



Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question

By Alan Dowty

Professor Dowty analyzes an interesting question which has been rarely examined in serious terms: how does Jewish history and experience -- beyond just religious considerations -- affect Israeli politics and foreign policymaking. He provides examples of adaptation, as well as cases where the past gives little guidance to contemporary problems.

Israeli foreign policy, like that of any state, derives largely from interests and ideologies. But there is more to it than that. Israel's approach to the world, like that of any nation, is also shaped by its political culture. A Jewish worldview, the product of unique history and circumstances, functions as a prism through which policymakers may see and act. The role of interests, particularly in the realm of security, cannot be denied. It often seems as though strategic logic, however understood, dominates all other considerations in Israeli policy. At the same time, rival ideologies -- nationalism and ultra-nationalism, socialism, liberalism, religious fundamentalism in both Zionist and non-Zionist versions -- often dominate public discourse, if not policy. Because of this it is easy to lose sight of a third strand in the formation of Israeli foreign policy: the force of political habits and patterns instilled by centuries of Jewish experience and communal life.

JEWISH POLITICS

Jews are a people who live by their traditions, even when rebelling against them. Zionism saw itself as a rebellion against Jewish history, but the Zionist movement and the state of Israel found themselves responding "Jewishly" to the challenges they faced. Even in organizing to promote their revolution in Jewish life, Zionist pioneers

were consciously or unconsciously drawing on the experience of sustaining Jewish life for centuries within non-Jewish contexts. To survive two millennia of hostility required not only spiritual strength but also a capacity for organization and for the assertion of collective interests: in other words, a capacity for politics. As David Biale contends, "without some modicum of political strength and the ability to use it, the Jewish people would certainly have vanished." (1) The Jewish experience in self-government over the centuries has been a rich one; Jews have often managed their own self-contained political system. The Encyclopedia Judaica lists over 120 cases of Jewish autonomy, in various forms, over the ages. Wherever Jews lived, they held in common not only the heritage of Jewish law and other normative Jewish institutions, but also patterns that arose from their universal position as a beleaguered minority: contention with a hostile environment, provision of needs that could be met only within the community, self-organization to minimize the intervention of outside authorities, and maintenance of relations with those authorities.

The basic fact of Jewish politics was the very tenuousness of the framework within which politics were conducted. The scope of political activity, and sometimes even the simple physical security of the Jewish community itself, were subject to the

sufferance of the larger community of which it was a part. In the past, even the basic right of residence had been subject to petition and negotiation with local rulers. At all times, the possibility of outside intervention in the community's internal affairs -- sometimes as the result of the actions of "informants" from within the community itself -- set limits to the extent and definitiveness of political activity.

Given their insecure status in societies where they comprised the most obviously different group, Jews needed to deal with outside and often hostile authorities over matters that others took for granted. Jewish history generated a psychology characterized by "the hypervigilance of the haunted, the alert scanning of the insecure, and the continuous suspiciousness of the vulnerable." (2) Jews learned to dread events over which they had no control, and perfected great skill in detecting the potentially disastrous side of seemingly benign developments. This "gevalt syndrome," or "doomsday" mentality, expresses as well as anything the deep-seated pessimism and anxiety rooted in the vicissitudes of Jewish history.

Historically, Jewish communities reacted to threat by closing off from the outside world, building the best possible barriers to maintain separation and minimize outside intervention. In the traditional mindset, the outside was seen as "totally strange and alien, the terrestrial manifestation of the *sitra ahara* or forces of evil." (3) Religious practices such as dietary laws, and the deep-seated Jewish aversion to intermarriage with non-Jews, are often seen as expressions of the felt need to maintain the clearest possible separation from the non-Jewish world. In time, survival as a people was linked in Jewish thinking to the minimizing of external ties; separation became synonymous with Jewish survival itself.

But separation also fostered a strong sense of shared fate, and a remarkable cohesion, within Jewish communities. The protective embrace of one's own group was the primary defense against a hostile environment. This engendered among Jews what was been described as a "familial," "kinship," or "clan" relationship. Amos Oz, the Israeli novelist, portrays it as a "tribal feeling" that "creates a perpetual intimate warmth which is sometimes necessary and comforting."(4) It is tied to the "communitarian" conception of the state, in which individuals see themselves as members of a community, rather than the modern Western "civic" conception that sees the state as an impersonal entity with interests of its own.

Separation also created strong feelings against "washing dirty linen in public," at least as far as the outside non-Jewish world was concerned. Habits of secrecy and confidential modes of operation were deeply ingrained. Special contempt is reserved in tradition for the informer (*malshin*) who reveals damaging information to outside authorities; Jewish law provides for the trial and punishment of those guilty of this threatening act. The delicacy of relations with state authorities was also indicated by the important role played by diplomatic agents (*shtadlanim*), either delegated or self-appointed, who interceded on behalf of the Jewish community with these authorities and served as a conduit between the two worlds.

