

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

The worsening conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians threatens to engulf the entire Near and Middle East and is affecting the world at large. This tragic situation raises the question of the viability of the Jewish state and requires us to consider various possible future scenarios.

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Any discussion about Israel attracts wide and suspicious attention; any questioning of the logic behind its existence is bound to arouse a fiercely polemical debate. Everyone is aware that the issue is explosive, literally and metaphorically, which makes it all the more necessary to expose it to an acute and unbiased scrutiny, with respect for the feelings of all parties concerned but also with surgical lucidity. It is time to ask certain questions when no one in a position of authority dares to, with the result that the malaise keeps growing and increasingly poisons minds, as often happens when a free debate is no longer possible.

ZIONISM AND ISRAEL

A glance at the historical background is always necessary to understand specific circumstances. The state of Israel is the product of the Zionist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the vision of its forefathers was pregnant with the scientifically inspired social utopias of

the period. The project of building an 'ideal', racially and religiously defined nation state open to the widespread diaspora, harked back to the prophecies of the Old Testament but radically broke with the traditional Jewish article of faith that only the expected Messiah would have the divine mandate to restore the kingdom of David and Solomon. In direct opposition to the passively expectant attitude of the orthodox Rabbinic community, the Zionists, some of whom at least were secular or agnostic reformers, advocated a systematic action to create a 'modern' territorial Jewish state without awaiting the long-promised divine intervention.

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It is beyond the scope of this paper to retrace the complex evolution of the "new Israel project" in the decades that separate Theodor Herzl's proclamation from the establishment of the first settlers' colonies in Palestine, then under British mandate following the collapse of the Turkish empire during the First World War.

It must be recalled that, faced with the challenge of bringing tens or hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world into an already rather heavily populated, if mostly pastoral land, against the predictable opposition of its inhabitants, the Zionist leadership was far from being of one mind on the advisable course of action. Some of the more secularist Jews entertained alternative options. It was variously proposed to create a Jewish home-state in Cyprus, an island long hospitable to Jews from all shores of the Mediterranean in Madagascar or in a district of Uganda in West Africa. However, the true Zionists never saw Israel possibly being reborn outside its cradle in the historic holy land. In fact two different visions of the identity of the 'elected people' were in conflict, the 'territorial' conception of 'Eretz Israel' rooted in the hoary image of Jerusalem and the secular notion, evolved during the millennial migrations of a wandering nation, that Israel is a blood-bonded, spaceless 'virtual' state which exists wherever ethnic Jews happen to live.

Drawing decisive momentum from the Balfour declarations and other affirmations of Western political support, the Zionist leaders pressed ahead with their undertaking to settle growing numbers of Israeli immigrants on

Palestinian soil, initially taking advantage of the ambivalent and sometimes inconsistent attitude of the British mandate administration and then proceeding to force its acquiescence through a campaign of violent intimidation manifested in terrorist actions.

Already then, the resolve to carve a nation out of expropriated territories aroused strong opposition in many quarters. The US Secretary of State George Marshall for one was vehemently opposed to supporting the Zionists in 'taking land which is not theirs', to quote his own words, but he was overruled by President Truman, under pressure from Jewish and pro-Israeli advocates, including some members of the administration.

ISRAEL'S INNER CONTRADICTIONS

There was clearly a revolutionary vein, typical of that troubled period which was marked by socialist theorizing and experimentation, in the ideology of the Zionist nation-builders. They envisioned their new state as a collectivist, egalitarian haven from the unfair social systems of Europe and her colonial territories. Nevertheless Israel was itself a European colonial adventure,

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perhaps the last in the twentieth century, in a near-eastern backwater. The ideal of economic and social justice entertained by most of the settlers, primarily Askenazi Jews of central and eastern European extraction, did not change the fundamental reality, no more than the Socialist convictions of many of the poor French immigrants who landed in Algeria in the second half of the nineteenth century made them any less colonialistic in the eyes of

the indigenous Muslim denizens.

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The latter were at least as poor and certainly more backward than the newcomers and have seen their poverty and destitution explode as a result of the invasion.

Israel, intended to be home to a largely proletarian populace, has in fact been planned and bankrolled by a very influential, cultured and cosmopolitan financial and industrial elite. As a result of these contradictions and the resulting pressures and threats it is under, the country has become a nuclear police-state. It is constrained to remain permanently at war, domestically and with its closest neighbours, heavily influenced by fundamentalist religious factions and closely allied with the world's only superpower, which can also not unfairly be described as the biggest imperialist state of our age. One can indeed wonder if these features are not making the nation of Israel, dependent as it is upon wide financial and military support for its survival, increasingly unviable.

According to Uri Dromi, Publications Director of the Israel Democracy Institute (writing in the *International Herald Tribune*): “behind the facade of a highly developed society with a formidable Air Force and a sophisticated hi-tech industry there still hide in Israel elements of a Third World country (which) was established in a hurry, in the heat of war. In a way it isn't finished yet. It doesn't have fixed borders, it lacks a constitution”.

