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Colin Shindler

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## A HISTORY OF MODERN ISRAEL

*Second Edition*

Colin Shindler's remarkable history begins in 1948, as waves of immigrants arrived in Israel from war-torn Europe to establish new cities, new institutions and a new culture founded on the Hebrew language. Optimistic beginnings were soon replaced with the sobering reality of wars with Arab neighbours, internal ideological differences and an ongoing confrontation with the Palestinians. The author paints a broad canvas that affords unusual insights into Israel's multicultural society, forged from more than 100 different Jewish communities and united by a common history. In this updated edition, Shindler covers the significant developments of the last decade, including the rise of the Israeli far Right, Hamas's takeover and the political rivalry between Gaza and the West Bank, Israel's uneasy dealings with the new administration in the United States, political Islam, the expansion of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank and the potential impact of the Arab Spring on the region as a whole. This sympathetic yet candid portrayal asks how a nation that emerged out of the ashes of the Holocaust and was the admiration of the world is now perceived by many Western governments in a less than benevolent light.

COLIN SHINDLER is Emeritus Professor and Pears Senior Research Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is also founding chairman of the European Association of Israel Studies.

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*In Memory of*

*Rachel Shindler (1905–96)*

*and*

*Goldie Pollock (1919–2003)*

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# A HISTORY OF MODERN ISRAEL

*Second Edition*

COLIN SHINDLER

*School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*



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## *Acknowledgements*

To write a history of Israel always poses the question of what to leave in and what to leave out. Telescoping momentous events is never straightforward, but I hope that by following a pathway based on the ideologies of the main actors in this drama, I have given a shape to this history.

Several libraries and archives assisted me in my deliberations. In particular, I should like to thank the staff of the Jabotinsky archives, the Beit Berl archives of the Labour movement, the Yad Tabenkin archives, the Central Zionist archives, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee archives (Jerusalem) and the Israeli State archives – all in Israel. In addition, the British Library and the British Newspaper Library in London and the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library were enormously helpful. I must also say a ‘thank you’ to Peter ‘Shmuel’ Salinger, the Hebraica librarian at SOAS, University of London, for his guidance and friendship over many years.

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60th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel. It seems that I lived in my office for most of 2006. My wife, Jean, put up with my hermit-like existence and her perceptive nature gave me the time and space to complete this endeavour. Without her support and advice, this book, like all my other works, would not have been possible.

As in my previous books, I have used a normal transliteration system with notable exceptions where familiarity has superseded convention. Any errors of fact or interpretation are mine alone.

## *Glossaries*

### POLITICAL PARTIES AND GROUPS

Achdut Ha'avodah	socialist Zionist party, founded in 1919, by Ben-Gurion and Tabenkin
Agudat Yisrael	ultra-orthodox party, founded in 1912 to oppose the Zionist movement
Alignment	established by Labour and Mapam in 1969
Balad	Israeli Arab nationalist party, advocating Israel as a state for all its citizens, founded by Azmi Bishara in 1995
Betar	nationalist Zionist youth group, founded by Jabotinsky in Riga in 1923
Bilumim	the settlers of the first Zionist immigration to Palestine in 1882
Brit Shalom Degel Ha'Torah	early peace group in the 1920s established by Eliezer Schach through the split in Agudat Yisrael in 1988
Democratic Movement for Change	established in 1977 as a centre party by Yigal Yadin
Free Centre	established in 1967 through a split in Herut
Gahal	established through an alignment between Herut and the Liberals in 1965

Gahelet	religious youth group which propounded redemptionist Zionism
General Zionists	promoted the views of small businessmen and private enterprise, established 1929
Hadash	Jewish-Arab party, emerging from the pro-Moscow wing of the Israeli Communist party
Haganah	the defence arm of the Yishuv and forerunner of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF)
Hapoel Hamizrachi	labour wing of religious Zionism and builder of religious kibbutzim, established 1922
Hapoel Hatzair	non-Marxist, Tolstoyan pioneering party, established in 1906
Hashomer Hatzair	dovish pioneering Marxist Zionist group, established in 1913
Herut	the Irgun as a political movement, established by Begin in 1948
Histadrut	General Federation of Workers in the Land of Israel, established in 1920
Irgun Zvai Leumi	nationalist military group, led by Begin from 1943
Kach	far Right party led by Meir Kahane, banned from participating in elections in 1986
Kadima	centre-Right party established by Ariel Sharon in 2005 in a split from Likud
Labour	established in 1968 from Mapai, Achdut Ha'avodah and Rafi
Left Poale Zion	pro-Communist party, merged with Achdut Ha'avodah in 1946

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Lehi	Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, established by Avraham Stern in 1940
Liberals	formerly the General Zionists, established in 1961
Likud	the main right-wing Israeli party, established by Sharon and Begin in 1973
Maki	Euro-Communist split from the main Communist party (CP) in 1965, led by Moshe Sneh
Mapai	leading labour Zionist party, 1930–1968, during the state-building years
Mapam	Marxist Zionist party, founded in 1948, second-largest party in first Knesset
Matzpen	anti-Zionist split from the Israeli Communist party, close to European New Left
Maximalists	radical right wing of the Revisionist party in the 1930s
Meretz	Left Zionist party established in 1992 by Ratz, Mapam and Shinui
Mizrachi	first religious Zionist party, established in 1902 to oppose secularized education
Moked	established in 1973 through the merger of Maki and the Blue-Red movement
Moledet	transfer party of the far Right, established by Rechavam Ze'evi in 1988
National Religious party	founded in 1956, the main party of religious Zionism
National Union	far Right party, based on a coalition of four parties, established in 1999
Palmach	elite fighting force, allied to Achdut Ha'avodah, led by Yigal Allon in the 1940s

