

# Israel at Peace With Its Neighbors

Hilel Kook and Samuel Merlin

*When Secretary of State Henry Kissinger spoke before the United Nations in September, he invited suggestions and recommendations that might provide serious alternatives to the course he has pursued in the Middle East. We offer the following observations in the belief that they outline such an alternative course.*

*H.K. and S.M.*

The repeated victories of Israel's Armed Forces have prevented our enemies from annihilating us. But our military successes alone did not and could not bring about peace and normalization in the relations with our neighbors. More important, our victory in the Six-Day War of June, 1967, not only failed to guarantee our security, but, paradoxically, exposed us to a major enemy attack on two fronts for which we were not prepared psychologically, politically, even militarily. Indeed, our extraordinary victory of 1967 left us with a time bomb we refused to recognize and did not defuse. All this happened because we regarded the military triumph as something of an end in itself instead of an instrument to shape a political strategy for achieving peace and stability in the region.

The conflict between Israel and its neighbors is not a territorial conflict, nor are frontiers the issue. It is essentially a conflict over national identity and self-determination between two peoples. Even if temporary arrangements are achieved, they will not insure true peace. True peace is conceivable only through the definition of the Palestinian entity on the one hand, and through the revision of the prevailing definition of the State of Israel on the other.

Historically our policy has been based on two prin-

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cial elements: mystical Zionism and military power. This combination, however, has not brought us nearer to our desired goals—neither from the point of view of security, nor in our social life, and certainly not in the realm of the spirit. In fact, we have reached a dead end. It will be impossible to extricate ourselves from this cul-de-sac by repeating the same mistakes, by continuing the same line of thought, and by perpetuating a regime that has failed us and brought political defeat and total isolation in the international arena.

There is no other way to overcome our troubles and to weather the crisis than to undertake a thorough analysis of what went wrong and to draw the necessary conclusions. This requires probing not merely the initial military setbacks of the October, 1973, war but the political, psychological, and philosophical attitudes that have prevailed since the establishment of the State.

This article can present only in summary what rests, in fact, on a detailed critical analysis of the principles that have so far guided our state and determined our very lives. Building on this analysis we develop guidelines for the future on two levels: *first*, a formulation of an authentic Israeli peace plan and a political offensive with the aim of moving toward the solution of the conflict between us and our neighbors; *second*, a program for the transformation of the State of Israel from its present character, essentially as part of the Jewish diaspora, into a sovereign nation-state.

## Israel and the Palestinians

1. Regardless of the future of Secretary of State Kissinger's initiative, and despite his good intentions and friendly attitude toward Israel, the step-by-step method will not bring the hoped-for peace. Nor is the alternative to a step-by-step approach *necessarily* the Geneva Conference. Every initiative based upon external factors must, by its very nature, result in pressures

and, ultimately, in imposed conditions upon Israel. Therefore, sooner or later, Israel will feel compelled to abandon the policy of partial settlements. Instead, we should offer a comprehensive peace plan of our own and pass over to a diplomatic offensive with a view to convincing the Arabs, our friends in the world, and public opinion everywhere of our sincere determination to bring to an end the intolerable "status quo" that leads us from one war to the next.

Israel should simultaneously offer a plan for an immediate settlement of the Palestine conflict, as a vision of the development of good-neighborly relations between the two peoples, through cooperation and friendship in the framework of a Palestinian-Israel confederation in the whole of Palestine on both banks of the Jordan.

2. Israel should express its readiness to enter into peace negotiations, directly or indirectly, with each of its neighbors, if any of them feel they can isolate such a settlement from the Palestinian question. Since, however, all of them believe that a bilateral peace settlement is contingent upon a solution of the problem of the Palestinians, it makes no sense to enter into such negotiations with our neighbors *before* that question is settled. In such a case the procedure should be reversed: first we have to seek a solution to the problem of the Palestinians, and only then to enter into negotiations with Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon.

3. Since the PLO has never established itself as a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and since King Hussein at present refuses to act as their representative, Israel should address itself to the Security Council of the United Nations and offer a plan to initiate, in cooperation with Jordan, elections to a Constituent Assembly of the Palestinians, to be held within one year's time. Thus, the Palestinians will, at long last, have a legitimate body to represent them, capable of entering into negotiations with Israel toward a peace settlement.

4. The Palestinian people—East and West of the Jordan—are a single entity; there is no reason to split them. It is not possible to isolate the Palestine problem from the Kingdom of Jordan. No verbal acrobatics, no sophistry, will do away with the organic connection and identity between the two. We have a direct interest in what is going on in the whole of Palestine, on both sides of the Jordan. We have to do everything to bring about an easing of inter-Palestinian tensions and find a solution to the Palestine problem in its totality.