This does not add up, however, to a fully developed "Jewish political theory," let alone a theory of foreign policy. Jewish theorizing is legalistic rather than speculative in style, and is usually derived from the discussion of actual cases; it constitutes "a massive, finely reasoned, intricately articulated portrait of public life at the level of practice." (5) There is no systematic theory of international relations in Jewish thought, though the separateness

of Jewish life was to prove fertile ground for acceptance of the principle of the nation-state as the basic unit of world politics.

Issues of human rights were important in Jewish law and in traditional governance. In Jewish law, however, they are not stated as rights but are inferred from duties that are imposed. For example, the commandment "thou shalt not kill" assumes the right to life, and led ultimately to a severe circumscribing of the death penalty in Jewish law. Similarly, other commandments and rabbinical rulings clearly protect the right to liberty and security of person, the right to property, freedom of speech and of movement, and even social and rights (in modern terminology) such as the right to work, the right to an education, and the right to rest and leisure (embodied in the institution of the Sabbath, which passed from Jewish law to the world at large). Jewish law is especially strong on legal and judicial safeguards, with provisions that often match or surpass those in modern liberal democratic states.

Jewish law and Jewish politics applied primarily to Jews; there was little experience or guidance for dealing with non-Jews within the Jewish community. There are of course numerous Biblical injunctions regarding the humane treatment of foreigners: "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, or oppress him: for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20); "One law and one code shall there be for you, and for the stranger that sojourns with you" (Numbers 15:16). Injunctions in the Talmud also invoke the principles of "the interests of peace" and "avoidance of ill feelings" as grounds for kindness toward non-Jews, even if this involved a breaking of Jewish laws. (6) But the essence of Jewish law toward "strangers" was humanity; the idea of civic equality of Jews and non-Jews in a Jewish society was as unthinkable as the idea of equal status for Jews in non-Jewish society was at that time.

Furthermore, the injunction of humane treatment was geared to the individual, and not to non-Jewish groups who might claim recognition of their collective identity. Recognition of the rights of individual aliens to humane treatment did not provide for any collective legal or political expression of non-Jewish identity. In any event Jewish communities never had under their jurisdiction large non-Jewish populations seeking to maintain their own collective identity, and thus Jewish political traditions were singularly unequipped to deal with such a situation. Jewish historical experience left, in sum, a strong legacy in dealing with the "outside world": assumption of a hostile environment; an easily evoked sense of insecurity and a deeply-rooted pessimism; organization for self-reliance; a strong sense of community; habits of separation and secrecy from the outside; a tradition of diplomatic intercession with outside authorities; and a strong tradition of human rights within the community that had uncertain relevance for non-Jews.

CONTINUITY IN ISRAEL: THE GEVALT SYNDROME

Whatever the strengths or weaknesses of this legacy, however, the Zionist movement did not seek to build on it. Whether subscribing to nationalist, socialist, or liberal ideologies, Jews of Central and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century were seeking a break with the past. They filled the ranks of non-Jewish revolutionary movements in disproportionate numbers, and those who rallied to the Zionist call also saw themselves as being in "revolt" against past patterns of Jewish history. Zionists sought to escape from the particularism of the Jewish past and to rejoin history by recasting Jewish life into new universal molds provided by modern ideology. Traditional

Jewish life was seen (with some exaggeration) as politically impotent, as a manifestation of weakness inseparable from the condition of exile. In some cases, the dissociation with the Jewish past reached extreme proportions.

But while Theodor Herzl and some of the more Westernized Zionists may have had little feel or regard for Jewish tradition, their followers in Eastern Europe were closer to it. They did not reject the past outright, but combed it for what might be useful in building the future. The relationship to history might be selective, and there was a marked tendency to revere antiquity while reviling Diaspora life, but on the whole few Zionists rejected all connection with Jewish history.

The continuity of Jewish culture and attitudes in modern Israel has, nevertheless, been obscured by the denigration of the Jewish past in most standard versions of Zionism. When a social psychologist in 1970 published a study documenting the continuity of Jewish attitudes among Israeli teen-agers, it was greeted with astonishment in many quarters. (7) Hadn't Zionism started with a clean slate? Yet there is strong evidence for continuity of perceptions and worldviews in all walks of life, and in foreign policy no less than elsewhere.

It is a stunning irony that the state founded to solve the age-old problem of Jewish insecurity has itself been plagued by chronic insecurity. In a sense, the perceived threats were merely displaced to a different level. The theme that most clearly penetrates Jewish political life, internally or toward the outside, past or present, is the need of security. Israel's precarious position after 1948 reinforced, rather than moderating, traditional perceptions of a hostile environment.