While that small and young country has earned deserved respect worldwide for its impressive record of technological and scientific achievements and for its ability to draw the most out of its meagre natural resources thanks to massive, perhaps unequalled financial and technical support from the USA, to the tune of more than a trillion dollars since 1973, according to economist Thomas Stauffer in a study for the US Army War College, quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* of December 10, 2002 (to which must be added the contributions of other friendly states such as Germany and the global Jewish community) — it carries as its very ‘raison d’être’ an ideological burden that seems oddly out of place in our post-colonial world. While it has largely discarded the collectivist agrarian socialism of its beginnings, the Jewish state is still based on a doctrine of religious and ethnic exclusiveness in an age where multiculturalism, racial diversity and secularism — according to a liberal school of thinking, decisively influenced by a phalanx of Jewish economic, intellectual and business leaders — are held to be inevitable aspects of modernity.

Strangely enough, the Jewish state belongs willy nilly to the small clan of nations, such as Pakistan and Lebanon, carved out of old empires in the last century in order to become homes for specific confessional communities that

did not wish to remain within a larger whole. We can see that all countries built on those premises are experiencing grave and persistent identity problems to the point of seeing their survival threatened by a combination of internal and external factors.

The comparison with Pakistan is less far-fetched than it appears at first glance. While the latter state is largely the brainchild of the secular-minded Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a contemporary of the founders of Israel who wished Pakistan to become a secular nation for all Indians of Muslim faith — a

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contradiction which did not survive the test of reality — the Jewish state was envisioned by mostly non-religious Jews as a secular home-country for their blood-brothers from all continents. The cultural and political realities played havoc with those abstract foundations as well. The orthodox, conservative Jews have come to play an ever greater role in Israeli policy, in almost direct proportion to the increase in the Sephardic, Near Eastern component

of the total population. Confronted with the Islamic faith of its Arab neighbours, fundamentalist Judaism is on the rise, much to the dismay of the moderate or agnostic Israelis who feel that the ideological convictions of the nation's fathers are being betrayed and who do not wish to live in a theocratic polity whose intolerant, backward-looking dogmatism they resent.

An additional paradox lies in the negative attitude of the traditional Jews towards Zionism which is skeptical towards the historical prophecies found in the scriptures. The orthodox Jews are hence in the strange position of living and participating in the government of a State which they must regard as the heretical creation of unbelievers and modernists in disobedience of the divine precepts. Their situation is not unlike that of loyal monarchists professing the belief in divine right while living in and serving a democratic republican State. We should thus not be surprised if the behaviour of many of the 'right wing' Israeli politicians and citizens betrays an endemic inconsistency akin to

schizophrenia as is often the case in the well-publicised issue of the settlements implanted all over the Palestinian soil.

The very name of those settlements, 'colonies' reflects the philosophy which accounts for the existence of the Jewish state but it also evinces some of its less viable features. The colonies, supported with more or less enthusiasm by the country's successive governments, are largely developed and inhabited by orthodox Jews who believe in "greater Israel" and reject the possibility of allowing any Palestinian State to exist in their holy land which must include at least Judea and Samaria, the Biblical names for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

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At the 1993 Likud Party conference, General Ariel Sharon restated the official position of the Israeli right wing that "Israel must base its official policy on the notion of biblical frontiers" which means that the green line set after the 1949 war and upheld by the United Nations is not regarded as the Jewish State's definitive border although his more moderate countrymen like Zeev Sternhell recognise that this border 'was the maximum that could be had at the time and is the optimum frontier at present' (*Le Figaro*, July 4, 2001).

Those who dispute the religious legitimacy of Israel's existence also refuse to accept the borders recognised by the international community through the relevant United Nations resolutions. While contradictions and paradoxes are not rare in policies that draw their inspiration from a blend of theology and mythified history as is characteristic of Judaism, they are seldom as calamitous as in the Middle East. In the persistent Israeli policy of encroachment and expansion we may recognise another typical feature of colonial processes: the imposition by force or through the sheer influence of capital and technology of a more materially sophisticated way of life for the nearly exclusive benefit of a "master race". The clash of cultures has proved as painful as it tends to be in those circumstances and it has made the situation even more complex.

TRAGIC MISGIVINGS SINCE ISRAEL'S INCEPTION

The first years of Israel's existence were marked by vigorous and impassioned debates about the mission and character to be imparted to the new State. A few voices of tolerance and wisdom, such as the illustrious academic Judah Magnes called for a meeting of minds, hearts and souls with the Arab Muslims and Christians in order to seek a peaceful reunion of the children of Abraham and work for a harmonious symbiosis between the returning Jews and the autochthonous inhabitants. The advocates of good neighbourliness did however not prevail upon the militant Zionists who saw themselves as the heirs of Moses coming to occupy a long-lost property fallen to primitive tribes descended from the biblical foes of the chosen people. The disdainful prejudice of white colonialists towards their native subjects was too widespread at the time not to be a factor in the attitude of the mostly European Jewish settlers in Palestine, especially in the face of increasingly hostile reactions

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to the massive arrivals. The Arab leaders and masses may be excused for connecting the landing of the future Israelis with the rearguard battle fought by Western imperial powers, bent on dividing amongst themselves the spoils of the collapsed Ottoman empire, to retain a commanding presence in the

neighbourhood of the strategic Suez Canal and of the new oil-rich Arab countries, in the guise of a resurrected Jewish national State closely related to and dependent upon its Euro-American sponsors. Israel remains to this day cast, for most of the developing world in the role of a colonialistic hold-out while Zionism is regarded as another facet of age-old Western imperialism. Reciprocally, Palestinians and Arabs of the neighbouring countries are branded by a large majority of Israelis as an inevitable nuisance at best or as eternal enemies at worst. The distinction made by Arab leaders between Zionists and Jews in order to point out that they are opposed to the former but not to the latter is sometimes as subtle and misleading as the 'distinguo' often attempted during the Second World War between Nazis and Germans.