5. The most important problem is that of evolving a plausible and legitimate representation of the Palestinians. Historically, the legitimate authority to deal with concerning the Palestine conflict has been King Hussein. This is not to ignore the criticism, at times extremely severe, leveled against Hussein. Nor is it to disregard the hatred, at times deep, of him on the part of certain segments of the Palestinian population, and especially among the Fedayeen. Nevertheless, if Hussein decides to fight for the right to represent the

Palestinian people in their entirety, and making all the allowances for the inherent dangers to him in such a course, we too should take the risk of recognizing him as our partner for negotiation and peace.

Since, however, King Hussein for the time being refuses to act as spokesman for the Palestinian people, we should express readiness to enter into negotiations with an alternative body representing the Palestinians. This must be on the condition, however, that such an alternative representation possesses a plausible mandate from the Palestinian people and is not just an artificial creation, as is the PLO, appointed and financed by foreign governments. Such a mandate can be obtained by a simple procedure of electing a Constituent Assembly of the Palestinian people. The elections should take place in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), in Gaza and Transjordan, under the aegis and supervision of the Security Council. The Government of Israel will offer maximum cooperation with the Security Council in carrying out this most important and decisive undertaking. Complete freedom to participate in the election campaign will be contingent upon one condition only—that those groups who wish to be part of this democratic process proclaim a suspension of violence for the whole period of the election campaign. In an atmosphere of violence no genuine elections are possible.

Upon completion of the elections to the Palestine Constituent Assembly the Government of Israel will enter into direct or indirect negotiations with representatives of the newly elected Constituent Assembly of the Palestinians, regardless of who wins the election. The negotiations will be conducted on a basis of equality and mutual recognition and respect. No preconditions will be advanced by any of the two sides. The legal, international basis of reference for these negotiations will be Security Council Resolution 242.

The aim of the negotiations will be to find a solution of the Israel-Arab conflict in Eretz-Israel (Palestine) that has agitated the peoples of the region and threatened the peace of the world for more than a quarter of a century. The two sides will try not only to reconcile their claims and counterclaims, but also to adjust the principles embodied in Security Council Resolution 242 (that now deals exclusively with existing states) to the conditions of the emerging new Palestinian entity.

Such an adjustment of the negotiations to the new conditions and the transition of the Palestinians from a status of refugees to one of a national entity will inevitably call for tripartite negotiations between Israel, the Palestinians, and King Hussein.

Israel's interest will not be served by splitting the Palestinian people. On the contrary, Israel is interested in its consolidation. From the point of view of tranquility in the region and its peaceful development it would in all probability be in the best interests of all concerned if in the framework of historic and Mandated

Palestine there would be two states rather than three. That is, an Arab Palestinian state on both sides of the Jordan and Israel—west of it.

To have a third state would defy the demographic, historic, and economic realities of Palestine. Transjordan is no less Palestine than is the West Bank. One cannot fail to arrive at the conclusion that both Transjordan and the West Bank constitute a single demographic and economic entity. Such a large and viable state could give Israel the necessary guarantees by offering to demilitarize areas contiguous to the agreed upon borders.

Whatever the outcome of the tripartite negotiations, one problem cannot be left open without a total solution—the *Palestine refugees*. No settlement can or should be acceptable to Israel which does not provide for a practical and formal solution to the refugee problem. Whatever the nature and scope of the future Palestine state, not one Palestinian should remain a refugee, within that state or outside of it. Palestinians will either become full-fledged citizens of the Palestine state or they will be considered citizens of the countries where they have settled. The settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict will mean that the refugee problem has been solved once and for all.

## Israel and the U.S.

The world considers the United States not only a friend, but also a staunch and abiding ally of Israel. There is, however, a great deal of ambiguity and imprecision in this relationship. The history of U.S.-Israeli relations has shown abundantly that from the very beginning we were often treated cavalierly by Washington, sometimes even with outspoken enmity. Conversely, from the June, 1967, war until the war of October, 1973, it was Israel that treated the U.S. cavalierly, with complete disregard of America's interests, as if that superpower is committed, by force of circumstances, or for some obscure reason, to submit to any wish and whim of the Israeli Government. Such an attitude stemmed in great part from our unrealistic evaluation of the influence and power of American Jewry in shaping the policy of America. This false evaluation contains the seeds of possible disasters to come. The Yom Kippur War was to a great extent a direct result of this shortsighted and arrogant attitude.

With the shock of the "earthquake" our arrogance nearly disappeared, but paralysis set in instead. The absence of any Israeli initiative created a dangerous vacuum that permitted the Arabs to undertake a worldwide political offensive. Never before has the climate in the Middle East been so charged with hostility and evil intentions toward Israel as it is now.

