

Israel Developing

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I presented the following views at the American Jewish Congress Dialogue held at the Weizmann Institute at Rehovot, Israel, during the summer of 1971. Nothing was said during the Dialogue either to confront or confound my remarks, but—I hasten to add—the stated goals of the Dialogue were considerably at variance with my own remarks. This eccentric point of view may yet serve to stimulate real dialogue.

A nation of Israelis, not Jews. Israel thus far seems to be using a model which is perhaps not entirely appropriate to its specific status. The model of Israel will not be made more useful by a return to parochialism, to a concept based solely on the idea of Jewish community—whether it be a North American Jewish community or a Jewish-Israeli community. The need of the moment from an Israeli point of view, if I may be so bold (and I presume a certain amount of *chutzpah* in this), is to move beyond a Jewish exclusivism based on the inverted dialectic of overseas Jews and Israeli Jews. The problems of political, economic and social formation go far beyond the personal problems experienced as a consequence of being either a Diaspora Jew or an organic Jew. The dialogue, if we must use that kind of format, should try to get beyond the contradictions that exist in the very framework of such a paradigm.

If you look at the academic literature on this country called Israel you will see that it is first defined as the home of a Mediterranean people; in the next paragraph they become a Middle East people; while in the next paragraph still they are a Westernized people; for scientific and sportive functions Israel is linked with Asia; and finally, they are said to be a

people of all continents. Any four paragraphs of any popular Zionist brochure can arouse considerable doubts as to the very nature of the peoplehood or nationhood we are dealing with. These confusions will never be resolved until we get beyond a parochial or ethnic definition into a world framework in which Israel is examined on its own terms as a developing nation.

In fact, the State of Israel is increasingly a model for developing African peoples, and for some Asian peoples as well. Indeed, Israel is one of the rare examples in the twentieth century, outside of Japan, of a properly developing young nation. The model of a developing nation provides questions of ethnicity and religiosity with more perspective and, frankly, with less pomp and circumstance. That kind of model involves non-Jews as well as Jews, and establishes a definition of Israelis quite apart from their conception as Jews.

In the first place, Israel's history of struggle against colonialism in the 1940's was essentially a prototype of guerrilla warfare. In the second place, Israel's unity is based on ethnicity, religious values and a strong egalitarian background. Whether you call this exclusivism, triumphalism, or anything else in the arsenal of contemporary theology, it is a necessary mobilizing component for most economic development.

Third, as in any successful economic development of the twentieth century, Israel has had very strong external support for developmentalism. In this case, the support base is an overseas religious group. Many of these overseas Jews have prospered in the advanced nations; hence they are able to provide both material support and technological know-how at a low cost, and on a temporary or permanent resettlement basis.

There is nothing morally wrong with these facts. They indicate the ways nations develop, in some measure the way nations *have* to develop, in the twentieth

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century. Israel exhibits strong characteristics of Third World membership in its political structure. The country formally has a multiparty structure, but actually has a uniparty operational apparatus that runs the country within the framework of almost socialist dimensions of democratic centralism. There may be more Leninism in Israel than there presently is in the USSR—if one takes seriously the intention of building a democracy based on class rather than party; and Israeli politicians certainly take class consciousness seriously.

Israel also has a strong professional military power that has a political interest in the maintenance of the national status quo. It also reveals prospects and trends far from peculiar to Jews but rather common to all old societies and young nations in search of their unique situation: namely, the place of militarism as a mark of national sovereignty.

The State is prior to the culture. The relationship between Jews who live in Israel, a state and a nation with the obligations of a state and of a nation, and Jews who live elsewhere, in the United States, South Africa, or where have you, may be important precisely because each group has its own special mission and vision.

The test for a state is its ability to maintain its power. While suffering may be a value and a positive attribute as a Jewish phenomenon, it comes perilously close to implying an acceptance of powerlessness as equivalent to virtue. As a nation, one cannot celebrate powerlessness; as a people, one can; and as a religious group, one should. This is where the dialectic is located. For example, many American Jews had an atavistic response during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The martial spirit overtook American Jews momentarily. It was, to be sure, a heady euphoria. But some also had a feeling of disquiet over this very euphoria. That kind of psychological dialectic, as it were, reflects a larger dynamic between the social context of the tasks of Israeli State power and the tasks of the Jewish people in their community.

The relationship between the maintenance and extension of the state, and Jewish culture overseas, or for that matter in Israel, becomes the essential pivot for Jews. But whether it is central to the State of Israel is another matter. The tasks of Jews, in contrast to those of Israelis, are tragically becoming separated. They are very different. It is more important, for example, that a Uganda ruler opens up a legation in Jerusalem than that ninety conferences between American Jews and Israeli Jews are held in Israel. For the former legitimates conferences. The state needs legations more than conferences, needs Africans at least as much as Americans, needs support from poor nations no less than from wealthy Jews.