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*Glossaries*

Poalei Agudat Yisrael	pioneering ultra-orthodox party, established 1922
Poale Zion	early socialist Zionist party in Palestine, founded by Jewish workers in 1906
Progressives	founded in 1948 by German immigrants and liberal General Zionists
Ra'am	Israeli Arab party, established in 1996 by the Arab Democratic party and the southern wing of the Islamic Movement in Israel
Rafi	established in 1965 after split from Mapai, led by Ben-Gurion, Dayan and Peres
Rakach	pro-Soviet wing of the CP, after the split in 1965
Ratz	civil rights and peace party, led by Shulamit Aloni in the 1980s
Redemptionist Zionists	religious Zionist settlers, who followed Zvi Yehuda Kook
Revisionist party	founded by Jabotinsky in 1925 to return to Herzlian Zionism
Shas	Sephardi ultra-orthodox party established by Ovadia Yosef in 1984
Sheli	dovish party, established in 1977 from Moked
Siach	Israeli New Left, established after the 1967 war
State List	Rafi faction that did not join the Labour party in 1968, led by Ben-Gurion
Ta'al	Israeli Arab party, founded by Ahmad Tibi in the 1990s
Tami	Sephardi breakaway from the National Religious party (NRP), established in 1981

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Techiyah	far Right party, established in 1979 in opposition to the Camp David agreement
Tsomet	far Right party with Labour roots, established in 1983 through a split in Techiyah
United Torah Judaism	main ultra-orthodox party, established in 1992
Yisrael B'Aliyah	Russian party, founded in 1996
Yisrael Beitanu	far Right and Russian party, founded in 1999

## GENERAL GLOSSARY

aliyah	Jewish immigration to Israel from the Diaspora
Aliyah Bet	illegal immigration to Palestine (1934–1948) during the British Mandate
Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade	military group often associated with Fatah
Ashkenazim	Jews generally originating from Eastern Europe
Balfour Declaration	British declaration promising a Jewish national home in Palestine
Bar Kochba rebellion	uprising in Judea against Roman rule, 132–135
Canaanism	supporting the idea of an evolving Hebrew nation rather than a Jewish one
<i>Davar</i>	the Histadrut's Hebrew daily newspaper
Fatah	leading Palestinian Arab nationalist organization, founded by Arafat
Fedayeen	Palestinian Arab fighters during the 1950s
Fellahin	Palestinian Arab peasants and farmers
Green Line	1949 armistice boundary between Israel and the West Bank

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*Glossaries*

Gush Etzion	Jewish settlement bloc in the pre-state era, now in the West Bank
Halakhah	Jewish religious law
Hamas	leading Palestinian Islamist organization founded in 1988
Haskalah	Jewish Enlightenment
Havlagah	military self-restraint in responding to Arab attacks
Islamic Jihad	Palestinian Islamist organization, originally influenced by the Iranian Revolution
kibbutz galuyot	ingathering of the exiles
Maronites	Lebanese Christians who practice the Eastern Catholic rites
Muslim Brotherhood	leading Sunni Islamist organization founded by Hassan al-Banna
nigun	humming tune associated with the chassidim
Phalangists	members of the Lebanese nationalist party, the Phalange
Popular Resistance Committees	Radical Palestinian Islamist military grouping
Al-Qassam Brigades	Hamas's military wing
Al-Quds Brigades	Islamic Jihad's armed wing
Salafists	followers of a more literal interpretation of Islam, often associated with jihadism
Sephardim	Jews generally originating from Spain and north Africa
Shechinah	the Divine Presence
Shoah	the Nazi Holocaust, 1939–1945
Shulchan Aruch	the code of Jewish law by Joseph Caro
Talmud	a compendium of rabbinical and scholarly opinions and teachings
Tephilin	phylacteries
Wissenschaft des Judentums	the Science of Judaism
Yeshiva	men's religious seminary

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## NAME GLOSSARY

Mahmoud Abbas (1936–)	known as Abu Mazen, President of the Palestinian National Authority 2005–
Haidar Abd al-Shafi (1919–2007)	non-aligned Palestinian politician
Abba Achimeir (1898–1962)	intellectual mentor of the Zionist Maximalists
Jamal al-din al-Afghani (1838–1897)	intellectual mentor of nationalist pan-Islamism
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (1956–)	President of Iran 2005–
Musa al-Alami (1897–1984)	Palestinian activist during the Mandate period
Yigal Allon (1918–1980)	founder and commander of the Palmach, Foreign Minister 1974–1977
Shulamit Aloni (1928–)	leader of Meretz and the peace camp, Minister of Education 1992–1993
Natan Alterman (1910–1970)	Hebrew poet and translator
Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000)	Hebrew poet
Yasser Arafat (1929–2004)	PLO chairman, President, Palestinian National Authority
Moshe Arens (1925–)	Likud leader, Foreign Minister, Defence Minister
Chaim Arlosoroff (1899–1933)	Hapoel Hatzair activist, Mapai leader
Hanan Ashrawi (1946–)	Palestinian political activist

