



Happy Birthday Israel

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Israel is currently celebrating the 60th Anniversary of its creation. It has not had an easy existence, far from it, and the fact that it still exists today is in itself a cause for celebration. Israel has progressed greatly since its birth in 1948 following a UN resolution. Nowadays it is a global economic power even though it is insignificant in geographical terms, minuscule in terms of population and has no oil or other natural resources. Israel's prosperity is a miracle that is down to the tenacity, perseverance and imagination of the Jewish people. That is what differentiates it from its poor and dictatorial neighbours to the north and south.

Celebration times should also come with serious concerns. In Lebanon the lackeys of Iran and Syria have gone on the offensive and it is likely that Hezbollah will

eventually impose its political demands by force. The UNIFIL - deployed to the south of the Litani River - has been unable to disarm its militia or reinforce the army that in theory serves the government. In the south, Hamas has returned to a fragile ceasefire that is broken on a daily basis by the rockets of other groups, such as the Islamic Jihad, which Hamas refuses to dismantle. And, in any case, the destruction of the State of Israel remains their main objective. In the distance, Iran is moving forward with their plans to become a nuclear power and assume regional hegemony. Nobody appears to be willing to put a stop to it. With Ahmadinejad and his constant threats at the forefront, Israel already knows what is in store. Closer to home, the dialogue with the Palestinians, renewed since the Annapolis conference at the end of last year, has yet to bear any

fruit whatsoever. It is rather significant that during the visit of President Bush he will be meeting with Olmert and also with Tony Blair as the Quartet representative, but has no plans for a tripartite meeting with the Palestinians.

On the other hand, Israelis are aware that they have come this far thanks to having strong governments and solid national consensus on security matters. Today this is no longer the case. Olmert has been greatly affected by the 2006 Lebanon war and the continuous investigations of the anti-fraud office that barely leave him any room to manoeuvre.

His parliamentary stability is not the same as political legitimacy. The good news is that Israel has always been able to find solutions to its problems. This is why we should join the optimistic spirit of this celebration, organised by its president, Simon Peres and devised to reflect upon the future of Israel in the next sixty years. There are few Spaniards at the festivities. An inevitable official guest, Moratinos; an honorary guest speaker, José María Aznar, and a handful of others. It is an honour to be in Jerusalem and to be able to say "happy birthday Israel. I hope there will be many more to come".