It is not only wars that create myths which help them to go on; nations also, as all human constructions, need legends to survive and prosper. Israelis are generally offended by the remark that their nation rests on its own myths, like all other human communities but there can be no denial that the constant and systematic commemoration of the Jews' ordeals before and in the course of the Second World War has endowed Israel with an aura of martyrdom which invests it with virtual immunity in the courts of Western public opinion. The nagging fear of appearing insensitive to the past sufferings of European Hebrews deters most American and European leaders from judging Tel Aviv's policies on par with those of other nations. The influential public relations, media and academic organs over which pro-Israeli interests have a decisive sway are effective weapons to silence and chastise those who might object too strongly to the Jewish State's often flagitious behaviour.

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The same fears have hitherto prevented a public debate on the early evolution of the Zionist ideology in the first half of the twentieth century, when it was, as all other contemporary political phenomena, reacting to the influences of Marxism and Fascism which were not always as easy to distinguish from one another as "politically correct" as historical accounts would have us believe. Thus it is undeniable that the Zionist militias of the Betar were meant to be Israelite versions of the "brown shirt" youth leagues of Nazi Germany with which they shared a cult of violent militant action, a mystical faith in their respective racial destinies and a paramilitary nationalist discipline. Both movements were dedicated to building ethnically pure, socialist and totalitarian States and that unmistakably 'national socialist' ingredient in Zionism has been absorbed into the fabric of Israel's polity though the latter has turned increasingly liberal under the prevalent cosmopolitan capitalist influences and has gradually shed its original skin while retaining a kernel of religious and racist political fundamentalism in the right-wing parties, such as the Likud block.

The kinship of extremist Zionism with German national revolutionary ideology and their common opposition to British predominance account for the history of their relations marked by attempts to cooperate before and during the Second World War as abundantly documented by Lenni Brenner in his book *Zionism in the Age of Dictators* (Croom Helm, 1983). That affinity may also have sown the seeds of the close current German-Israeli collaboration.

In his later book *51 Documents — Zionist Collaboration with the Nazis* he reproduces a 1941 memo from the Stern Gang (a faction of the National Military Organisation in Palestine, which included Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, to the Third Reich leadership, entitled 'Fundamental Features of the

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Proposal of the NMO in Palestine (Irgun Zvai Leumi) concerning the solution of the Jewish Question in Europe and the participation of the NMO in the war on the side of Germany'. That document states: "The establishment of the historic Jewish state on a national and totalitarian basis, bound by a treaty with the German Reich, would be in the interest of a maintained and strengthened future German position

of war in the Near East".

The Likud and allied ultra-nationalist parties are the heirs to Zionist terrorism which was, in the formative years of Israel directed against Arab, British and later United Nations authorities, with the goal of eliminating any opposition to the creation of the planned new State. Many of the Jewish nation's leaders, sprang from the radical paramilitary organisations, whose track record for killing civilians and planting bombs is comparable to those of other liberation armies the world over, from the Basque ETA and the IRA to the very PLO and Hamas that Israel is facing. The country's rulers are hence not the best placed to condemn Palestinian terrorism since they provide a living proof, as Yasser Arafat does too, that terrorist violence and blackmail can be grimly effective means to achieve global recognition.

Some of the frequent subversive operations carried out by the Jewish state's notorious secret services have been revealed by former Mossad agent

Victor Ostrovsky in his memoirs, which describe a pattern of machiavelian deceit blackmail and sabotage usually intended to pin the blame for terrorist actions on unfriendly Arab neighbours. Such was the 'Levon affair' in Egypt and the commando raid in Libya, also staged by the Israeli Sayeret Matkal to plant evidence of terrorist plotting against American interests from Tripoli. That clandestine operation intentionally triggered the bombing of Libya by the US Air Force on the order of Ronald Reagan in April 1986.

According to Ostrovsky, the Israeli Mossad and Aman (military intelligence) had advance information about the terrorist suicide bombing operations which killed more than two hundred US Marines in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 but Tel Aviv decided not to warn the American command. This allegation is considered accurate by high-level Pentagon-related sources and is confirmed by military officers such as (retd.) Brigadier General James J David.