Bashar al-Assad (1965–)	President of Syria 2000–
Hafez al-Assad (1930–2000)	President of Syria 1971–2000
Meir Bar-Ilan (1880–1949)	leader of Mizrahi and the national religious camp
Menachem Begin (1913–1992)	Prime Minister of Israel 1977–1983
Yossi Beilin (1948–)	architect of the Oslo Accords 1993; leader of the Meretz party
David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973)	founding father of Israel; first Prime Minister 1949
Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (1884–1963)	Israel's second President
Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934)	Hebrew national poet
Nathan Birnbaum (1864–1937)	originator of the term 'Zionism'
Dov Ber Borochoy (1881–1917)	founder and theorist of Marxism–Zionism
Yosef Chaim Brenner (1881–1921)	Hebrew writer and novelist
Martin Buber (1878–1965)	Jewish philosopher and founder of Brit Shalom
Yosef Burg (1909–1999)	leader of the National Religious party; Minister 1951–1986
Moshe Carmel (1911–2003)	commander of the northern front 1948, operation Hiram
Richard Crossman (1907–1974)	British Minister 1964–1970; editor, <i>New Statesman</i>
Moshe Dayan (1915–1981)	IDF Chief of Staff 1955–1958, follower of Ben-Gurion

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Abba Eban (1915–2002)	liberal politician, Foreign Minister 1966–1974
Raful Eitan (1929–2004)	IDF Chief of Staff 1978–1983, founder of Tsomet party
Liova Eliav (1921–2010)	peace activist and Secretary-General of the Labour party under Golda Meir
Racep Tayyip Erdogan (1954–)	Prime Minister of Turkey 2003–
Levi Eshkol (1895–1969)	Prime Minister of Israel 1963–1969
Israel Galili (1911–1986)	Achdut Ha'avodah leader, head of Haganah 1946–1948
John Glubb (1897–1986)	British commander of Transjordan's Arab Legion 1939–1956
Nachum Goldmann (1895–1982)	Zionist diplomat, founder of the World Jewish Congress
A. D. Gordon (1856–1922)	Zionist pioneer, Tolstoyan mentor of Labour Zionism
Yehudah Leib Gordon (1831–1892)	Hebrew poet and writer
Shlomo Goren (1917–1994)	leader of religious Zionism, Israeli Chief Rabbi 1973–1983
Uri Zvi Greenberg (1894–1981)	Zionist Maximalist, Hebrew poet
Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927)	Zionist intellectual and writer
George Habash (1926–2008)	radical Palestinian activist, founder of the PFLP
Ismail Haniyeh (1963–)	Prime Minister of Gaza 2006–

Naif Hawatmeh (1935–)	radical Palestinian activist, founder of the DFLP
Theodor Herzl (1860–1904)	father of the modern Zionist movement
Chaim Herzog (1918–1997)	President of Israel 1983–1993
Moses Hess (1812–1875)	socialist theoretician, early progenitor of Socialism Zionism
Faisal Husseini (1940–2001)	Palestinian politician, Fatah representative in East Jerusalem
Abu Iyad (1933–1991)	Palestinian leader, founder of Fatah
Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940)	Liberal nationalist, Revisionist Zionist, head of Betar
Abu Jihad (1935–1988)	Palestinian leader, founder of Fatah
Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874)	early progenitor of religious Zionism
Chaim Kalvarisky (1868–1947)	early peace campaigner
Shimon Bar Kokhba (?–135)	leader of the Jewish revolt against the Romans 132–135
Teddy Kollek (1911–2007)	Mayor of Jerusalem 1965–1993
Avraham Yitzhak Kook (1864–1935)	first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine
Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982)	spiritual leader of Gush Emunim
Yitzhak Lamdan (1899–1954)	Hebrew poet and editor
Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864)	founding father of German socialism
Yitzhak Meir Levin (1894–1971)	leader of Agudat Yisrael
David Levy (1937–)	Israeli politician and Sephardi leader

*Glossaries*

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Moses Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910)	Hebrew writer, Zionist publicist and literary critic
Karl Lueger (1844–1910)	Viennese politician, leader of the Christian Social party
Judah Magnes (1877–1948)	founder and President of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem
Abraham Mapu (1808–1867)	early Hebrew writer
Golda Meir (1898–1978)	Prime Minister of Israel 1969–1974
Khalid Meshal (1956–)	Hamas leader and chairman of its political bureau
Leo Motzkin (1867–1933)	Zionist leader, colleague of Herzl and Weizmann
Imad Mughniyeh (1962–2008)	Hezbollah leader
Abbas Mussawi (1952–1992)	Secretary-General of Hezbollah 1991–1992
Benjamin Netanyahu (1949–)	Prime Minister of Israel 1996–1999, 2009–
Max Nordau (1849–1923)	founder, modern Zionist movement, writer and philosopher
Shimon Peres (1923–)	Nobel Prize winner and President of Israel since 2007
Leon Pinsker (1821–1891)	Zionist leader, writer and publicist
Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995)	Prime Minister of Israel 1974–1977, 1992–1995
Solomon Rapoport (1790–1867)	Haskalah scholar, rabbi and writer
Walter Rathenau (1867–1922)	German Foreign Minister, industrialist and writer

Yonatan Ratosh (1908–1981)	Hebrew writer and thinker, founder, Canaanite movement
David Razieli (1910–1941)	leader of the Irgun
Yitzhak Reines (1839–1915)	founder of the religious Zionist movement, first leader of Mizrachi
Mohammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935)	progenitor of nationalist pan-Islamism
Edmond de Rothschild (1845–1934)	supporter of early Jewish settlements
Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943)	facilitator in acquiring land for Jewish settlement
Yitzhak Sadeh (1890–1952)	founder and first commander of the Palmach
Herbert Samuel (1870–1963)	first British High Commissioner of Palestine
Pinchas Sapir (1907–1975)	Labour politician and Israeli Minister of Finance
Yossi Sarid (1940–)	former leader of Meretz and leading peace campaigner
Eliezer Menachem Schach (1898?–2001)	Talmudic scholar and founder of Degel Ha'Torah
Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994)	leader of the Lubavitcher chassidim
Mendele Mocher Sefarim (1835–1917)	Hebrew and Yiddish writer
Chaim Moshe Shapira (1902–1970)	Israeli politician and National Religious party (NRP) leader

