and not worthless paper. This is a long discussion, but the point is clear.

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