

# **Zionist Ideology and the Reality of Israel**

**By Nahum Goldman**

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475 Riverside Drive, Room 245  
New York, New York 10115-0245  
Tel. 212-870-2053  
Fax: 212-870-2050

Nahum Goldmann is Founder President of the World Jewish Congress and served as President from 1951 to 1977. He is former President of the World Zionist Organization and of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. He is the author of *Memories, OÙ Va Israel?* and *Le Paradoxe Juif*. This article, completed in early August 1978, is reprinted by permission from *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1978. Copyright 1978 by Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

**T**he purpose of this article is to review the situation of Israel from a Zionist point of view, at this most critical moment—in the real sense of the word "crisis," which, in medical terms, may lead either to full recovery or to a tragic end. I am now 83 years old and, having made my first Zionist speech at the age of 13, I can look back on a Zionist career of 70 years. I asked myself whether my views at this particular time should not rather be published in a Jewish paper. But the fact is that the issue of Israel and Zionism has been and continues to be much more than a purely Jewish problem: it is a front-page international one, in, which the United States has been getting more and more intensely involved, both directly and through the United Nations.

The creation of the State of Israel was an international act, based on a U.N. decision, and since then both the General Assembly and the Security Council have had many times to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict. There is no other example of a state of three million inhabitants that so much occupies public opinion, provoking deep emotional reactions, both positive and negative. This is just another indication of the uniqueness of the Jewish problem.

Jewish history and the character of the Jewish people are unique and represent, both in their totality and in many partial aspects as for instance the Soviet Jewish problem—a unique phenomenon. Without taking this uniqueness into account—and "unique" does not include any qualitative connotation but only that it is exceptional—it is impossible to understand the history of the Jewish people, which is a combination of religion, nationalism and race. This history always moved between two poles, the center in its state and the Diaspora around it, and defies most of the rules normally dominating the history of peoples. The present State of Israel is the third "commonwealth" in Jewish history and, although it is the culmination of 2,000 years of prayers of Jews all over the world for their return to their ancestral country, now that they have the possibility of going back, the majority prefer to remain in their dispersion. Zionism, too, which, from a universal point of view, may be regarded as one of the many manifestations of the nationalistic idea which came into being in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is unique. A normal national movement is the expression of an oppressed people ruled by a foreign power, which revolts against this domination, wins the fight and proclaims its independence. Zionism, however, was born not as an expression of an untenable reality but as the result of a dream, a longing, an ideal. When Theodor Herzl wrote *The Jewish State* and soon afterward, in 1894, called the first Zionist Congress, there were about 60,000 Jews in Palestine, living as a minority among a much larger Arab population.

I stress this point because I see a deep wisdom in Goethe's saying that peoples and human beings have to live "by the law by which they started their existence." The extent to which it is capable of realizing its ideals is decisive for any people, but the Jewish people is surely *the* one in the world that owes its survival not to its economic, political or military power, but to its ideals—religious, cultural and social. If the reality of Jewish history had determined the fate of the Jewish people, it would have disappeared long ago. There were periods when there may have been no more than one or one-and-a-half million Jews in the world, but they survived 2,000 years of discrimination, lack of equality and persecution climaxing in the Nazi Holocaust—not because of their power but because of their loyalty, to their ideals and their indestructible faith in a better future, in being "the chosen people," in the coming of the Messiah. Among the many new states created during the last 50 years, Israel is the only one that has its origin not in reality but in an ideal, not in a factual situation but in the hope and faith of a people.

## II

The 30th anniversary of Israel, celebrated a few months ago, is a fitting occasion to draw a balance. Having devoted most of my life to help realize the Zionist ideal and having occupied important positions in the Zionist leadership during several decades, I am able to compare the reality of Israel today with the vision by which it was created. The conclusion of such a critical comparison is that on the one hand only a part of the Zionist ideal has been implemented in the reality of Israel of today and that, on the other, many aspects of this reality, even the dominant character of Israel's image—both internally and externally—constitute a radical distortion of the Zionist ideal.

I fully realize that no revolutionary movement can totally fulfill its ideals and that these are often distorted in the process of implementation, as the history of the French and Russian Revolutions, among others, proves. The relationship between the ideal and the realization is one of the touchstones of the success of any movement: for a people whose existence is primarily based on the creative challenges of ideals and hopes, it is more decisive than for any other.