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Moshe Sharett (1894–1965)	Mapai politician, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister
Ariel Sharon (1925–)	Prime Minister of Israel 2001–2006
Menachem Sheinkin (1871–1924)	early Zionist leader
Avraham Shlonsky (1900–1973)	Hebrew poet, writer and translator
Peretz Smolenskin (1842–1885)	Haskalah publicist, advocate of cultural nationalism
Moshe Sneh (1909–1972)	Zionist activist and Israeli left-wing politician
Hatam Sofer (Moses Schreiber) (1762–1839)	leader of ultra-orthodoxy and scholar
Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677)	Dutch philosopher, rationalist and exponent of Biblical criticism
Avraham Stern (1907–1942)	poet, far Right ideologue and founder of Lehi
Nachman Syrkin (1868–1924)	early leader of Socialism Zionism and ideologue
Yitzhak Tabenkin (1887–1971)	founder, Labour Zionist and kibbutz movements
Saul Tchernikovsky (1875–1943)	Hebrew poet
Yosef Trumpeldor (1880–1920)	Zionist activist and founder of the Zion Mule Corps
Menachem Ussishkin (1863–1941)	Zionist activist and head of the Jewish National Fund
Zerach Warhaftig (1906–2002)	NRP leader and Israeli politician

Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952)	founding father and first President of Israel 1949–1952
Ezer Weizmann (1924–2005)	Israeli politician and President 1993–2000
Meir Ya'ari (1897–1987)	Marxist Zionist and Mapam leader
Yigal Yadin (1917–1984)	archaeologist, IDF Chief of Staff and Israeli politician
Ovadia Yosef (1920–)	Talmudic scholar and founder of Shas
Mahmoud Zahar (1945–)	Hamas founder and Foreign Minister in Gaza 2006–2007
Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745–1813)	founder of the Lubavicher chassidim
Rechavam Ze'evi (1926–2001)	far Right politician and founder of Moledet

## PRIME MINISTERS OF ISRAEL

David Ben-Gurion	1948–1953
Moshe Sharett	1953–1955
David Ben-Gurion	1955–1963
Levi Eshkol	1963–1969
Golda Meir	1969–1974
Yitzhak Rabin	1974–1977
Shimon Peres	1977
Menachem Begin	1977–1983
Yitzhak Shamir	1983–1984
Shimon Peres	1984–1986
Yitzhak Shamir	1986–1992
Yitzhak Rabin	1992–1995
Shimon Peres	1995–1996
Benjamin Netanyahu	1996–1999
Ehud Barak	1999–2001
Ariel Sharon	2001–2006
Ehud Olmert	2006–2009
Benjamin Netanyahu	2009–

*Chronology*

- 66–70 First Jewish war against the Romans  
70 Fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple  
638 Arab conquest of Jerusalem  
1099 Crusader massacre of the Jews of Jerusalem  
1492 Expulsion of the Jews from Spain  
1791 The Pale of Settlement established by Catherine the Great  
1799 Napoleon invades Palestine from Egypt  
1860 Theodor Herzl is born in Budapest  
1862 *Rome and Jerusalem* by Moses Hess is published  
1881 Pogroms in Russia following the assassination of the Tsar  
1882 *Autoemancipation* by Leon Pinsker is published  
1882 The emigration of the ‘Biluim’ from Russia to Palestine  
1896 *The Jewish State* by Theodor Herzl is published  
1897 First Zionist Congress takes place in Basel  
1906 Ben-Gurion and Ben-Zvi establish Poale Zion in Palestine  
1909 The first collective settlement established in Palestine  
1917 The Balfour Declaration promises a national home for the Jews in Palestine  
1919 The establishment of the Socialist Zionist party, Achdut Ha’avodah  
1920 The Histadrut, the General Federation of Labour in Israel, is founded  
1921 Transjordan, the eastern part of Mandatory Palestine, promised to Abdullah  
1925 Jabotinsky establishes the Union of Revisionist Zionists  
1929 The massacres of Jews in Hebron and Safed  
1930 Mapai, the Labour Zionist party, formed  
1936 The Arab Revolt breaks out in Palestine  
1937 The Peel Commission visits Palestine