In view of our past experience the time has come to try to normalize our relations with the United States. First and above all, we need to define, by mutual agreement, the nature and the scope of the American

commitment to the security and territorial integrity of Israel and our own commitments to the United States, on a reciprocal basis.

Among the various elements and aspects of such a formalized commitment, four are of paramount importance:

*Territorial Integrity.* What is the American Administration's interpretation of the concept of the territorial integrity of the State of Israel? What are the boundaries of Israel agreed upon between Israel and the United States as legitimate and defensible and as defining the territorial integrity of our country?

*Aggression.* When and under what circumstances would the U.S. consider military action by any of the Arab states as an act of aggression against the territorial integrity of Israel?

*Soviet Intervention.* When and under what circumstances, and according to what criterion, would the United States consider Russian military action in the Middle East as direct and unprovoked intervention in the Israeli-Arab conflict?

*Oil Blackmail.* To what degree, if at all, will the United States tolerate the Arab oil-producing countries using the vital commodity with the intent of determining the outcome of the Arab-Israeli conflict—both in the field of battle as well as in the international arena?

These and other important aspects of Israel-American relations can be clarified (though never absolutely and with finality) only in a process of negotiations. One should always keep in mind that American pressures are exerted only against a background of Israeli negativism and lack of initiative, or as a reaction to lack of Israeli willingness to consult Washington. Israel-American relations must be based on mutual understanding and regular consultations. Otherwise, Israel's situation—militarily and diplomatically—is bound to deteriorate at an ever increasing pace.

Parallel and complementing the above—and there is no contradiction here—Israel should urgently undertake a vigorous diplomatic offensive, with a view toward improving relations with the Soviet Union. Israel should seek the renewal of diplomatic relations and normalization in as many fields as possible.

## From Diaspora to a Sovereign Nation-State

The proclamation on May 14, 1948, of the reemergence of the State of Israel constituted the triumph of the Hebrew war of liberation and the realization of the Zionist aim. The Zionist revolution achieved its purpose. With the proclamation of the State a new leaf should have been turned over in our history, and a new age of national independence ushered in. The leaf was never turned, and the new age never began. True, there was a need for a transition period for adjustments to the harsh conditions of that period. But this transition period became a permanent

condition. What were supposed to be emergency priorities became habitual preoccupations. In order to rationalize all this a false post-State Zionist ideology was created and is perpetuated to this very day. The basic requirements of the sovereign state were neglected, as if the national revolution never took place.

As long as we persist in our refusal to define our identity as a sovereign nation-state, there will be no end to our internal religious divisions and the appalling gap between our various ethnic communities. Nor will we find the time and the means to rectify the present disgraceful social conditions and the ever widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

There is a lack of elementary sincerity in the relationship between Israel and world Jewry. A clear and honest attempt to define the relations between us as a sovereign nation and the communities of the Jewish people in the diaspora would greatly help to crystallize and solidify our relations with the Jewish people wherever they are.

We suggest that within one year national elections be held in Israel. In the course of the election campaign we would attempt to raise the following questions and make an effort to provide satisfactory and reasonable answers:

Should Israel retain the theocratic aspects of its present regime, or should an honest and effective effort be made at a separation of state and religion within a constitutional framework to be drafted and promulgated during the term of the next Knesset? In other words, should Israel be launched upon a course of secularization, or remain bound by the chains of tradition belonging to Judaism as a religion but having no justification among the constituent elements of Israel as a modern nation-state? We, on our part, will advocate the separation of state and religion and the transformation of Israel into a secular republic, which of course will remain Jewish in the sense that the vast majority of its citizens are of the Jewish faith—just as the United States can be described as a predominantly Protestant country and France as a Catholic country.

Should Israel remain psychologically and structurally part of the "*pezurah*"—of the dispersed world Jewish Community—or should it begin to assume an ever greater autonomy, freeing itself more and more from diaspora Jewish institutions, and thus becoming a normal and sovereign nation-state? We will advocate the latter course.

Conversely, should Israel continue to consider itself the guarantor and protector of Jewish communities the world over? Or should Israel adjust its very *raison d'être* to the imperative of consolidating and strengthening the infrastructure of the state as such? In other words, it is time for Israel to define its national priorities in accordance with the principle that its own destiny, its own vital needs are also its first priorities, transcending everything else, with one exception: in case of an emergency, when a Jewish community any-

where finds itself in physical danger as a result of anti-Semitic persecution.

This reevaluation of values and reordering of priorities is not only vital and natural and logical from the point of view of Israel's interests as a sovereign state, but in the last account it is also in the best interests of world Jewry. What is healthy for Israel is also good for the Jews of the world.