When it emerged about 80 years ago, the Zionist idea, like most phenomena of Jewish life, was quite exceptional, unique and, in a way, even absurd. As a matter of fact, Herzl's idea of a Jewish state as the solution of the Jewish problem was, for quite some time, considered quixotic, unrealistic and utopian by a majority of Jews and non Jews alike. One need only imagine what would happen in the world if all the peoples who lost their states

centuries or millennia ago—such as the Indians in North and South America, for instance—were to reclaim their land. It was Herzl's good luck that he was ignorant of the complexities of Jewish history and Jewish life. I have long felt that what characterizes genius is the ability to simplify a very complicated problem and to reduce it to one striking formula: Marx did this for economics, Freud for psychology, and so on. Herzl defined the Jewish problem as a question of logistics: "a people without a land should be transferred to a land without a people," and by this stroke he believed the Jewish problem, which had been embarrassing the world for thousands of years, would be solved. Nothing in this formula, of course, was true: most of the Jews throughout the world were not people without a land but loyal citizens of their countries, and Palestine—although not as densely populated as it is today—was certainly not a land without a people. Nor has the transfer of nearly three million Jews to Israel solved the Jewish problem in the world, as is unfortunately apparent in the recent resurgence of anti-Semitism, often in the form of anti-Zionism. As a matter of fact, the creation of the State of Israel, though certainly enriching Jewish life and giving it more dignity and new challenges, has doubtless created serious political difficulties for many Jewish communities in various countries.

The main or primary purpose of the Zionist movement was never just to create a state and to move all the Jews of the world to it. The real aim of the thinkers and ideologues of the Zionist movement was twofold: on the one hand to create a country in which Jews who are persecuted or driven out could find a home in their own right and, on the other, to establish a center to bring about a renaissance of Jewish culture and Judaism, in whatever form it expresses itself, in order to secure the survival of the Jewish people. The first aim was more or less achieved by the creation of a normal state, where Jews are the majority and which is open to every Jew who wishes to live within a Jewish atmosphere or who is obliged to leave another country. But the second task of Zionism, to secure Jewish survival, has not really begun to be implemented. It is not only because three million Jews in the Soviet Union are prevented de facto from remaining Jews that the future of the Jewish people is more threatened today, in my opinion, than it was in the days of the Holocaust. The greater danger lies in the fact that the internal front of the Jewish people, which assured its existence during the thousands of years of its history much more than its external front, which was always weak, is seriously menaced nowadays.

In many European countries, where the Jewish population was decimated by the Holocaust, not only in Eastern Europe but also in countries such as Holland, Germany, Italy or Belgium, there may not be a Jewish community at all in ten or 20 years. At best, half of

American Jews are in any form active as Jews, either by belonging to a synagogue or by participating in Zionist or communal affairs, and there are statisticians who predict that, in a decade or two, half of them will have lost all Jewish consciousness. The lack of Jewish education, the complete assimilation of a generation of Jews who enjoy full equality—economic, political and cultural—in their countries, as well as mixed marriages, endanger the survival of a considerable part of the people. Realizing this threat to Jewish survival, some of the ideological creators of the Zionist movement, chief among them the great Hebrew writer and thinker Ahad Haam, regarded it as the main task of Zionism not just to create a state for homeless Jews but a country with a special character which, in the form of a sovereign state, would become the spiritual center for the majority of Jews who were living outside the Jewish state and would continue to do so for an unforeseeable future. The purpose was to create new values to inspire the young generation all over the world to remain Jewish, in place of the religious tradition—that portable fatherland, to use a famous term of Heinrich Heine—which had dominated Jewish life for centuries but which has lost a great part of its significance for the majority of the people that no longer lives the separate life of the ghetto.

From this point of view, Israel is far from even having begun to fulfill the deeper meaning of Zionism. The reasons for this failure—despite all the successes Israel has achieved in building up a state, forging a strong army and winning victories—are both objective and subjective, and it is the purpose of this article to elaborate them.

### III

The objective reasons are two tragic events which no philosopher of Zionism could ever have foreseen. One was the Holocaust, which annihilated a third of the Jewish people and, in particular, the great cultural and religious centers of Jewish existence in Central and Eastern Europe, which had for centuries been the bearers of Jewish tradition and values and would have been the natural reservoir for large-scale immigration into a Jewish state. The second tragic development, which neither Theodor Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, nor any of the other founders of Zionism had ever considered possible, was that the career of the State started with a war against the Arab world.