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*Chronology*

- 1938 Peel promises a two-state solution  
 1939 The Mufti rejects the White Paper which promises Arab control over immigration  
 1942 The systematic mass extermination of Jews commences in occupied Europe  
 1944 Menachem Begin, commander of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, proclaims the Revolt  
 1945 The liberation of the concentration camps – six million Jews exterminated  
 1947 Second partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states  
 1948 The state of Israel proclaimed by the Jews during the war of independence  
 1948 The Nakba produces defeat, flight, expulsion and exile for many Palestinian Arabs  
 1948 Menachem Begin transforms the Irgun into a political movement, Herut  
 1949 Mapai wins the first Israeli elections  
 1950 Israel begins a retaliatory policy against Arab infiltration  
 1953 Moshe Sharett becomes Prime Minister  
 1955 Ben-Gurion resumes the premiership  
 1956 Suez campaign in collusion with Britain and France ends in a victory over Nasser  
 1964 The PLO is established  
 1965 Ben-Gurion breaks away from Mapai to form Rafi  
 1965 Herut and the Liberals form Gahal under Menachem Begin  
 1967 A national unity government which includes Menachem Begin established  
 1967 Israel's victory over Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the Six Day war  
 1968 The beginning of Jewish settlements on the West Bank  
 1968 The formation of the Israeli Labour party  
 1973 Gahal and remnants of the Labour party form Likud under Begin  
 1973 Yom Kippur war ends in a muted victory for Israel at the cost of thousands of lives  
 1974 The establishment of Gush Emunim, the religious settlers group  
 1974 Yitzhak Rabin becomes Prime Minister for the first time  
 1977 The election of Menachem Begin as Prime Minister  
 1977 Anwar Sadat visits Jerusalem and speaks to the Knesset  
 1979 Begin and Sadat sign the Camp David Accords

*Chronology*

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- 1979 The Iranian Revolution puts the Ayatollah Khomeini in power
- 1980 Basic Law proclaims Jerusalem as the capital of Israel
- 1981 Mubarak succeeds the assassinated Sadat as President of Egypt
- 1981 Golan Heights annexed by Israel
- 1981 Israel bombs the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq
- 1982 The Sinai settlement of Yamit evacuated and destroyed
- 1982 Sharon's invasion of Lebanon brings out 400,000 demonstrators for Peace Now
- 1984 Labour's Peres and Likud's Shamir form a rotational government
- 1987 The first Intifada breaks out
- 1988 Hamas emerges from the Muslim Brotherhood
- 1988 Hussein separates the West Bank from Jordan
- 1988 Yitzhak Shamir wins the election for the Likud
- 1990 The far Right parties enter government for the first time
- 1991 Iraqi missiles hit Tel Aviv during the first Gulf war
- 1991 The Madrid conference brings Israel, Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians together
- 1992 The election of Yitzhak Rabin as Prime Minister
- 1993 Rabin and Arafat sign the Oslo Accords in Washington
- 1994 Hamas's first spate of suicide bombings within Israel
- 1994 Gaza–Jericho agreement
- 1994 Israeli–Jordanian peace agreement
- 1995 Oslo II agreement
- 1995 Yitzhak Rabin assassinated by an opponent of the peace process after a Peace Now rally
- 1996 Shimon Peres loses the election to Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu
- 1997 Netanyahu and Arafat sign an agreement on Hebron
- 1998 Clinton oversees the Wye Plantation agreement between Israel and the Palestinians
- 1999 The election of Labour's Ehud Barak as Prime Minister
- 2000 The breakdown of the Camp David negotiations and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada
- 2000 The Clinton Parameters as a negotiating framework formulated
- 2001 The Taba talks
- 2001 Ariel Sharon defeats Ehud Barak and becomes Prime Minister at the age of seventy-two

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*Chronology*

- 2002 Saudi peace initiative in Beirut
- 2002 Bush's Rose Garden speech
- 2003 The Quartet publicizes the Road Map
- 2003 Sharon advocates disengagement from part of the territories
- 2004 President Bush's letter recognizes Israel's right to annex some settlements
- 2004 Yasser Arafat, besieged and unrecognized by Israel and the United States, dies
- 2005 Abu Mazen elected President of the Palestinian Authority
- 2005 The Gaza settlements evacuated without violence
- 2005 Likud and Labour split and realign to form the Kadima party under Sharon
- 2006 Hamas defeats Fatah in elections for the Legislative Council
- 2006 Ehud Olmert, head of Kadima after Sharon's stroke, wins the election
- 2006 Hezbollah fights Israel in Lebanon in a thirty-four-day war
- 2007 Dan Halutz resigns as Chief of Staff and is succeeded by Gabi Ashkenazi
- 2007 Iron Dome anti-missile system given the go-ahead
- 2007 Conflict between Hamas and Fatah ends in the takeover of Gaza by Hamas
- 2008 Winograd report into the second Lebanon war released
- 2008 Imad Mughniyeh, veteran Hezbollah leader, killed by Damascus car bomb
- 2009 Israel initiates Operation Cast Lead against Gaza
- 2009 Benjamin Netanyahu becomes Prime Minister for the second time
- 2009 The Goldstone Report on Operation Cast Lead issued by the UN
- 2010 Stuxnet computer virus attacks centrifuges in an Iranian nuclear plant
- 2010 Gaza flotilla ends in the killing of several Turkish activists
- 2011 President Karlos Papoulias of Greece visits Israel
- 2011 Hamas and Fatah sign reconciliation agreement in the light of the Arab Spring
- 2011 First use of Iron Dome system in southern Israel
- 2011 Widespread social protest takes place in many Israeli cities
- 2011 The Muslim Brotherhood emerges victorious in Egyptian elections
- 2012 Magnetic car bomb kills senior official at Iranian nuclear plant

*Chronology*

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- 2012 Israel's population increases to 7,836,000 citizens
- 2012 Tsipi Livni resigns as leader of Kadima to be succeeded by Shaul Mofaz
- 2012 Kadima join Netanyahu's coalition government, representing ninety-four Knesset seats, and leaves two months later
- 2012 Mob attacks on African immigrants in south Tel Aviv
- 2012 Flame computer virus shuts down Iranian oil terminals
- 2012 Mohammed Morsi, candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood, elected President of Egypt

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In 1948, the young Robert Kennedy, as yet unknown in public life, visited Palestine as a special correspondent for the *Boston Globe*. He wrote:

The Jewish people in Palestine who believe in and have been working toward this national state have become an immensely proud and determined people. It is already a truly great modern example of the birth of a nation with the primary ingredients of dignity and self-respect.<sup>1</sup>

Kennedy spoke of the ‘undying spirit and unparalleled courage’ of the Jews and compared their struggle to that of the Irish by quoting the speech from the dock of the Irish revolutionary Robert Emmet.<sup>2</sup>

In his articles, he captured the idealism and spirit of the times – themes which ran through his speeches in later life. Esther Cailingold, the same age as Kennedy but from England, died when the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem was overrun by numerically superior Arab forces. In her last letter to her family in London she wrote:

We have had a bitter fight: I have tasted of gehenom [hell]. – but it has been worthwhile because I am quite convinced that the end will see a Jewish state and the realisation of our longings.<sup>3</sup>

‘Hebrew independence’, the daily *Ha’aretz* commented, ‘is not being renewed during an hour of mercy’. In 1948 Israel struggled to take its place at the table of nations.<sup>4</sup>

More than sixty years later, this sense of determination and self-sacrifice remained – if somewhat buffeted by the waves of political reality and rampant materialism. The founding fathers had passed into history. Politicians were no longer placed on pedestals. Poets were no longer adored

<sup>1</sup> *Boston Globe* 4 June 1948. See Lenny Ben-David [jcpa.org/article/robert-kennedys-1948-reports-from-palestine/](http://jcpa.org/article/robert-kennedys-1948-reports-from-palestine/).

<sup>2</sup> *Boston Globe* 6 June 1948.

<sup>3</sup> Yehuda Avner, *The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership* (London 2010) p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> *Ha’aretz* 14 May 1948.

national figures. Instead presidents went to prison and failed politicians were resurrected within a couple of years of resigning. In a certain sense, 1948 had been a simpler time, when choices were straightforward. To fight or to die. To change the course of Jewish history. To build and be built. To create a perfect future.

Hindsight brings with it the revelation that the past was a complicated place. It is always accompanied by a revision of treasured memories by a succeeding generation. Yet the Israelis of the twenty-first century also remember the profound lessons that the past taught despite its myths. Sometimes this has proved to be an obstacle in achieving peace with their neighbours. In other instances, it has been an asset. While all carry this heavy burden, few dismiss its significance.

The rise of Palestinian Islamism in the twenty-first century led Israel to batten down the hatches and to hope that this period of religious intensity would be brief. It led to the ongoing construction of a separation barrier along and close to the Green Line. It stimulated wars of deterrence in Lebanon in 2006 and in Gaza in 2009. It persuaded the Israeli electorate to elect governments which increasingly leaned towards the Right as an instrument to protect the population. The Right in all its political manifestations was also ideologically committed to colonizing the West Bank and integrating it into Israel territorially and economically.

The advent of the Islamist suicide bomber in the spring of 1994 created a sense of indifference towards Palestinian aspirations. The peace camps in both Israel and Palestine were undermined in the process. Although opinion polls repeatedly indicated that a majority of Israelis were not in favour of the settlements, they came to be seen as a long-term buffer against irrational enemies – transient structures which could be negotiated away in better times.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the prospect of two territorially contiguous states began to disappear gradually as the West Bank fragmented into Palestinian enclaves through settler encroachment. One French illustrator, Julien Bousec, depicted the West Bank as an archipelago – an array of Palestinian islands surrounded by an Israeli sea and separated by a multitude of inlets, bearing names such as Baie de Shomron and Canal d’Ariel. Indeed some Palestinian commentators argued for a one-state solution – a state of all its citizens. Others suggested a variation on this theme, a return to UN Resolution 181 of November 1947 within an acceptance of partition into two states. The original resolution spoke of a customs and currency union and other instances of shared sovereignty. Palestinians recalled that Israel’s war of independence had resulted in the

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conquest and integration of 21 per cent of the territory of the proposed Arab state.

Although the battle for Jerusalem took place in 1967, every inch of the holy city was still being contested nearly half a century later. Barak's offer to divide the city at the Camp David negotiations in 2000 seemed naive by 2012. The character of the city was changing – more religious and less secular. Israelis were also migrating to the suburbs or leaving to secure affordable housing and better employment opportunities. Scholarly predictions suggested a population of 60 per cent Jews and 40 per cent Arabs by 2020 and perhaps parity by 2035. Yet the borders of the city were not static as successive governments attempted to build a contiguous territorial presence over the Green Line to isolate Arab East Jerusalem.

Jerusalem ironically occupied a space whereby there was coalescence rather than fragmentation and polarization. On 1 December 2011, the first paying passengers stepped on board the Jerusalem Light Rail, which linked many areas of the city. Palestinian Arabs from East Jerusalem and haredim from ultra-orthodox enclaves in West Jerusalem and neighbourhoods over the Green Line such as Pisgat Ze'ev found common cause in the convenience and speed of the new railway. It gave an opportunity to view the other and to explore. Herzl had painted such an idyllic landscape in his utopian work *Altneuland* in 1902, depicting a future flawless society where the dignity of difference was exalted.

Although the service was three years behind schedule after four false starts, it was an important component in Israel's evolving transportation system, which would include a high-speed railway linking Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Yet the reality of the political situation could not be held in abeyance, especially since Arab East Jerusalem, conquered in 1967, remained under Israeli rule. Therefore the participation in the railway consortium of two French companies, Veolia and Alstom, catalyzed legal action in France by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and divestment by an ethical Dutch bank and a Swedish pension fund. Saudi Arabia was requested to intervene because Alstom was part of a consortium to build the Mecca–Medina railway. The Gulf Cooperation Council was warned not to consider these two companies when offering a tender to build a railway linking six Gulf states.