Security cannot be measured simply by the objective threats that a nation faces; in the end, it is a subjective feeling of safety in the minds of individuals. The Jewish

worldview is the product of twenty centuries of religious and ethnic persecution; no minority in history has been so unremittently conditioned to regard the world as an essentially vicious place. The Holocaust was merely the latest and most brutal chapter in a long history. Jews throughout the world were stunned by the world's lack of response to Nazi genocide, including the general closing of doors to would-be refugees. In the words of a leading Israeli literary figure, the Holocaust left a "latent hysteria" in Israeli life. (8)

A mood of despair and outrage, born of past persecution and fanned to a white heat by the Holocaust, intensified during the Israeli War of Independence. Though the United Nations recommended establishment of a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine, no effort was made to enforce this decision against Arab opposition. The Jewish community was left to face the regular armies of five Arab states, some of them armed by Western states, while the Jewish community faced a general arms embargo. Despite the widespread perception that another Holocaust was in the making, the world seemed as indifferent or passive as it had the first time.

This sense of isolation in a hostile world was further strengthened by the events of 1956-1957 and 1967. In the first case, Israel faced universal condemnation for what most Israelis regarded as a necessary act of self-defense to stop attacks along the Egyptian border and to end an illegal blocking of access to Israel's southern port, Eilat. Israel was then forced to withdraw from Sinai in return for international assurances of free passage to Eilat that turned out to be valueless when tested ten years later. When these guarantees collapsed, in 1967, Israel again stood alone. Once more, as Israelis saw it, only the strength of their own armed forces prevented national destruction.

Every major crisis in Israel's early history was seen as a threat to national and personal survival. In 1956, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion warned of "a supreme test, graver and more difficult than that which we faced successfully eight years ago." The period of tension prior to the 1967 war was marked by repeated references to the Holocaust among Israeli decision-makers who felt that Israel was (again) "threatened with collective assassination" (Abba Eban), in "a war for [its] very existence" (Yitzhak Rabin), or "in danger of annihilation" (Golda Meir).(9) When Egypt and Syria attacked in 1973, recalls then-Defense Moshe Dayan, "I could recall no moment in the past when I had felt such anxiety? Israel was in danger, and the results could be fatal if we did not recognize and understand the new situation in time ... " (10)

Of course these perceptions were not imaginary; during the early years there was a consistent and strongly expressed intent, on the part of Arab leaders, to destroy Israel, and as noted the cold numbers of the military balance gave little comfort to those facing a threat to national and personal survival for the second or third time in their life. But the objective threat was magnified by this subjective reality. This pervasive preoccupation with survival leads to what Asher Arian, a leading expert on Israeli opinion, terms a "religion of security" that is "a mix of deeply held beliefs based on nationalist and religious symbolism, on the one hand, and rational and professional considerations on the other." Like all religions, this one "has its dogmas, its scripture, its priests, its festivals, its proces, and its ceremonial garb ... Many of these are typical of all armies, but for the Jewish army they also relay the messages of the horror of the Holocaust, the mysteries of Masada, (11) and messianism." (12)

With a historically-conditioned sense of foreboding ("gevalt syndrome") and often

personal experiences as refugees, Israelis tend to interpret security very broadly as freedom from threat to their personal safety and the ability to live without fear of politically-motivated violence. As defined by David Ben-Gurion, Israel's founding father, the concept of security in Israel's case was exceptionally broad:

"Security means the settlement and peopling of the empty areas in north and south; the dispersal of population and the establishment of industries throughout the country; the development of agriculture in all suitable areas; and the building of an expanding (self-sufficient) economy...Security means the conquest of the sea and air, and the transformation of Israel into an important maritime power...Security means economic independence...Security means the fostering of research and scientific skill on the highest level in all branches of [science and] technology...Security means vocational training of a high standard for our youth...And finally, security means a voluntary effort by the youth and the people in general for difficult and dangerous tasks in settlement, security and the integration of the immigrants..."(13)

We must distinguish between basic security (war-fighting capability) and current or personal security (control of lesser threats), and no account of the impact of security concerns on Israeli life can afford to focus exclusively on the former. In a 1993 survey, 85 percent of Israelis expressed fear of being attacked by an Arab during their daily activities. A deep sense of "familism" has always pervaded the Israeli reaction to terror; the death of a single Israeli "on a national background" (i.e., for political reasons) is seen as an attack on a family member and as a personal threat, evoking a degree of horror and rage far beyond that triggered otherwise.

Since 1967 Israelis have generally felt confident about the ability of the Israeli

army to defeat any enemy in battle, but the public remains extremely sensitive to developments that might affect their personal safety. This is expressed not only in the intense reaction to terrorist incidents, but also in fears of missile attacks and of weapons of mass destruction. The Iraqi Scud attacks during the 1991 Gulf War did little physical damage, but the psychological dislocation inflicted on the nation was immense. In particular the fear of chemical warfare, with its mental association to the gas chambers of the Holocaust, evoked a level of public fright far out of proportion to the probability of such weapons being deployed, or to their actual potential.