The Zionist movement had always been convinced that the Arabs would receive it with open arms, and be happy for its bringing the values, the ideas and the know-how of West European and American civilization into the Middle East. Because of this illusion—a result of the lack of political experience of the Jews during 2,000 years of Diaspora life—Zionism

committed the unintentional error of ignoring the importance of the Arab attitude for the realization of Zionist aspirations. The leadership of the Zionist movement, to which I belonged for several decades, concentrated primarily on winning the sympathy and the support of the great powers and of world public opinion, and in this it was successful, as the U.N. decision of 1947 proves. Attempts were made occasionally to try to win over the Arabs to agree to the establishment of a Jewish state in their midst, but these efforts were never intensive nor flexible enough. When the Zionist movement won its great political victory and the United Nations voted for the creation of a Jewish state by a two-thirds majority, the Arab world was more isolated than Israel is today because both the democratic countries and the communist bloc voted for the resolution. Some of us then suggested that the proclamation of the State should be delayed for a few weeks or months, in order to try to reach an agreement with the Arabs, if not to accept Israel at least not to react to its creation by war. This might not have succeeded, but, as it was not even tried, there is no way to assess the alternative, and for the major part of its 30-years' history, Israel has had to fight wars with the Arabs in order to secure its survival.

The tragedy of the situation is that, although Israel won all the wars—more or less decisively—nothing definite was achieved by the victories. As formulated by Nietzsche, great victories are less easy to digest than defeats, and the psychological effect of the repeated Israeli victories was the hardening of positions on both sides of the barricades. Instead of leading to peace, the victories only aggravated the conflict: the Arabs felt more humiliated and insulted with each defeat, and the Israelis acquired a feeling of superiority and the conviction that they need not worry too much because of the Arabs' refusal to recognize them. Characteristic of this attitude is Prime Minister Begin's statement that Israel does not require Arab acceptance because its existence is the affirmation of God's promise and Jewish tradition.

In this connection it may be useful to recall that, on his return from Yalta, President Roosevelt had a meeting with Ibn Saud, who expressed his utter refusal of the idea of a Jewish state and so impressed the President that, in a subsequent talk with Rabbi Stephen Wise, he warned him that the Zionists were taking upon themselves a terrible responsibility, as they might, by the creation of the State, lead to the extermination of millions of Jews. Similar views were conveyed in 1948 by Secretary of State Marshall to Moshe Sharett and by Under Secretary of State Lovett to myself. It is difficult to understand how a people so brilliant, resourceful and intelligent as the Jews fail to realize that, if the acceptance of the Jewish state by the Arabs and ensuing peace does not occur in the

near future, the outlook is grim indeed.

The undeniable fact that determines the present situation and the evolution of the Middle East is that time does not work for Israel. Israel's belief in its superiority as a permanent phenomenon has no foundation in reality. On the one hand, 100 or 120 million Arabs are lined up against three million Jews—or even four or five million in the coming years—and their natural intelligence will enable them in the very near future to learn the use of the most modern weapons. On the other hand, the tremendous wealth of the Arab oil-producing states and the political power this gives the Arab world influences American policy. Israel cannot take for granted, from a long-term point of view, America's total and unlimited political, military and economic support. The most decisive and, for Israel, the most ominous fact is that one cannot, under any circumstances, imagine the elimination of the Arabs from the Middle East, whereas it is unfortunately quite conceivable that, in case of an overwhelming Arab victory and the indifference of the world in general, Israel might be destroyed. Indeed, this fear is often used by Israelis in defense of their intransigent policy.

#### IV

As a matter of fact, deep in the heart of the Israelis, despite their over-publicized feeling of superiority based on military victories, is the worry of what the next day may bring. This was the reason for the miraculous impact of Anwar Sadat's gesture in coming to Jerusalem last November. It created not only a joyful surprise all over the world but a heartfelt and intense enthusiasm in Israel—and at the same time in Egypt, where the population is tired of the misery that 30 years of war has brought about. It would be a real tragedy, for Israel as well as for the Arab states of the Middle East and indeed the whole world, if Sadat's great initiative were to remain a short-lived episode leading to a new war, with the danger of a big-power confrontation in the background.