That Israel according to Uri Dromi again, 'feels omnipotent', particularly since the six-day war, is reflected in many editorials of the supportive press, such as an article by Thomas Friedman published in the *New York Times* of July 4, 2001 which states: "The UN, the US, the Russians, the Arabs have got the Palestinians nothing. It was the power of the Israeli left and centre that saved the Palestinians in Lebanon and delivered them Oslo I and II. And it is also the only power that can deliver them a state". Such triumphant conclusions remind one of the assertions made by the late Prof. Israel Shahak in his book, *Histoire Juive, Religion Juive, le Poids de Trois Millénaires* (1996): "Judaism is of a fundamentally totalitarian nature" and further along: "the main danger Israel represents as a Jewish state for its people, for the other Jews and for its neighbours lies in its ideologically justified resolve to expand territorially and in the succession of wars that inevitably brings about". Shahak pointed out that the fundamentalists always dream of a greater Israel encompassing parts of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt and owning some of the oil and gas supplies of that region.

ISRAEL AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The flip side of the Israeli national identity, forged over decades of war and defiance is manifested in the ruthlessness and cunning freely displayed by Tel Aviv in its dealings with the outside world. Many prominent citizens of the Jewish State, including Prime Minister Ariel Sharon himself (in a speech

to the Knesset on May 30, 2001 argued that the country's peculiar 'culture of sloppiness' was 'self-destructive'), have publicly criticised the widespread tendency to 'cut corners' and circumvent national and international laws in the belief that Jews can get away with many things because in a way all people 'owe it to them' as a result of the world's sense of guilt for their former plight.

Inevitably however Israelis are not the last to come to grief as a result of the prevalent moral laxity and unbridled opportunism which have made Israeli politics and business particularly venal and murky, to the point of leading the national newspaper, *Yehodioth Ahronoth* to devote an editorial in 2001 to 'the intuitive conclusion that (we) are especially negligent and corrupt to the point of rottenness'.. A conclusion borne out by the fearless investigations of the well known political journalist Barry Chamish who regularly exposes the seamy underside of the country's public life.

The difficulties that this small nation experienced during decades of conflict has led it to build close associations with other 'pariah' States or powers that pursued controversial policies, from Maoist China to Central American dictatorships, and from apartheid-time South Africa (with which it partnered in atomic tests and secret research on 'ethnic bioweapons') to Mobutu's Zaire. These relations tended to cover a broad gamut of cooperation, involving the training of military and security forces as also clandestine arms trade and defence technology transfers, sometimes in violation of UN mandated regulations.

The secret military espionage, smuggling and industrial research programme which has made the Jewish state a fully developed atomic power, also endowed with 'state of the art' deliverable chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction — many manufactured and stored in the Nes Tziyona Biological Institute — with the implicit cooperation of the United States and of a few West European nations, is only the most egregious of many activities which places Israel in the short list of countries that qualify as 'rogue States' or 'States of concern' in American diplomatic parlance. Likewise, the methods used by the Israeli defence, intelligence and security apparatus to fight and crush its opponents in domestic territory, Palestinian lands and in the world at large make it one of the habitual offenders denounced by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other civil rights monitoring bodies rarely suspected of partiality against the Jewish nation, but the virtual immunity

status the latter enjoys protects it from any effective sanctions as long as it retains the blanket support of the USA.

According to Israel Radio at a cabinet meeting held on October 3, 2001, Ariel Sharon said to his ministers: "... Don't worry about America. We the Jewish people control America and the Americans know it". It is well-known that the Jewish state resorts customarily to nuclear blackmail in order to prompt the US government to act at its behest since, as Seymour Hersh has pointed out in 'The Samson Option' (1991), Israel's tactical nuclear weapons are an integral part of its defence policy which foresees the use of neutron bombs in pre-emptive attacks under certain circumstances. Israel Shahak says in that respect in 'Open Secrets' (London 1997): "Israel's insistence on the independent use of its nuclear weapons can be seen as the foundation on which Israeli grand strategy rests".

Not unnaturally, all countries that have reasons to be suspicious of Arab nationalism, such as Iran, or Muslim separatism, be they China, India, Turkey or even Russia are courted as potential allies and have in fact cooperated more or less discreetly with Israel. Turkey, whose secular American-backed polity is perennially threatened by an Islamic revival was until the 2002 general elections, under prodding from Washington, the Jewish state's staunchest friend and partner in the region. On the other hand Iran, an age-old enemy of Arab expansion, has engaged at various times in secret weapons' trade and intelligence swapping with Tel Aviv under the imperative of containing Iraq. China is engaged in extensive military cooperation with Israel with which it shares a long-term understanding over the problem of domestic Islamic terrorism. Finally, Russia, whose economic life is heavily influenced (since the end of the Soviet system) by Jewish business "oligarchies" closely linked with their American and Israeli brethren, has a complex relationship with Tel Aviv.

The far-reaching involvement of the Israeli military, security and business establishments in transactions involving weapons, radioactive substances, drugs, rare and strategic metals and precious stones in a variety of States — including some of the more crisis-ridden and anarchical countries in Africa, the former Soviet Union and Latin America — reflects a pernicious 'frontier town' culture of grey-area trade and elastic ethics within the Israeli nation. The tendency to flout international rules and resort to arbitrary force or subterfuge, typical of Tel Aviv's foreign policy has alienated allies and well-wishers. Lately, the American military leadership has been at pains to hide its irritation and dismay

about the relentless espionage that Mossad and its related agencies carry on the United States and about the active, overt and covert technological cooperation that the Jewish State has lent to the Chinese armed forces for quite a few years without Washington's approval and often to the detriment of the US security interests and military dominance.