These kinds of considerations should be placed on the public agenda and not made part of a hidden agenda. We must remember that what we have is a dialogue, not so much between Israeli and Jewish intellectuals, but between Jews who happen to be spending four days or four weeks in another country; and doing so almost as if they were in the Bermuda Hilton. Unless we come to terms with these facts, we are going to have disillusionment of a very high order; the kind that could easily ensue if Israel develops diplomatic relationships with the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China; or establishes cordial ties to the Falangist Republic of Spain—or does any other things that a state has to do to survive or expand. Israel may not meet the needs of liberal Jews or orthodox Jews in the United States; they may not approve of the state's actions; but such considerations will and must dwindle as the power of Israel becomes autonomic and independent of private foreign capital.

Like it or not, the tasks of statehood are sometimes Hobbesian—nasty and brutish. If the rights of a state to exist are distinct from the moral claims for the superiority of a particular state, then one of the grand anomalies of being an overseas Jew is dissolved, if not resolved. The overseas Jew can thus recognize the special task of his own nationhood. Many of us will return to the United States and face tasks that are uniquely related to our country—an election this year, war in Vietnam every year, making a living in the face of a troublesome economic situation.

Jews may outlast the State of Israel. As a Jew, I am shareholder in Israel as a nation. Yet every adult realizes that some stocks which may be very good at one period of time may turn sour at another period of time. Being a spiritual holder of volatile national stock, I am fully aware of the risks as well as the rewards of marginal stock participation.

What happens when or if shares in the political structure of Israel turn sour? It is not inevitable that Israel survives, shocking though that thought may be. There is a near 6,000-year Jewish history. There is a twenty-four-year Israeli history. The history of Jews and the history of Israel are coincidental at some points, and not at other points; certainly the two histories are not isomorphic. It may happen, as it has in the past, that Jews live only outside the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. It is conceivable that if worse comes to worst there will be a Jewish community of twelve million in the United States, Europe, Latin America, etc., that would survive functionally. It might be that the psychological trauma of two holocausts in one century would prove too much for even Jews to bear. But this is an empirical issue.

One often hears that all American Jews are shareholders in Israel, without the parallel assumption that Israelis have to make a side bet or an investment

in world Jewry, not simply as a residual category but as that human and economic force which uniquely can and will support the Israeli State. To maintain that all Jews are shareholders in Israel is also a risk as well as a reality. Israel has all religious Jews and all of world Jewry to contend with. God help Israel if it makes a tactical mistake at any given time. Most nations have to confront pressure groups, including narrow interest groups, only within their own boundaries. Israel must contend with international pressure groups—whose power is sizable, but whose commitment is somewhat unsteady.

At some point, the Israeli position has to be a national position; further, at some point Israel has to recognize that if it wants moral leadership as well, it will have to give up some portion of its national sovereignty. The history of Western political theory, from Hobbes and Rousseau to the present, indicates that few nations will yield their political power or military advantages to the ethics of others. It is hard to believe that Israel will prove an exception to this rule of nations. My point is that Israel should take this for granted, and probably does so already; thus we should all move on to real issues.

We often hear fine scenarios for the Jewish future, but they usually leave out the most outrageous hypothesis, one that none of us would hope for but nonetheless must be included; namely, one which includes the fall of the State of Israel and the survival of Jews throughout the world, and even in the Middle East. What could possibly happen in that kind of totally negative scenario? One possible outcome is that the religious zealots, of whom there are many in Israel, would say: "The fall of Israel was predetermined by a certain error, a religious error, a sin of pride," ignoring certain factors in the religious credo. Yet, Jews must go on in their search for the true "Zion." In other words, the very fall of the Israeli State would serve for such zealots as a warranty of the "moral decay" of the nation.

Another survival response might be that of the nonreligious Jews to whom the fall of Israel would be a tragedy, such as the fall of Biafra was a tragedy: "It is a terrible thing. We should make sure immediately that the U.N. feeds these people." It is unfortunate, but it has to be said: Among these Jews the fall of Israel would be like the fall of other small nations; or the latest Pakistani schism in which federation is no more important than separation. Drawing upon the American Civil War experience, some Jews might advocate a confederation of greater pan-Palestinian unity: "Not the nicest thing in the world, but nonetheless, you see, they are not starving the Jews and they are able to survive." What would happen to the people of Israel in that kind of scenario? Admittedly, all this is highly conjectural and hopefully will never come to pass. Yet, there is a need for

a sober assessment of overseas Jewish behavior that does not take fundamental loyalties for granted.

My own opinion is that world Jewry could not sustain another holocaust. Jewish community life would disintegrate, except for certain Hasidic sects for whom this disaster might not be the monumental tragedy it would be for most other Jewish people. However, the Jews of Israel might be absorbed into a larger Palestinian confederation. Slowly, they would develop integrated community patterns and re-establish community forms of life. Or there might be a protracted period of U.N. or international supervision. If the velocity of defeat were slow, then Jewish overseas survival might be less impaired than the utter destruction of Israel through war or conflict would initially suggest.