Opinion polls of both Israelis and Palestinians often indicated a contrary view to the one voiced by politicians. In November 2010, the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion conducted a poll amongst the inhabitants of Arab East Jerusalem for Pechter Middle East Polls. It found that 35 per cent of its respondents would choose Israeli citizenship, compared to 30 per cent

who would choose Palestinian citizenship. When asked what would happen if their neighbourhood in East Jerusalem became part of the new state of Palestine, nearly 40 per cent would prefer to move to another location within Israel. Their reasons were freedom of movement in Israel, a higher income, better employment opportunities and health insurance. Those who chose to remain stated that their patriotic inclinations came first.<sup>5</sup>

There seemed no indication that the security barrier around Jerusalem would be dismantled even though the age of the suicide bomber seemed to have passed for the time being. What was once deemed to be temporary was rapidly being seen as a permanent edifice of separation and an evolving border. Yet numerous Palestinian villages were either marooned or truncated. The village of Bil'in became a cause célèbre and was visited by the Elders group, which included Jimmy Carter and Desmond Tutu. Weekly demonstrations by Israeli leftists such as Anarchists against the Wall, characterized by often violent clashes with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), drew international attention. In March 2010, the IDF declared it a closed military zone, thereby banning Israeli citizens and non-Israeli protesters from entering the area. In 2011, the military, acting on a Supreme Court judgement that the security argument was unconvincing, began instead to reroute the barrier.

Yet under the stewardship of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Salam Fayyad, the standard of living of the West Bank Arabs increased by leaps and bounds. The struggle, however, between Palestinian nationalists and Islamists – between Fatah and Hamas – seemed insoluble despite the regular proclamations of brotherhood. The release of the Palestine Papers to *al-Jazeera* and the *Guardian* at the beginning of 2011 suggested that the Palestinian Authority (PA) was prepared in private to go some distance in striking a compromise with Israel. The right of return, however, continued to occupy an important place in Palestinian emotions. Yet the European Court of Human Rights had ruled in 2010 that Greeks who had fled or been expelled from northern Cyprus in 1974 as a result of the Turkish invasion did not have a right to return. Most Israelis considered the Palestinian return of millions a direct assault on their right to national self-determination. But how many would actually return if offered the opportunity? Khalil Shikaki's study in 2003 of more than 4,500 Palestinian respondents in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan produced a scientific analysis for the first time. While virtually all demanded a recognition of a right of return,

<sup>5</sup> [pechterpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Detailed-Survey-Results-on-E-Jerusalem-1-10-11-1034pm-Eastern.pdf](http://pechterpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Detailed-Survey-Results-on-E-Jerusalem-1-10-11-1034pm-Eastern.pdf).

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Shikaki found that only 10 per cent demanded permanent residence in Israel – a percentage which fell away when respondents were informed that they would also have to accept Israeli citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Shikaki's research led him to the conclusion that initially the number of refugees who would wish to move from Lebanon and Jordan to any sovereign Palestinian state, alongside Israel, would be 784,049. The number who wished to exercise the same right to return to Israel was calculated at 373,673.<sup>7</sup> Hamas, however, believed in the absolute understanding of the right of return. Indeed Ismail Haniyeh, the Prime Minister in Gaza, commented in January 2011 that there was no alternative 'to a full return to lands that became Israeli in 1948'.<sup>8</sup>

After Hamas's takeover of Gaza in 2007, the break between Islamists and nationalists seemed final. Regular agreements in favour of reconciliation were abandoned with remarkable rapidity. The price for such a reconciliation and the inclusion of Hamas in a government of national unity under the stewardship of Mahmoud Abbas was the dismissal of Salam Fayyad, an independent who was a member of neither Fatah nor Hamas. Yet the United States regarded Fayyad as the practitioner of good governance and the architect of the West Bank's economic amelioration. Would the Palestinian Authority jeopardize the annual \$600 million which the Americans provided? While the West Bank under the nationalists prospered, Gaza under the Islamists drifted into poverty under an Israeli state of siege. Would the West Bank and Gaza move further and further apart until they became two distinct entities, the East and West Pakistan template remodelled for a divided Palestine? Would Gaza eventually become a Palestinian Bangladesh?

The Oslo II agreement which was signed by Yitzhak Rabin just before his assassination had stipulated that there should be no change in the status of the West Bank before the completion of negotiations. This clause was buried by his successors. Was the prospect of a two-state solution now an impossibility under the weight of the settlement drive on the West Bank and the division within the Palestinians? While some Palestinians argued for a one-state solution of Israel and Palestine, other observers predicted that the Palestinian Authority would eventually be linked to Jordan in some fashion despite King Abdullah's wish to avoid this possibility. The prospect of the Islamists' governing in Egypt under Mohammed Morsi also raised

<sup>6</sup> *New York Times* 14 July 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Poll on Refugees' Preferences and Behaviour in a Palestinian–Israeli Permanent Refugee Agreement, Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 18 July 2003.

<sup>8</sup> *Ma'an News* 26 January 2011.

the question of what would be the relationship between a post-Mubarak regime in Cairo and a Gaza governed by Hamas. Would there similarly be some form of linkage here too? And what would this mean for Israel?