The history of Israeli espionage on the USA began practically with the creation of the Jewish State and soon involved the stealing of nuclear military technology, often on account of both Tel Aviv and Moscow. The widely publicised arrests and trials of master spies such as Jonathan Pollard, whom Israel is still working to have released in the face of determined US military opposition, have generally deflected attention from the underlying evidence of massive Israeli Intelligence infiltration at the highest levels of the American government.

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behind its own domestic and strategic objectives, though the latter do not necessarily coincide with American interests. Many members of the US Intelligence community are not convinced that the Jewish State's secret services shared all the advance information they may have had on the terrorist plots of Al Qaida which they kept under close and continuous observation throughout the spring and summer of that year, according to a painstaking investigation by Fox

News Network correspondent Carl Cameron in the fall of 2001 which points to the likely role of major Israeli-owned telecommunication companies Odigo, Comverse and Amdocs operating in the USA.

Washington's suspicions about its self-serving ally's behaviour and ulterior motives, fed by lingering memories of painful episodes such as the 1967 aggression by the Israeli Air Force on the US ship Liberty off the Near Eastern shore, (which left thirty-four American sailors dead and many more wounded),

led to the arrest of a substantial number of Israeli citizens found on US soil following the September 11 attacks. Those circumstances have fostered the widespread rumours about an underlying Israeli conspiracy, as stated to the press by Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz the Saudi Home Minister and reported in the Atlanta Journal Constitution of December 12, 2002.

However debatable the theory of Mossad's involvement in the September 11 terrorist strikes, there can be little doubt that Ariel Sharon's government influenced decisively the predictable American decision to embark on a global anti-terrorist war which dovetails with and vindicates its own policies to crush Palestinian resistance as was acknowledged by ranking Tel Aviv officials in successive public statements. Furthermore, Israel and its lobby in America have found a unique opportunity to embarrass and put pressure on a Republican administration known to be dangerously close to the Arab oil interests.

The old personal bonds between the Bush family, the Royal House of Saud and some members of the Bin Laden clan make the President vulnerable, and hence reduce his ability to resist Tel Aviv's demands pressed by Israel's spokesmen in the U S Government, including Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz, Defence Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle, Vice-President Cheney's chief of staff L Libby (ex-counsel for Israeli international businessman and agent Marc Rich) and National Security Council member Elliot Abrams, all members of what is known as the neo-conservative 'Wolfowitz Cabal'. Those officials are supported by many lobbies (i.e. the New York 'Mega group' headed by billionaire investor Michael Steinhart or the World Jewish Congress chaired by Edgar Bronfman), forums and think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute, themselves connected to the vast Christian coalition whose leading preachers identify themselves as 'Christian Zionists', just as President Bush's speechwriter David Gerson. One of the links is provided by the National Unity Coalition for Israel chaired by Douglas Feith who is also the Undersecretary of Defence. It must also be pointed out that major corporations affiliated to Christian Coalition stalwarts such as Pat Robertson's television network are now controlled by investors linked with the Jewish state.

Several Israeli leaders have publicly insisted that the American government undertake military operations against a number of Arab and Muslim countries, after taking control of Afghanistan. They have specifically designated the PLO, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon

and Iran as States requiring militarily dictated 'regime change'. The Likud-led regime is confident that it has enlisted the world's superpower in its own campaign to put down opposition in the Islamic world, even at the cost of costly, complex, hazardous and unpopular undertakings such as the conquest of Iraq which it requires Washington to carry out in order to neutralise this

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So far, the siege mentality, so deeply ingrained in the community because of the age-old experience of hostility and also because of the fierce will to remain separate and preserve the specific beliefs and traditions of the race — the 'us against them' reflex — has served Israel by fostering its cohesion in spite of the heterogeneous diversity and fractiousness of the communities that make up that nation. However, the often repeated calls for global Jewish support coupled with the fanatical statements of certain fundamentalist religious organisations which violently target dissidents are creating substantial alienation in the diaspora, some of whose members feel that the State which was supposed to be their haven and pride is turning into a permanent liability for them

simply because they happen to be Jews, no matter what their own opinions and nationalities are.

In fact, according to a 2001 American Jewish identity survey a mere 22 per cent of all US Jews declare themselves Zionists. It is to be expected that a growing number will refuse to be held hostage by Israeli religious and political leaders wont to make them collectively responsible for all the decisions they feel entitled to take, especially on such controversial issues as repression and torture of Palestinians, systematic assassination of the resisters, destruction of the homes of their families, 'pre-emptive reprisals', expropriations, building of illegal settlements, military aggressions against neighbours and other such plainly arbitrary actions which expose all parties responsible to the sanctions of international justice.