The tasks of statehood are different from the tasks of nationhood

I am trying to point out, in an admittedly harsh way, that the tasks of statehood are different from the tasks of peoplehood. The problems of Jewish religious and cultural survival are continuous. They take special forms under conditions of a powerful Israeli State apparatus, and they would take special forms should the Israeli State falter. It is evident that the survival of a nation is not uniquely tied to the survival of that people. The great Simon Dubnow said in the last century that there is a certain peculiarity rather than uniqueness about Jews. They have a nationality of the mind. I dislike sounding idealistic, but that nationality of the mind has a certain functional capacity to survive even the most powerful and protracted nationality of the land. Perhaps this point has been obviated by the rise of Israel. Perhaps Jews will never again have a nationality of the mind; never again have that particular sense of spiritual continuity. It may very well be that the condition of world Jewry is inexplicably tied to the fate of Israel; but this is not necessarily to the benefit of Jews as a religious entity or Jews as a cultural entity; although it is of a distinct benefit to Jews as a national or ethnic identity.

The Third World: a time for concern. I frankly am shocked, utterly dismayed, that any Israeli citizen can speak in a cavalier fashion about the Third

World, or about the Arab world, or about the African world, or about the Sephardic problem and the Black Panthers in Israel. Certainly a sense of justice is an integral part of any definition of what it means to be a Jew, and a sense of universal peoplehood that embraces all oppressed peoples is a part of such a definition. Too many people, it seems to me, with the support of established Jewish organizational life, assert the need for a definition of Jewishness and deny the extension of Jewish concern for the condition of the Third World, the Arab population and the black population.

That doesn't mean that, as Jews, all the people of Israel have the same kind of response mechanism or the same kind of reaction time to what goes on in the world. But to speak blandly and blithely about Jews who see themselves as Israelis, and Israelis as Jews, is to talk within terms appropriate to the nature of the state viewed as an organ of power, but it is a denial of the Jewish religion and the Jewish people as an organ of morality. It is not that politics and morals lack any connection. They *are* connected. What makes Israel special is that there are many moral Jews in it; not that it is a state of a special moral sort. There are people who have a moral conscience living in Israel, as Israelis. Israel as a nation-state, however, cannot be said to embody all virtue. After all, even in Israel Machiavelli's dictum exists: it is only the combination of fortune, opportunity and virtue that can permit the State to service the nation.

I would like to hear my Israeli colleagues express what they perceive as the future of their society and civilization. When they talk about minorities and majorities I would like to understand what minorities they are talking about and what majorities they are talking about. I myself do not feel terribly "minoritarian." On the contrary, I am somewhat taken aback and nonplussed by the sense of militant "majoritarianism" as an ideology that lurks behind much that is discussed in Israel. As Jews we have the requirement to transcend nationalism and to outlive all nation-states. The recognition of the sovereignty of Israel does not mean the celebration of statism. Quite the contrary, only such recognition allows Jews elsewhere to once again behave "naturally"—as the marginal people of the world; as the moral guardians of principles of equity and ethics.

Israel and American Jewry. I would like now to present some low-risk proposals for Israel and for all of us that could help American Jewry. I say low-risk because they should be considered in the context of present-day Israeli foreign and domestic policy.

First, American Jews have a tremendous problem with American black people. These are not historic problems or inevitable problems; there was a long

period in which blacks and Jews were close to one another; certainly closer than they are now. I think that if the Israeli government were to change its "low profile" of ties with African states, giving them an even higher priority than they now have and publicizing those ties, it would help American Jews generally. The stronger the ties between Israel and black Africa, the stronger the ties between American Jews and American black people; not automatically, not *ipso facto*, but it would help to a considerable degree.

Second, it has become plain that the question of a multiracial, multinational policy which does not repeat the homilies of our own American forms of separatism and our own forms of superiority are very much called for. Again, this is a matter of reshuffling priorities, and such changes are in the wind in any event; this is bound to happen within the next ten years—there can be no question about it. The semi-Western Oriental Jewish population is so extensive that a legislative as well as an educational reshuffling has simply got to be pronounced ideologically in such a way as to crack through the marrow of a separatistic society. Otherwise, Israel cannot serve as a moral model for another land or other peoples.

Third, to help American Jewry, there must be an end to the theocratic state. Pseudo-apologists—those who would use repressive regimes like Pakistan as a theocratic model of the Third World that might be emulated by Israel—cannot be taken seriously any longer. Pakistan has fallen apart, and obviously Pakistan is no model for the Third World, or for Israel. It seems to me, if one is going to reach young American Jews, the theocratic aspects of the Israeli State must be taken into account; and more, simply overcome. Israel will always be under siege. So let the inevitable come. Let the secularization of the State of Israel take place, so that many of the problems that have been raised—uncomfortable, embarrassing problems—can once and for all be confronted.

To recapitulate, the primary items on the agenda for a reshuffling of priorities are: (1) An affirmative public policy toward the African states. (2) A multiracial educational reform within Israel that recognizes differences of habits, manners and customs and does not penalize peoples on ethnic or cultural grounds. (3) An end to theocracy once and for all; a confrontation that will have to come about within the next decade for a host of international as well as domestic Israeli reasons.

These are relatively low-risk items on the historical agenda. I am not talking about long-range, complicated, ideological problems. If even these risks cannot be taken, it seems to me that fundamental issues will never be addressed, much less resolved; and thus the unique place of Israel in the covenant of nations will become sheer myth, lost in the rubble of geographical determinism.