For all these reasons, Israel and the Arab world have reached a crucial point in the history of their conflict. The coming year will probably decide whether there will be an agreement leading to peace or an increase of tension and a hardening of positions on both sides, culminating in a brutal war with all its international complications. Due to its military superiority throughout the 30 years of its existence, Israel has achieved a significant success—Sadat's offer to accept the Jewish state as an equal member of the family of nations of the Middle East, after the solution of the Palestinian problem and the settlement of the border question. It is likely that Lebanon, Jordan, and even Syria and Saudi Arabia

would follow his example, and this should be regarded by Israel as a major political victory. For 30 years Israel proclaimed that the basic condition for peace was the readiness of the Arabs to recognize the Jewish state, formally and factually. Levi Eshkol, the Israeli Prime Minister at the time of the Six Day War, solemnly declared a few days before the war started that Israel had no desire for territorial expansion; after the big conquests of 1967, this promise was forgotten—as the French say, "*l'appetit vient en mangeant.*" Today, now that the leading Arab states are ready to recognize Israel on condition that it return to the 1967 borders, with certain ameliorations, Israel refuses. It should, I believe, consider what would have happened had the Arabs agreed 30 years ago to the U.N. decision on partition, which foresaw a Jewish state less than half as big as Israel is today, and which Israel then enthusiastically accepted.

The Israeli arguments in interpreting the crucial Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 may be useful for a logical dispute, but are meaningless from a historical and political point of view. One of the objections is that in many cases peoples have kept territories conquered in war. This in fact occurred when the conquerors were strong enough to impose the territorial changes on their defeated opponents and to achieve peace, but the past 30 years have proved that the Arabs cannot be forced to yield and, as they get permanently stronger, it is unlikely that they will do so in the future. There is, however, a real chance that the moderate Arab countries will accept certain territorial changes due to security considerations which, as I know from conversations with various Arab representatives, many of them understand—as, for instance, on the border between Israel and Jordan, which, near Natania, leaves only 18 kilometers to Israel from the coastline to the frontier.

The second Israeli argument against relinquishing any territory, that of the so-called historical borders, is no less untenable. In the history of the biblical and post-biblical Jewish States, there were many different borders at various periods between Israel and its neighbors, and neither the Bible nor the Talmud specify what these borders should be. Moreover, and though the loyalty of the Jewish people to its tradition is one of the reasons for Jewish survival, one may legitimately wonder why the Arabs or the Americans should be committed to the promises of the Jewish God! Great religious Jewish leaders, with whom I have discussed this issue, state unequivocally that it is contrary to the spirit of Jewish law, in which the welfare of every human being is a major commandment, to fight a war and risk the lives of thousands of young Jewish men and women to gain territories. And there are some extreme and logically most consistent groups of Orthodox Jews who

reject the creation of the Jewish state without the Messiah having yet come, and who regard the establishment of Israel rather as a violation than as the fulfillment of divine promise.

The only remaining argument that is understandable and acceptable is that of security, but it is also greatly distorted and misrepresented. In a period when warfare is based on supersonic airplanes and missiles, the importance of borders, from a security point of view, has not disappeared but has greatly decreased. Syrians, Jordanians and even Saudi Arabians could bomb Israeli cities from beyond the present borders—as Israel could do as well in retaliation—and there is, as a matter of fact, great fear on both sides that a new war may be directed more against civilians than conducted on the battlefield.

The history of the Middle East in the last 30 years is one of the sad chapters of missed opportunity. It would be a real crime if the intransigence on both sides were to bring to naught the extraordinary and, maybe, last chance offered by Sadat's courageous gesture. Psychologically, one can understand the doubts and hesitations of the Israeli leadership to take a more flexible stand. The Jews survived the last 2,000 years because of their stubbornness, because they refused to accept realities, because of their faith in miracles which would save them, because of a mixture of an inferiority complex with compensatory superiority feelings in their relations with the non-Jewish world, because of their refusal to rely on promises and guarantees from outside. Mr. Begin and most other leaders of Israel are still an incarnation of *Galut* (exile) psychology, and this is the major obstacle for reaching a settlement as far as Israel and the Jewish people are concerned. But I am confident that a new generation, free from many of the complexes developed during the Diaspora, will emerge, exemplified even today in the Peace Now movement, led by some of the most decorated heroes of the Israeli Army.