Prime Minister Sharon himself and various other high officials including the Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz are charged with and have been investigated for a variety of war crimes against civilians, some of which, like the notorious massacres in the refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila in Lebanon, carried out under 'Sharon's indirect personal responsibility', according to the Israeli official inquiry commission, may qualify as 'crimes against humanity' and should thus come under the purview of the International Penal Tribunal, though the United States is expected to use its clout to protect any Israeli leader from such a trial. Another clear instance of a war crime is provided by the deliberate bombing of the UN-run Qana refugee camp in Lebanon in April 1996 by the IDF. It left one hundred and three dead, including dozens of children

We should quote here the founder of the Israeli Gush Shalom (Peace Now) movement Uri Avnery when he writes with great courage and lucidity in the Tikkun of November-December 2002: "Every few years, the Jewish lobby 'eliminates' an American politician who does not support the Israeli government unconditionally. This is not done secretly...but as a public 'execution' ... As the ancients remind us 'pride comes before the fall'; the shameless flaunting of Jewish power, the buying of representatives and senators, the immense pressure put on the media is counter-productive in the long run ..."

Some of those targets of Israeli pressure and propaganda feel like the Jaffa-based journalist Israel Shamir who wrote in August 2001: "Israel wants the uprising to go on. Israel wants no peace but low intensity conflict. A war with Palestinians allows the Israeli leaders to keep their heterogeneous communities

together ... What is more important, the war allows the Jewish leaders ... to continue their arduous task of reviving world Jewry ... As long as the supremacist Jewish state exists, it will ensure violence and avoid peace." A similar claim is made by Rabbi Moshe Shonfeld in his book *Holocaust Victims Accuse* published in 1977, which charges that Zionists sometimes behaved as 'war criminals' with their fellow Jews too, as was the case when the Haganah (the proto-Israeli irregular army) admittedly blew up the ship 'Patra' off the Palestinian coast on November 25, 1940, killing two hundred and fifty-two Hebrew refugees from eastern Europe on board. Various other Jewish authors have analysed the evidence of deliberate action against their co-religionaries by Zionist organisations. One is Edwin Black in *The Transfer Agreement* and another, Rabbi Michael DB Weismandel in *From the Depth*.

As many of the independently minded Jews have pointed out, not being Israelis they do not participate in Israeli elections and have thus no part in the formation of the country's government. On the other hand, moderates and pacifists among the Jewish people, such as the well-known Californian Rabbi Michael Lerner and Norman Finkelstein, author of the book *The Holocaust Industry*, are routinely insulted and threatened with death by some of the vigilante organisations which appoint themselves to serve as what the late French writer Anne Kriegel called "the insufferable Jewish thought police".

The so-called 'self-hating' Jews, who count illustrious names in their ranks, such as Noam Chomsky, Woody Allen, the late Lord Yehudi Menuhin, are described as mortal enemies by the pan-Israel extremists because they refuse to condone certain troubling aspects of Israel's policy and dispute the sacred status conferred on Zionism which as Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht in *The Fate of the Jews* (1983) pointed out: "has become for many Jews THE religion ... Any opposition to Zionism or criticism against Israel has become a heresy...". Her statement rings as an echo of Henry Makow's pithy observation that for many "the religion of the Jewish people is the Jewish people".

Norman Finkelstein has aroused the ire of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League and other watchdogs for alleging, after extensive research, that much of the funding raised from various countries for compensating survivors and relatives of victims of the Second World War persecutions has, in fact, been funnelled into foundations and business organisations to finance the settlement of Eastern European Jews in Israel and on Palestinian land, while the intended beneficiaries of those massive payments got mere token amounts.

OMINOUS INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ISRAEL

The first cracks in Israel's international support system are mirrored within the country by strains in the national fabric, lately betrayed by the damages to the economy stemming from the chronic insecurity and the state of latent war. The country's accelerated development and a constant fear of being numerically overwhelmed by the surrounding, more fecund Arab population have led to the hasty admission of large numbers of immigrants of Jewish origin from the Middle East, North and Eastern Africa, Asia, South America and the former Soviet Union, apart from growing crowds of non-Jewish, mostly Eastern European and Far Eastern 'guest workers' to make up for the labour shortage resulting from the endemic blockade of Palestinian territories. The profound cultural, linguistic and social disparities between these communities have taken a heavy toll on the nation's cohesiveness. Jews of Soviet extraction, for example, used to living in an atheist Slavic environment have tended to settle in self-contained townships where their lifestyle remains typically Russian and where few of the nutritional and behavioural ritual prescriptions and restrictions enforced by the orthodox Rabbis apply.

On the other hand, Israel now has a slim majority of conservative Sepharads of North Africa and Oriental origin who play a decisive role in pulling the country away from the secular, social-democratic moorings of the European Askenazi left and centre parties, thus bringing their society culturally closer to its ethno-geographic environment. However, despite the policy of hasty absorption of any foreigners claiming Jewish origins, Israel has not overcome the looming threat posed by galloping Palestinian demography which will, sooner or later, challenge the fragile Jewish hegemony in the essentially indivisible bi-polar unit formed by the Israeli-Palestinian region, bound together by such vital requirements as water, agricultural land and commerce.