Pessimism extends to the reading of events that would ordinarily be seen as positive developments. Following both the 1977 breakthrough in relations with Egypt, and the 1993 mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), initial euphoria was followed by a pronounced letdown and a sense that little, if anything, had essentially changed. (14) More recently, the lack of even initial enthusiasm for the Wye Accords of 1998 served as an indication of how low expectations in Israeli-Palestinian relations had fallen.

Suspicion and distrust of outside parties has characterized the diplomacy of all Israeli governments. Ben-Gurion's distaste for the United Nations was famously expressed in his oft-quoted dismissal of "oom-shmoom," combining the Hebrew acronym for the UN with a Yiddish expression of belittlement. The idea of betrayal by the British, when they lopped off some 80 percent of the original Palestine Mandate to create the Emirate of Transjordan (now the state of Jordan), was central to the rise of the Revisionist Zionist movement. These attitudes are still operative; in *A Place among the Nations* (1993) Benjamin Netanyahu devotes a chapter to "The Betrayal," concluding that

"the betrayal of Zionism by the West ... [today] is found in the nonchalance with which virtually the entire Western world demands that Israeli governments accept risks that no elected official in any Western state would ever willingly accept for his own country." (15)

The sense of an unfriendly world also influences the interpretation of international conflict. There is a tendency to deny any objective reason for Arab hostility; wars with Arab states are not seen as events in international politics rooted in a territorial dispute, but as acts of primordial hostility that evoke images of the Holocaust and other historical attempts simply to kill Jews. Acts of terror against Israeli civilians are seen not as political actions designed (however brutally) to achieve Palestinian national aims, but as plain and simple acts of antisemitism. On a broader scale, 68 percent of Israelis surveyed in 1987 agreed that "world criticism of Israeli policy stems mainly from antisemitism." (16) As Asher Arian summarizes, "even mainstream Zionist parties still tend to reject a geopolitical explanation of international conflict and persist in analyzing the Israel-Arab conflict in the spirit, and often in the lexicon, of the persecution suffered by Jews in most European countries and in some of the countries of the Moslem world." (17)

The consensus was that Arab threats should be taken seriously -- that they were not just words--and that the security of Israel was always in jeopardy, since a single defeat would mean national destruction. During the period 1986-1994 (encompassing the Madrid conference and the Israel-PLO breakthrough), between 25-30 percent of Israelis continued to believe that the Arabs wanted to conquer the state of Israel while an even larger group -- almost half in one sample -- remained convinced that they wanted not only to conquer Israel but also to destroy most of the Jews living there. (18) On this background it is possible to

understand the tremendous emphasis placed by both Labor and Likud governments on PLO renunciation of articles in its Charter calling for the destruction of Israel, despite the fact that Israelis are generally known -- in line with their prevailing skepticism -- to dismiss "mere words" and put greater emphasis on the "facts on the ground" (in another oft-quoted statement attributed to Ben-Gurion, "it is not important what the goyim [nations] say, but rather what the Jews do"). (19)

Demonstrations of Arab moderation are regarded with suspicion, as they are likely to be tactical maneuvers rather than abandonment of the basic design of destroying Israel. This primordial "us-them" view of this conflict clings to the assumption of unyielding hostility as an explanation that makes sense of a threatening world and reinforces the Jewish self-image as the perpetual victim of unreasoning hatred, rather than simply as the party to a conflict.

The primacy of security in all walks of life leads to an appeal, once again, for unity and voluntary cooperation within the community. It also translates into a strong tendency to defer to existing leadership, despite the Jewish tradition of skepticism toward authority. Actually obsession with security meshes very well with proclivities rooted in the Jewish past. The threat of danger from the outside was to a great extent what made consensus and voluntarism work in Jewish communities. Increased threat usually forced Jews to bond more closely together. Finding themselves surrounded by enemies did not strike Israelis as a novel occurrence; to the contrary, it evoked a long collective memory of similar threats, or threats seen as similar. It may also help explain why 64 percent of Israelis sampled in 1969, and 72 percent in 1981, said that they preferred strong leadership over "all the laws and debates," and why in 1990, 34 percent agreed that Israel was "too democratic" to a very large or certain extent.

(20) The high value placed on national consensus has been reflected in various ways: in the formation of National Unity Governments, in the call for a "Jewish majority" on sensitive issues, and in such exercises as the informal negotiation between Likud and Labor Knesset members in 1995 to formulate agreed principles for the future of the peace process.