The great question is whether the Arabs will be ready to wait until such a psychological change occurs. The future of Israel, however, will depend on it, and the Israelis must realize that the psychology that enabled Jews to survive 2,000 years of ghetto and *mellah*, of living not really within history but on the verge of it, cannot be the basis of the existence of a modern state established in the midst of hostile Arab countries. Without a definite acceptance of Israel by the Arab world, which, in the long run, must mean not merely a formal peace treaty but also normal diplomatic, economic and cultural relations—on which Israel rightly insists as the condition for any settlement—there is no future and no security for the Jewish state in the Middle East.

Such Israelis as believe that the Arabs will never accept a Jewish state should pack their bags and leave the country. I, for one, have always felt that, given the proper psychological attitude by the Israelis, the Arabs will finally accept Israel and cooperate with it. Sadat's initiative and the attitude of the moderate Arab states prove that there is a basis for this hope, and it would be a historical crime—not only vis-à-vis the Jewish people but with regard to all the peoples of the Middle East and humanity—if either Israel or the Arabs, by their intransigence on nonessential details, were to destroy the possibility of beginning an era of good neighborliness, friendship and real cooperation.

v

The main consideration for Israel in determining its position at this most crucial moment in its history must be the understanding that, without peace, there is no chance for it to fulfill the real mission of the Zionist movement. While the menace of Arab destruction may enthuse the Diaspora for a certain time in support of Israel, it is insufficient, from a long-term point of view, to inspire Jewish youth throughout the world and to influence it in remaining loyal to its people. Some of the young generation, I am afraid, is lost already—not only in the U.S.S.R. but also in the Western world; the only hope to maintain at least a large part of it within the Jewish fold is for Israel no longer to be obliged to use its resources and talents for winning battles—with the danger, as the Germans say, of "*sich tod zu siegen*," to be victorious to death—but to be able to devote its immense creative energies to the establishment of a new society and new values which would inspire the Jewish Diaspora.

In order to implement this major ideal of Zionism, Israel must, in my opinion, not only achieve peace and be as strong as possible, but it must become a state unlike all others. It is obvious that, even after signing a peace treaty, Israel will have to remain strongly armed for quite some time so as to prevent the violation of the agreement. But this alone cannot suffice. The peace treaty must be implemented by real guarantees, either on the part of the United States alone or, preferably, by a number of major powers, with the stationing of international forces on Israel's borders for a long time. The more countries that participate in such guarantees, the better for the Middle East and for the world, and this may even serve as a precedent for other parts of the world, which would benefit from demilitarization and realistic guarantees instead of engaging in the armaments race.

As I argued in detail several years ago in *Foreign Affairs*, it would be advisable, in my opinion, if Israel were proclaimed a neutral state by the United Nations and enjoyed inter-

national protection of its neutrality.<sup>1</sup> For the time being, I believe Israel's security would have to be guaranteed by the presence of international forces around its borders. To affirm, as many in Israel do, that this would be undignified and a violation of Israel's sovereignty, is quite absurd. West Germany, Belgium and Holland see no infringement of their sovereignty by having American soldiers on their soil and, on the contrary, they worry at the mere mention of their number being reduced. The friends of Israel in the United States who, are genuinely interested in Israel's security and survival should be more ready to insist on the stationing of American forces than to agitate against the supply of arms to Arab countries, thus endangering the good relations between the United States and the Middle East.

The role of the Soviet Union in the effort to reach peace in the Middle East should not be overlooked. Any attempt to eliminate the U.S.S.R. from that area is, in my opinion, unwise and shortsighted. The Soviet Union is certainly not strong enough to impose a peace agreement in the Middle East, but it is well capable of sabotaging any settlement reached without it. For that reason the Vance-Gromyko agreement of October 1977 was a piece of real statesmanship, and it is regrettable that Israel's opposition and that of the pro-Israel lobby in America rendered the agreement ineffective. Likewise, whatever may be achieved in the direct negotiations again undertaken between Israeli and Egyptian representatives—and certainly if these talks fail—will make necessary a reconvoation of the Geneva conference, notwithstanding the reluctance of Israel and some Arab states.