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The policy-makers and the man on the street are aware that, within 30 or 40 years, Jews will be in a minority amidst Palestinian Muslims and Christians, whether with Israeli or Palestinian citizenship. Continued hostility between those inseparable next of kin will make it impossible for the Zionist State to survive, at least in its present form. **Indeed the most unacceptable demand for the Israelis concerns the return of all the expropriated and expelled original Arab inhabitants from exile since that massive or gradual homecoming, however morally justified, would seal the fate of the Jewish nation.** Indeed the most unacceptable demand for the Israelis concerns the return of all the expropriated and expelled original Arab inhabitants from exile since that massive or gradual homecoming, however morally justified, would seal the fate of the Jewish nation.

In his book *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, Thomas Friedman wrote that after entering the Lebanese capital in 1982, Ariel Sharon and the Tsahal achieved the very important goal of destroying the PLO's Research Centre with all the books, old registrations and deeds of property of Arab families throughout Israeli territory, thereby eliminating most documentary proofs of the large-scale land grab perpetrated by the Jews. Of particular importance were the maps of pre-1948 Palestine that featured the old Arab villages, many of which had since been razed to the ground by the newcomers.

Faced with the prospect of being forced to make critical concessions to the Palestinians, many radical Zionists have not lost the hope to eliminate the problem by pushing their Arab opponents out under unrelenting economic and military pressure while continuing to muster international — and especially US — support, invoking the imperative to fight terrorist aggression which also justifies many otherwise unacceptable recourses to force. Yet, as Thomas Friedman himself among others acknowledged in the *New York Times*, May 23, 2001: "Palestinians will never be bombed into submission". Wendy Perlman put it very well in the *Washington Post* of July 4, 2001: "Israel's logic of power is doomed to boomerang. In its fear of terrorism, Israel employs warlike violence that drives people to terrorism. In its effort to crush radicalism, it imposes a siege that makes people more radical... The more Israel makes the Palestinian people suffer, the more Israel will suffer in the long run".

The reverse calculation of course obtains among Palestinians and in the Arab world that expects to witness a gradual yet inevitable Jewish eclipse as a result of the departure of most Israelis with foreign roots, exhausted by the continuous trial of war and terrorism. Though both predictions are symmetrical, the law of numbers is not on the side of the Jews who may not have as much stomach either to inflict and bear suffering over time as their despondent and destitute foes.

PROSPECTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The dramatic plight of a large part of the Jewish people in Nazi-dominated Europe and the exceptional influence it has come to wield in the modern world, not to mention its seminal role in the formation of the Christian and Muslim religions, ensure that Israel is a focus of nearly universal attention and that all episodes of the permanent conflict with its Arab neighbours are abundantly covered and commented, perhaps to excess, in the global media. Every individual killing, every armed clash, every terrorist attack taking place in that land, holy for nearly three billion believers, gets far more coverage than similar incidents in any other region of the planet. Yet, in many theatres of civil war, such as Colombia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Kashmir and various regions in Africa, casualties are more numerous and the conflicts spread over far wider areas.

The constant publicity is not an unmitigated blessing for Israel which is put under enormous pressure not to go beyond certain limits though the latter are highly questionable and tend to be periodically pushed further back in the repression of the Palestinians. In the meanwhile the world's attention gives the latter some hope to elicit enough international support to bring about the satisfaction of at least some of their demands. It is hard for the well-trained and mightily armed Israeli armed forces to elicit sympathy when they are employed to shoot down stone-throwing children and UN workers, search and beat women and old men, prevent ambulances from reaching combat victims, cut off roads to poor villages, wilfully destroy emergency food-aid supplies and launch missiles on civilian neighbourhoods for the so-called 'surgical strikes' with their inevitable 'collateral casualties'. As the Israeli Baruk Kimmerling wrote: "After some thirty-five years of occupation, exploitation, uprootings and degradations, the Palestinian people have the right to resort to

force to oppose an Israeli presence which is nothing but the brutal imposition of force. Millions of people cannot today be compelled to remain under the coercive power of a foreign occupier”.

We are taken back to the comparison we used in the beginning of the article with the historic drama of French Algeria. A European society established

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for more than a century on Islamic soil struggled during a decade to quell a native uprising which threatened its total destruction. The parallels are too obvious to be ignored but there are even more similarities than is revealed by a superficial glance. If Palestine all along had a substantial Jewish population (the Sabras), Algeria has had for centuries a European demographic component of Spanish, Italian, Maltese and other sundry origins. Whereas the Zionist immigrants laid an ancient historical claim to Palestine, likewise the French

colonial powers harked back to the days of the Roman, Byzantine and Vandal dominance in North Africa, prior to the medieval Arab Muslim invasions and to its conquest by the Ottoman Turks. However, these attempts by the French Algerians to justify their conquest of the Maghreb did not prevent their ultimate exodus along with the collapse of the multi-cultural Christian-dominated society they had built on African soil under the onslaught of an indigenous insurrection supported by all Islamic and formerly colonised nations.

