

# SunSentinel

## FIDF gala lauds Sharon as 'hero of Israel'

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By David A. Schwartz, Staff Writer

Dan Gillerman, former Israel ambassador to the United Nations, on Sunday called Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister and soldier who died a day earlier at the age of 85, a "hero of Israel" on the battlefield, in the political arena and on the international stage.

Speaking to more than 400 donors at the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces Palm Beach-Broward Region gala dinner, Gillerman said Sharon was "one of the IDF's greatest heroes and Israel's greatest leaders."

Sharon "fought for Israel's security and he then fought for Israel's long-lasting safety by fighting for peace," said Gillerman, who was appointed Israel's 13th ambassador to the United Nations by Sharon and foreign minister Shimon Peres in 2003.

Sharon was a friend and a mentor, Gillerman said as he offered several insights into the personality of the Israeli leader. "In spite of everything he saw. In spite of all the battles he fought, he had a great sense of humor," Gillerman said. Sharon was a gentleman and a romantic who was well read and loved classical music, Gillerman added.

He asked the audience to rise for a moment of silence and to remember "that great hero of Israel."

Gillerman, a businessman and CEO of several Israeli companies, served as Israel ambassador to the United Nations for more than five years and was elected vice president of the 60th UN General Assembly. He played a central role in early negotiations during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict.

Now a Middle East analyst who lectures throughout the United States and speaks to the news media, Gillerman told the Friends of the IDF audience that the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal signed on Sunday is not a cause for celebration in Israel.

"One party was very eager to have a deal and would do anything to get that deal," Gillerman said. "That party was not Iran." He added, "Iran at the end of the day committed practically nothing."

Israel is worried because it believes the deal "signifies that Iran is on the verge of becoming nuclear," Gillerman said. A nuclear Iran would change the rules of the game and start a nuclear race in the Middle East, he said.

"The Saudis and the Gulf States, and Egypt and Turkey and others would seek to become nuclear as well," Gillerman said. "We'd be living in a very tough world."

While he is worried, Gillerman also optimistic that the crisis presents "an opportunity to create a new alliance in the Middle East when all those countries realize that Israel is not their enemy [and] their main threat does not come from Jerusalem but rather from Tehran."

The countries need to "support and legitimize a Palestinian leader who will go for a sane, logical, pragmatic settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," he said. "But in order to do that, we need a strong United States and a strong American president who will restore the trust that has been lost."

The Arab and Muslim world together with Israel can create a new reality in the Middle East, Gillerman said. "We do need a strong America to lead that effort. I hope it does."

He said he is optimistic because Israel has the IDF. "It is the real rock of our existence and the guarantor of our security and our future," Gillerman said.

At the dinner, Rabbi Efrem Goldberg of [Boca Raton](#) Synagogue accepted the Pillar of the Community and Israel Award on behalf of the synagogue.

Goldberg acknowledged synagogue members' children who are serving in the IDF. "The least we can do is [to] make sure that those who represent us, those who are our agents to serve and protect our brothers and sisters in Israel, have all that they need," he said.

Sherri Siskin, executive director of the FIDF Palm Beach-Broward Region, said the chapter's \$2.5 million annual goal was "surpassed."

After a video paid tribute to the U.S. airmen from World War II who joined the Machal and fought for the new Jewish state in its war of independence. Dr. Steven Katz, who co-chaired the dinner with his wife Nicole, recognized American fighter pilot Gideon Lichtman, 90, in the audience as "a war hero and an inspiration for all of us."

An Israel Air Force pilot and an IDF soldier also spoke to the audience prior to the appeal for funds.