Given perceived vulnerability and self-reliance, Israel also adopted an active defense. Official doctrine stressed the need to anticipate, to seize the initiative, and to take the war to the other's territory. The preemptive attacks of 1956 and 1967, and the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, are cases in point. In terms of concrete defense doctrines, this was expressed in the focus on mobility, forward deployment, and threats of punitive counterblows that in some ways resembled strategies of nuclear deterrence. (21) The penchant for activism can be seen as overcompensation for the passivity and weakness of the past, leading to such heady gestures as the challenging of Soviet anti-aircraft crews, and even Soviet pilots, during the 1969-1970 war of attrition on the Suez Canal. Many observers noted a "cult of toughness" among Israeli youth, symbolized by popular figures such as Meir Har-Tsion, a soldier whose exploits became legendary. (22)

But if Israel tended to active defense on a military level, it showed an aversion to risk taking in politics or diplomacy. Israeli diplomacy tended to be reactive, responding to events and shunning bold initiatives. There was a distinct distaste for diplomatic methods in general, given the meager resources that Israel possessed for playing the diplomatic game and natural suspicion of a process in which Jews had little experience and for which history had not taught them to have high regard. (23)

Because of this distrust of the outside world, Zionist and Israeli diplomacy have also typically (and somewhat illogically)

sought a sympathetic outside patron or protector. As the shtadlanim in traditional Jewish communities sought influence in royal courts, so Theodore Herzl in his brief but intensive career as head of the Zionism movement focussed on gaining the support of a key European power. Chaim Weizmann was an extremely skillful diplomat, helping to secure the Balfour Declaration from Britain in 1917 and U.S. support for statehood in 1948. Even the Revisionist Zionists, under Ze'ev Jabotinsky, sought to secure their goals by alliance with one or more of the Great Powers. David Ben-Gurion, in what has been termed "the Ben-Gurion complex," felt that Israel should not go to war without the backing of at least one outside power.(24) The centrality of the U.S. connection in more recent years needs no emphasis.

Despite the security obsession, however, Israel has not behaved like a society under siege, nor has the army become the dominant institution in the country. The best image for the cycle of war and normality in Israel may be the concept of the "interrupted society" as developed by Baruch Kimmerling. Israelis pull together in time of genuine crisis (wartime), but revert to more disorderly and individualistic behavior when tensions are "merely" normal. (25) This, also, is hardly a new pattern in Jewish life, but reflects in a general way the rhythm of intermittent threat and quiescence that characterized much of Diaspora life. The absence of a strictly military tradition also helps account for Israel's relatively non-political army. There was no history of a military role in politics, and in fact it was the political leadership (in the yishuv) that invented the military.

Israeli skepticism in foreign policy, rooted in traditional Jewish insecurity, also fits well with "realist" interpretations of international relations. Brecher refers to it as "the triumph of realism in the foreign policy elites -- the acceptance of self-interest as the

supreme basis of foreign policy." (26) But this needs to be qualified: while Israeli attitudes correspond to realism in the common senses of pragmatism and lack of illusions, as well as the political scientific sense of the importance of power and of self-interest, they contradict realist assumptions on the importance of objective factors over subjective forces such as racial hatreds, misperceptions, and ideology. In their more extreme ultra-nationalist versions, they even create a "meta-reality" totally divorced from the reality they purportedly evoke.

CONTINUITY IN ISRAEL: A PEOPLE THAT DWELLS ALONE

In traditional Jewish perceptions no distinction is more fundamental than that between Jews and non-Jews. Despite the search for a powerful patron or protector, Jews must in the end rely on themselves. International support or guarantees cannot be trusted as a reliable basis for national security. The only reliable outside allies were the Jewish communities of the world. Michael Brecher refers to this deepseated attitude as the "two-camp" thesis: the bifurcation of the world into Jewish and non-Jewish camps, with the latter seen as basically hostile. (27) A typical expression was that of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in 1988 when an international tribunal ruled in Egypt's favor on the Taba dispute: "The UN, the world court, international arbitration, or international conference -- it's always against us." (28)

Paradoxically, the Israel public and media often display great sensitivity to external opinion even while denigrating its importance at the same time. In addition, the focus on the "friendliness" or "hostility" of outsiders, seen as an index of their basic attitudes toward Jews, leads to an extraordinary focus on the attributes of specific foreign leaders rather than on

impersonal forces driving policy. Friendly or unfriendly acts by foreign leaders are attributed to their like or dislike of Jews as a group; as Sasson Sofer puts it, "anti-semitism gave rise to the tendency to ascribe a political position to a particular national character or to the attitudes of certain nations and regimes towards the Jewish communities in their midst." (29) During the Mandate, Zionist leaders divided British leaders into those who were pro-Zionist and those who were pro-Arab, even though British policy was set primarily by British interests, and changed little because of changes in personnel. Likewise Israelis were puzzled by the change of French policy under Charles de Gaulle, who had previously seemed friendly. It was also hard to understand the actions of a Richard Nixon, who was privately antisemitic but who expanded aid to Israel more than any other U.S. President, or those of many European leaders whose personal sympathy for the victims of Nazism was offset by interests in the Arab world.