Some would argue that the French presence was more beneficial for native Algerians than the Israeli occupation has been so far for Palestinians but in any case, that precedent is ominous for the future of Israel which is becoming increasingly isolated as a result of the hostility of the Arab countries and of its growing alienation from the outside world.

The multicultural and probably multiethnic origins of the contemporary Jewish colonialists mirror the composition of the first Hebrew immigration in the second millennium before Christ which inspired the account of the Torah. Settlers of various origins, some possibly led by Moses and Joshua, may have come in successive waves, spurred by the Egyptian occupation of Chanaan and perhaps influenced by the 'monotheistic revolution' brought about by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton) of the eighteenth dynasty. The autochthonous and alien, racially and religiously heterogeneous tribes were gradually brought together by a succession of elected and hereditary leaders but their confederacy, built in order to pool forces against local enemies, was always fragile and hinged on the charisma and military abilities of the paramount ruler. That fissiparousness justified the undertaking to forge a single religion by integrating elements from various traditions into a broadly homogeneous biblical corpus, often at the cost of considerable theological and social conflict and pressure as recorded in the *Old Testament*. Nonetheless, the United Kingdom did not survive long the death of Solomon, its greatest monarch whose power certain Jewish historians estimate to have been vastly overrated by latter-day clerical chroniclers in the seventh century BCE State of Judah who appear to be the main authors or compilers of the Bible.

The old centrifugal tendencies broke up the country which was gradually absorbed into the larger states of Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia. If history repeats itself every now and then, especially for those who don't heed its lessons, we can see thereby the shape of things to come. The biblical holy land is still divided between the Bene-Israel and Bene-Jacob, on the one hand, and their Philistine (Palestinian) enemies, on the other. There is growing scientific evidence that many Askenazi Israelis of Central and East European origin are in fact Khazar (Turkic) and Slav converts from medieval days and not Semites. The deep fault-lines between the various components of the Jewish nation may result in its breakup through a 'Lebanisation' of the region into a mosaic of ethnic and religious cantons. That would bring about the effective internationalisation of the districts sacred to the three Semitic religions and would by and by settle the otherwise intractable problem posed by the Israeli nation state in its present shape and structure.

The Swiss confederal polity and the Lebanese constitution, as also the experience of other federal multiracial, multireligious states, such as the Union of Malaysia may provide useful models to devise required power-sharing

arrangements between the long-estranged communities of the strife-torn land. As remote and as difficult to accept as it may seem, that perspective probably provides the only hope for a permanent stabilisation of the situation.

Meanwhile, Israel has initiated the constitution of a new 'Berlin Wall' between Jews and Palestinian, but it is unlikely that such a barrier will prevent violence from taking place between the inimical inextricably overlapping

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communities. Furthermore it will consecrate Israel's status as an 'apartheid system' with all the unpleasant comparisons that calls to mind and, in any event, as the Palestinian writer, Marwan Bishara points out in his book, *Palestine-Israel: la Paix ou l'Apartheid* (2001): "in a few years, if the pace of Jewish

colonisation holds up, a separation will become impossible without 'ethnic cleansing'... Hence the possibility of finding ourselves in ten years faced with the imperative of a 'democratic' rather than a 'national' solution to the conflict. The democratic expression of the two peoples according to the principle of 'one person one vote' could then lead to the end of the apartheid system, as was the case in South Africa."

Unquestionably, faced with those moderate and realistic assessments, most Israelis are afraid for the future of their country and prefer to bury their heads in the sand, hoping for a miraculous 'final solution' of the crisis under the status quo. More forward-looking and reasonable Jews think in terms of the need for a 'neo-Zionism', as advocated by Amos Oz, Yossi Sarid, Michael Lerner and Zeev Sternhell (to cite a few representatives of the various currents within this general tendency) or a form of Jewish nationalism that would not necessarily be incompatible with the acceptance of a bi-national, pluricultural, federal state structure. Oz has said that "Zionism is not a first name but a family name" and he subscribes to the view that, absent peace in the medium-term future, Israel is doomed. The same fear is expressed by Uri Avnery in the *Tikkun Quarterly* where he writes (in the issue of November-December 2002): "All over the world Jews live in safety; they are threatened with annihilation in only one place: Israel. Here national parks are being prepared for use as mass graves, here (pathetic) measures against biological and chemical weapons

are being prepared. Many people are already planning to escape to the communities in the Diaspora. End of a myth”.

And further: “The Sharon government is a giant laboratory for the growing (sic) of the anti-semitism virus. It exports it to the whole world” (ibid).

These intellectuals tend to deplore the climate of vindictive and self-righteous recrimination, tinged with self-pity that prevails in Israeli conservative circles, well aware that just as no people hold a monopoly on suffering, any nation can turn into an oppressive power. Despite the dogged refusal in pro-Israeli quarters, and hence in most US official circles, to accept any criticism, however moderate and balanced, those enlightened devout or secular members of the mosaic community would like to see an ‘*aggiornamento*’ in the political creed of the Hebrew state.

Rabbi Lerner wrote: “What the Jewish people need is for Christians to denounce anti-Semitism but nevertheless to join with progressive Jews in criticizing the immoral and self-destructive policies of the Israeli government”.