In the present confused state of affairs the lines are blurred between Israel as a sovereign state and the Jews as citizens in the various countries of their dispersion. In those circumstances Israel cannot protect the Jews of the world. Rather the reverse is the case: Paradoxically, it is the Jews of the diaspora who must time and again come to the defense of Israel both as a state and as a collectivity of Jews who are in danger of their lives. On the other hand, the need for the Jews of the world to defend Israel is responsible, at least to a considerable extent, for the steady erosion of the status and the security of the Jewish communities in the Western free countries. This trend is most disturbing.

A change in national perspective and the reordering of priorities require the following: As a matter of principle, Israel should be committed to a policy of noninterference in the internal affairs and policies of any other state, except, as we indicated above, in special situations when there is a physical danger to Jews being persecuted *as Jews*.

Israel's policy should no longer be subordinated to absorbing new immigrants as a supreme and transcendental principle ("the ingathering of the exiles") that cannot be questioned under any circumstances. We suggest harmonizing the problem of Jewish immigration with other, no less important, requirements, namely, to strive for greater social justice for all our citizens.

We will also encourage the end of the use of the terms "*Alyia*" (ascent) and "*Yerida*" (descent). These terms do not reflect a respectful attitude toward Jews who immigrate to or from Israel.

The relations between the State of Israel and the Jewish institutions in the diaspora will have to undergo a basic change, not only philosophically but also institutionally. We advocate the annulment of the covenant between Israel and the Jewish Agency. As a result this institution will have to reorganize itself on an entirely new foundation, and will assume a public rather than a state character. It is imperative to establish a new system of relationships, sincere and honest, between Israel and the Jewish organizations in the world. This is particularly necessary for the United Jewish Appeal. The UJA should organize in Israel a body of experts, who in consultation with Israeli institutions will disperse this fund for specific and proper purposes. It is also necessary to enable the newly established body of the UJA to supervise and to directly control the spending of the monies that are being transferred to Israel. In such a way the connection between Israel and the Jews will be strengthened. It

will become more genuine and honest, and this in all probability will also help to advance the goal of bridging the social gap now prevailing in Israel.

We suggest basic revisions in the Law of Return (*"Khok Hashevut"*):

The constitutional laws that the next Knesset will debate should include legislation that stipulates that Israel is open to immigrants of all religions and all nations. Their numbers will be determined by the needs and interests of the state, and the vast majority will, in the nature of things, be Jews. The non-Jews, as in any other democratic and normal state, will also be able to become nationals and a part of the Israeli nation (like tens of thousands of Israeli emigrants who became Americans). In the framework of an Israeli nation all nationals of the state—Jews, Muslims, Christians, etc.—must be equal, not only in theory but in practice, before the law; this equality includes equal rights in employment, without any restrictions, including the civil service, diplomatic appointments, and service in the Army. The principle of political asylum should be incorporated in the new legislation and given the most liberal interpretation—in the sense that Israel will become an exemplary haven for the politically oppressed.

As long as Israel refuses to define itself as a sovereign nation-state, and as long as it is not clear that the Government of Israel represents the Israeli people and not the totality of the Jewish people in the world, we will remain misunderstood by friends, let alone enemies. The State of Israel is not an infinite entity. It is a defined national entity within defined frontiers. It is impossible to reconcile two

unique phenomena—a Zionist Jewish state on the one hand, and such a movement as the PLO, advocating the phoney slogan of a democratic secular Palestine, on the other. But it is definitely possible to arrive at a compromise and understanding between two nation-states, with defined territorial and demographic identities.

Our situation is far from desperate if we are sober and alert enough to remove the hurdles we ourselves have erected. We are a nation of three million living in a strong state marshaling the most potent and sophisticated weapons in the world. And we can count on the help and backing of a superpower, on the condition that we act wisely and in harmony with the United States.

We must also remember that apart from our military capabilities we possess forces and extraordinary talents that have not been tapped. The time has come to utilize these forces for purposes befitting an ancient people reborn in its homeland. But all this is contingent upon snapping out of our lethargy—that is the greatest of all dangers. One should not, one must not, postpone any longer the redeeming initiative.

There is no denying that some of the elements of our plan contain serious concessions. But our plan requires far-reaching concessions also from the other side. The truth is that the concessions demanded of both sides are trivial when compared to the goal: to bring the conflict between us and our neighbors to a conclusion based on reciprocity, in which there are no victors or vanquished. Only thus is a true peace possible, a peace that will enable our historic nation to fulfil the age-old vision of the prophets of Israel and to make our contribution to the whole of humankind, as a sovereign nation and a spiritual power in the Middle East.