The "two-camp" thesis also has important implications for relations with Jewish communities outside of Israel. This goes beyond the maintenance of close ties; there is a sense of mutual responsibility. Israeli diplomats are viewed as emissaries also to local Jewish communities, in a way that has no exact parallel elsewhere. Israel's relations with other nations have often been affected by the interests of local Jewish communities. Its attitude toward other nations has, in fact, been greatly influenced by whether ongoing close relationships with Jews within that nation are possible.

This was a factor in the early evolution of a pro-Western orientation. There were, in the beginning, neutralist tendencies in the Israeli leadership, given East European ties, socialist sympathies, and hopes of continuing support from both sides of the cold war. But even before the Soviet Union adopted a pro-Arab stance and moved

to arm Israel's enemies, Israeli policymakers had reacted strongly to Soviet policies of preventing Israeli contacts with Soviet Jews. (30) This was reinforced by a natural affinity of values with democratic Western countries, as well as the importance of Jewish communities in the West and especially in the United States.

Control of the media also evokes the traditional sensitivity to how the country is seen on the outside. Amos Elon calls this "a provincial determination not to let the skeletons out," reminiscent of the Biblical injunction "to tell it not in Gath and publish it not on the streets of Ashkelon." (31) A striking parallel to this verse was expressed by an Israeli Chief of Staff, Rafael Eytan, who declared that "nothing which might give satisfaction to an Arab, should be allowed to be published by the Israeli news media." (32) This may be an extreme view, but in fact the "right to know" is not officially recognized in Israel. On the contrary, the Defence Regulations dealing with censorship have been backed up by other statutes designed to reinforce secrecy. The Israel Penal Revision Law (1957) included broad definitions of matters to be classified, and even penalized the unauthorized disclosure of official information that was not classified. The Basic Law on the executive branch, in 1968, included the prohibition on the publication of cabinet proceedings on foreign or defense issues, or any other matters that the cabinet declared to be secret. Also, the cabinet in 1966 adopted the device of declaring itself as the "Ministerial Committee on Security Affairs" for certain debates, making any disclosure of the proceedings into a case of "severe espionage" (33) according to law. Israel did adopt a "Freedom of Information" law in early 1998, which may modify this picture somewhat. It should also be pointed out that much that takes place behind closed doors does leak out into the media, despite the strictures, and also that Israeli journalists

have adopted the tactic of passing sensitive material on to foreign outlets and then reprinting it after it is published abroad -- which is perfectly legal.

The role of secrecy is also expressed in an oft-noted attachment to "backstage diplomacy." For example, Moshe Dayan as Foreign Minister in 1977 undertook four secret foreign trips within one month. (34) Relations with a number of nations -- Iran under the Shah, South Africa under apartheid, Ethiopia in various periods, Jordan before 1993 -- were conducted primarily behind closed doors. A number of unofficial special emissaries, carrying on in the past traditions of Herzl and Weizmann, have been prominent in this backstage diplomacy: for example, Nahum Goldman in negotiations over German reparations, and Edgar Bronfman in unofficial dealings over Soviet Jews.

The impact of Jewish politics is also clear in relations with non-Jews. Just as Zionism had no clear guidelines for dealing with Palestinian Arabs, the state of Israel never settled on a clear choice between integration or separate development for the Arab minority within Israel. The willingness to deny civil rights to Arab citizens has been confirmed in a broad range of studies, sometimes in striking fashion. A 1985 survey carried out by Sammy Smooha found that 50 percent of Jewish respondents favored encouraging Arabs to leave Israel, and only 27 percent clearly opposed a ban on Arab political demonstrations. (35) A Modi'in Ezrahi poll of June, 1989, found that 73 percent of the Israeli Jewish public believed there should be "one law" for Jews and Arabs in Israeli courts -- but 53 percent, nevertheless, favored a then-current idea (later dropped) to establish fenced compounds to hold Arab workers from the West Bank and Gaza as they entered or left Israel! (36)

Obviously the situation was even more difficult in the West Bank and Gaza

strip, occupied by Israel since 1967. Integrating these territories threatened to dilute the Jewishness of Israel itself. In the total area of Israel plus the West Bank and Gaza, Arabs constituted about 39 percent of the population by 1995, and various projections (including those of the government itself) predicted an Arab majority within twenty to thirty years, due to the higher Arab birthrate. The influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union, by these calculations, only delayed the inevitable; each 100,000 new immigrants pushed back the date of parity by one year. Consequently, if Israel chose to integrate the territories politically, it could not remain both Jewish and democratic: it would either become a binational (Arab-Jewish) state, or it would have to deny full civil rights to non-Jewish residents.