One last remark concerning a very essential aspect of the problem. Israel's claim that neither Jews outside Israel nor even the U.S. government have a right to criticize its policies or make suggestions is the expression of a lack of psychological security and without any justification. Without the partnership of the Jewish people and its support of Zionism after the Second World War, Israel would never have come into existence, nor could it have survived for long. It is obvious that formal decisions on Israel's policies must remain in the hands of its elected parliament and government, but it would be morally unfair and realistically untenable to deny Jewish individuals and organizations in the Diaspora, who have constantly shown their solidarity with Israel and who help it politically, financially and in many other ways, the right to express an opinion on Israel's policies or criticize them. Jews in the Diaspora, in the long run, will not continue to feel responsible if they are refused the right to influence Israel, by private views and by public utterances.

No less absurd is the demand that America should not "impose" a peace. This is nothing but a clever and demagogic formula. International politics are based on permanent in-

terference and pressures, and even Israel very often demands that the United States should influence its allies in NATO or pressure its adversaries like the Soviet Union. Why should it therefore deny the United States the right to make proposals or suggestions, while accepting billions of dollars annually in support and arms supplies and leaving the United States in the uncomfortable position of being Israel's only supporter in the United Nations? I have maintained for years that America, by its reluctance to influence Israel and through having given in to too many Israeli demands—for instance, with regard to the Jar-ring mission, the Rogers Plan, etc.—not only failed to help Israel but harmed it in the long run. With greater American interference, peace could have been brought about long ago, in situations more favorable to Israel than today.

Experience has shown that the Arabs and Israelis, left alone, will not achieve an agree-ment. The conflict is, in a certain way, a family affair between two Semitic peoples, who are characterized by stubbornness and lack of flexibility. The United States, which has in-tervened in many other conflicts and helped to bring about settlements, should not only have the right but the obligation to use all its influence in the Arab-Israeli issue, which has occupied the headlines of the world for 30 years.

## VI

We have reached a point in the history of Israel and the Middle East where the whole world is beginning to be sick and tired of this conflict. In the long run, the tiny state of Israel cannot keep the center of world attention and will, by its attitude, provoke indifference and even increasing hostility. American Jews who support Israel in its present intransigent pol-icy and who feel they must prevent America from taking a position are harming Israel more than many of its adversaries. It is my feeling that not only has Israel the obligation to make use of the present unique opportunity for a settlement, but the United States must do whatever it can to take a hand in it.

Finally, I believe that the number of Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora who are begin-ning to doubt the validity of Israel's rigid policy—which, as a matter of fact, has not changed radically from Ben Gurion to Begin—is growing. Despite all the negative ele-ments that characterize the momentary situation, I am more optimistic than ever before about a positive solution of the Middle East conflict. Once the major Arab states have reached the psychological maturity to accept Israel and be ready for peace, the intransi-gence of Israel and of certain Arabs will not endure. When the United States and, I hope, other major powers cease to be reluctant to interfere in a situation that is a potential dan-

ger for the whole world, the chances for a true settlement and for the beginning of a new and creative chapter in the history of the Middle East will become real.

The Israeli-Arab conflict, despite the fact that it concerns only a tiny territory, is morally and historically one of the main problems of today's world politics. Just as the major powers bear responsibility for the tragic past of the Jewish people—for their participation in or indifference to its sufferings and persecutions, culminating in the Holocaust—so they are responsible for the survival and security of the Jewish state, which alone can avoid possible future persecutions and dangers to the Jews.

The insistence of Israel's present leaders that the world should not interfere and should leave Israel and the Arabs to solve their issues by themselves results in a paradoxical negation of the real ideal of Zionism. The fact that Israel depends exclusively on the United States, politically, financially, economically and militarily, and could not continue to exist as it is today if the United States were to abandon it—which fortunately is not likely—is a denial of the Zionist ambition to make the Jewish people independent of others in determining its future.

Zionism and Israel are, as explained above, a unique problem. Its solution must also be unique and not be brought about by the usual methods of routine diplomacy, which, for 30 years, have failed to solve it. Only an Israel guaranteed by as many powers of the world as possible, being allowed to create a new civilization new values, will be the true fulfillment of the classic ideology of Zionism. Israel as it is today is the realization of that part of the Zionist ideal which wanted a state for the Jewish people, but it is still far from, and in a certain respect even in contradiction to, that more decisive aspect of Zionism which aims at creating a spiritual center for the Jewish people as a whole, the real guarantee for Jewish survival.

<sup>1</sup> See "The Future of Israel," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1970, particularly pp. 453-59.

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