Though the experience of being powerless and persecuted does not necessarily produce tolerance and virtue once one has acquired power, the weight of Jewish history could not be entirely ignored. It is no surprise that the most telling critiques of Israeli occupation came from within Israel itself. In a debate that could hardly have taken place anywhere else, Yehoshafat Harkabi, former chief of military intelligence, attacked the "mystical orientation of unrealism" in post-1967 Israel by drawing a historic parallel to the disastrous Bar-Kochba rebellion against Rome in 132-135 C.E. (37) Harkabi and others, in "speaking truth to power" and in re-affirming the priority of prudence and morality toward others over hubris and temporal power, harkened back to the classic prophetic tradition in Jewish history.

Even in the realm of security, the case for separation rather than integration looked stronger with the passage of time. While an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza would pose serious strategic issues, so did continued occupation of that area. Jewish settlements did not

contribute to strategic depth, but stretched the resources of the Israeli army in providing protection to scattered and isolated outposts. The army itself was diverted from its basic missions by the tasks of occupation and the increasing need to focus on control of civilians rather than training and readiness for military combat. The lack of internal cohesion within Israel was reflected in growing confusion over a security policy torn by conflicting demands and pressures. Strategists pointed out that a settlement with the Palestinians, by furthering the trend among Arab states to drop out of the conflict, would lessen the greater dangers that Israel faced. It would also strengthen Israel's international position immeasurably, leading to final universal acceptance and legitimacy. The clear trend in Israeli opinion has been toward separation as a solution to conflict, rather than trying to integrate a large hostile population. Even the Likud was not totally assimilationist, in that its proposed program of autonomy aimed for maximum separation consistent with continued Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza. The strategy of separation was also a strategy for reducing the Arab-Israeli conflict to its pre-1948 intra-Palestinian core: by allowing Palestinian Arab self-determination to be realized within Palestine, alongside Israel, the major cause and incentive for external Arab involvement would be neutralized. Israel would remain in a very strong position in dealing with a separate Palestinian entity that in itself posed no military threat (apart from the problem of terrorism, to which continued occupation was also not a solution).

The detachment of external enemies requires settlement of Israeli-Palestinian differences in a way acceptable to most Palestinians; this in turn requires, realistically, a disentanglement of the two peoples. After flirting with other conceptions, the Israeli public has returned

to the conventional wisdom that good fences make good neighbors; roughly 75 percent agreed in 1995 with the statement that "from Israel's point of view, also in a state of peace, it is preferable to have a clear and closed border between it and the Palestinian entity, in order to create maximum separation between Israelis and Palestinians." (38) Even more striking, perhaps, is the public response to the closures between the territories and Israel periodically implemented since March, 1993, in response to terrorist incidents. Despite the fact that these closures contributed substantially to the process of disengagement, they were supported wholeheartedly by all segments of the population except the ideological hawks.

Separation is seen by some as the defeat of Jewish values, as failure to fulfill a historic mission. But disengagement may be the key to the preservation of a developing Israeli culture within a recreated Jewish state. Disengagement clearly preserves democracy, but it may also be the strongest bulwark of Jewishness. Separation of Israel from the West Bank and Gaza is a process begun but not concluded, and even when concluded a high degree of mutual dependence will remain. But the weight of Jewish experience would indicate that only independent nation-states, interacting as equals, can hope to achieve relative stability.

A basic element of continuity in Jewish history is that insecurity still permeates Jewish politics. The establishment of a Jewish state displaced this fear and mistrust onto a new and unaccustomed plane, but the sense of being "a people that dwells alone" still pervades the nation. Israelis are reluctant to recognize success even when it is apparent; the historic achievement of at least de facto acceptance by most of the Arab world, and contractual peace on the country's two longest borders, is hardly felt. Despite tremendous change for the better in Israel's security position,

and enviable success economically and otherwise, the gevalt syndrome still prevails. The capacity to extract gloomy premonitions from even the most promising turnr obstacle:

It is our duty, to ourselves and our children, to see the new world as it is now -- to discern its dangers, explore its prospects, and to do everything possible so the State of Israel will fit into this world whose face is changing. No longer are we necessarily "a people that dwells alone," and no longer is it true that "the whole world is against us." We must overcome the sense of isolation that has held us in thrall for almost half a century.

In a rather remarkable way, both sides of the current debate in Israel draw strongly on elements of the Jewish experience; the difference lies in which strands they draw upon and the practical implications they draw. Both still see Jewish life centered on a struggle for national and personal survival, and give highest priority to the political and military measures they see as most relevant to that struggle. The right emphasizes the ineradicable hostility of the Palestinians, in line with Jew-hatred since time immemorial, and cites as evidence every comment by Palestinians that can be construed as a denial of Israel's legitimacy. The policy implication is that Israel dare not surrender any position of military significance, since the conflict is permanent. The left, on the other hand, appeals to the original Zionist vision of a homogeneous Jewish state, and argues the undesirability and impossibility (and injustice) of prolonged control over a non-Jewish population. The solution is, therefore, separation of the two populations rather than continued occupation.

The solutions may seem diametrically opposed, therefore -- but the underlying assumptions are not as far apart as it would seem.

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NOTES

1. David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (Schocken Books, 1986), p. 6.
2. Jay Y. Gonen, *A Psychohistory of Zionism* (Mason/Charter, 1975), p. 32.
3. Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (Schocken Books, 1971), p. 27.
4. Amos Oz, "The Discreet Charm of Zionism," in Amos Oz, *Under This Blazing Light* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 107-108.
5. Bernard Susser, "Jewish Political Theory," in Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig and Bernard Susser, eds., *Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora, Comparative Jewish Politics, Vol. 1* (Bar-Ilan University Press, 1981), p. 19.
6. Gittin, 60a; Avoda Zara, 26a.
7. Simon Herman, *Israelis and Jews: The Continuity of an Identity* (Random House, 1970).
8. Amos Elon, *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 199. For an outsider's appreciation of how deeply the Holocaust shapes Israeli attitudes, see Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Siege: The Saga of Israel and Zionism* (Simon and Schuster, 1986), pp. 327-328; for an insider analysis, see Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Memory and Political Culture: Israeli Society and the Holocaust," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 9 (1993): 139-162. Ben Gurion, Address on Independence Day, April 15, 1956, quoted in Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press, 1975), p. 245.

9. These and other quotations on "the Holocaust syndrome" are taken from Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis* (University of California Press, 1980), pp. 38-39, 95.
10. Dayan, *Story of My Life* (Steimatzky's Agency, 1976), p. 494.
11. Where Jewish rebels in 66-73 C.E. held out against a Roman army before committing collective suicide as a final act of defiance.
12. Asher Arian, *Security Threatened: Surveying Israeli Opinion on Peace and War* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 164, 165.
13. David Ben-Gurion, "Israel's Security and Her International Position before and after the Sinai Campaign," *Israel Government Year-Book 5720 (1959-1960)*, pp. 22-24, quoted in Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Settings, Images, Process* (Yale University Press, 1972), p. 267. *Ibid.*, p. 68. On basic vs. current security, see Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence without the Bomb* (Lexington Books, 1987), p. 99.
14. For example, by early 1994 only 19 percent of Israeli respondents in a survey said that the agreement with the PLO had made them more ready for conciliatory moves, while 62 percent said it had not changed their assessment of security or political situations, and 12 percent had become more supportive of militant views (Arian, p. 89).
15. Benyamin Netanyahu, *A Place among the Nations* (Bantam Books, 1993), p. 89.
16. Arian, p. 174.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.
19. Speech on Independence Day, Ramat Gan, 1955, quoted by Brecher, 1972, p. 231.
20. Arian, pp. 233, 237.
21. Yaniv, *op. cit.*
22. On overcompensation to past weakness, see Gonen, p. 147; the cult of toughness and the symbolic importance of Meir Har-Tsion is discussed by Elon, p. 237.
23. Avi Shlaim and Avner Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel," *International Affairs* 56 (April 1980): 242-62, emphasize the internal causes of a conservative, risk-averse diplomacy.
24. Brecher, 1980, pp. 37-38; Aaron S. Klieman, *Israel and the World after 40 Years* (Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), , pp. 55, 88.
25. Baruch Kimmerling, *The Interrupted Society: Israeli Civilians in War and Routine Times* (State University of New York Press, 1985); Kimmerling, "Making Conflict a Routine: The Cumulative Effects of the Arab-Jewish Conflict Upon Israeli Society," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 6 (No. 3, 1983): 13-45.
26. Brecher, 1972, p. 247; see also Sasson Sofer, *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 360-364.
27. Brecher, 1972, pp. 274ff., 290, 298, 314, 339, 502.
28. Klieman, p. 45.
29. Sofer, p. 366.
30. Brecher, 1972, pp. 39-46; Brecher, 1975, p. 123.
31. Elon, p. 297.
32. Dina Goren, *Secrecy and the Right to Know* (Turtledove Publishing, 1979), p. 164.
33. Itzak Galnoor, "Secrecy," in Galnoor, *Government Secrecy in Democracies* (Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 179-182; Goren, pp. 162-163.
34. Klieman, p. 169; see also p. 88.
35. Sammy Smooha, *Arabs and Jews in Israel*, Vol. 1 (Westview, 1989), p. 141.
36. Data supplied to the author by Modi'in Ezrahi.
37. Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Bar-Kochba s most recent book is The Jewish State: A Century Later* (University of California Press, 1998).