The potential fall of Assad in Syria posed a dilemma for Israel. On the one hand, the link to Iran would be broken. On the other, would Sunni Islamists replace an ostensibly secular regime? On both Naksa Day (the anniversary of the Six Day war) and Nakba Day (the anniversary of the founding of Israel) in 2011, Palestinians breached the Golan border, and there was a lethal response from the Israeli military. Many believed that the Assad regime had looked the other way in the hope that these incidents would divert international attention away from an incipient civil war.

The political stagnation continued. Sharon had always argued that there could be no negotiations if there was violence – whichever Palestinian faction was responsible for this. The President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, had similarly refused to conduct negotiations while settlement construction on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem was taking place. During the ten-month settlement freeze in 2010, construction had not ceased in East Jerusalem and its environs. Planning and all subsequent stages continued. There were even actual violations of the freeze by several West Bank settlements. While government construction certainly decreased, it was more than compensated for by a surge in private construction. At the beginning of 2011, the Netanyahu administration, unlike previous governments, proposed the legalization of outposts which were sited on state land while promising to continue to evacuate those built on private land.

Abbas questioned the real meaning of negotiations with Netanyahu, which in the absence of any political initiative seemed to go around in never-ending circles. Successive Israeli governments had continued the settlement drive through the expansion of already existing settlements. Peace Now's Settlement Watch discovered that whereas the areas of jurisdiction of cities and councils in Israel were placed in the public domain and therefore such knowledge was available to all, the same could not be said about the boundaries of West Bank settlements. A Freedom of Information request in January 2006 together with a later appeal to the Supreme Court coerced a reticent Civil Administration to release such information. Thus Mitzpeh Shalem, a settlement of about 200 souls, situated near the Dead Sea, was found to possess jurisdiction over 35,000 dunams of territory – the area of the city of Petah Tiqva.

The forward charge of Erdogan's neo-Ottomanist policies in Turkey, the uncertain end results of the Arab Spring and Ahmadinejad's ambiguous

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ambitions for a nuclearized Iran induced a sense of fear and isolation. While Iran had been a worry for many years, the intensified competition between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad transformed Israel into a political punch-bag between these rivals for absolute power. With new moves to outmanoeuvre the other, Israelis wondered how this power struggle would manifest itself in their region of the Middle East. This was compounded by cooler relations with Obama's White House and a divided and sometimes unfriendly Europe. Even the unilateral attempts by the Palestinian Authority to secure recognition within international bodies such as UNESCO and the WHO were seen in Israel as moves in the diplomatic chess game rather than positive initiatives in themselves. Debates about the ownership of contested religious and cultural sites such as Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem/the Bilal bin Rabah Mosque became more intense and more convoluted.

There was a fatigue and disappointment in Israel which bred indifference to seeking a solution to the conflict. Between the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Oslo in 1993 and Sharon's walk on the Temple Mount, 256 Israelis had died, followed by another 1,097 during the subsequent years of Intifada.<sup>9</sup> Ismail Haniyeh, the Prime Minister in Gaza, had commented that suicide bombing was no more than a natural reaction to Zionist aggression.<sup>10</sup> The sense of fatalism was accompanied by a lack of confidence in the current generation of politicians. As the veteran left-wing commentator and politician Yossi Sarid commented:

The feeling that we are stuck with the same politicians: Governments come and go, but the same people remain. Soon there will be elections here, and the same bunch will sally forth from the ballot box, in slightly different dress. At most, after the elections, they will reshuffle the cabinet seats. One will be upgraded and another will barely find a seat. But the group picture will remain the same and with it the situation.<sup>11</sup>

Transparency International's findings in 2010 indicated that Israelis' lack of faith in their public bodies was amongst the highest in the world. With political parties and religious institutions deemed the most corrupt, some 82 per cent of the respondents thought that their government was worthy of this label.<sup>12</sup>

The era of optimism during Yitzhak Rabin's premiership was long gone, buried in the graveyard of good intentions. The idea that there was no one to

<sup>9</sup> Efraim Inbar, 'Israel's Palestinian Challenge', *Israel Affairs* vol.12 no.4 October 2006 pp. 823–842.

<sup>10</sup> *Ha'aretz* 2 April 2006.

<sup>11</sup> *Ha'aretz* 20 June 2008.

<sup>12</sup> *Ha'aretz* 10 December 2010.

speak to was promoted strongly during Sharon's tenure as Prime Minister. Sharon declared that 'Arafat is our Bin Laden'. The Saudi Initiative of March 2002 was glossed over, as was Arafat's call for a ceasefire in December 2001. Senior Palestinian figures such as Raed Karmi, who was obeying the ceasefire, were still assassinated. The weakening of the PA's infrastructure led to the resignation of the advisor on Palestinian affairs to the head of the Shin Bet and initiated a policy of solely relying on military deterrence for the next decade.<sup>13</sup>

The polarization of the situation had led the Israelis to elect Sharon to protect them. It had also persuaded the Palestinians to look to Hamas to protect them. The broadly based peace camps in Israel and Palestine had dwindled to the point of invisibility. Extra-parliamentary groups on the far Right such as Im Tirzu embarked on a campaign to attack liberal organizations such as the New Israel Fund, often merging them with genuinely far Left bodies with anti-Zionist inclinations. This attack on local dissent was partly funded by Kanit Azrieli, which owned the Azrieli Malls (30,000 shekels), and the Leo Schachter groups, a major exporter of processed diamonds (74,000 shekels). They were further supported by donations from US groups such as Christians United for Israel (748,000 shekels).

The once all-powerful Israeli Labour party, founder and mentor of the state, divided into two with single-seat representation in a Knesset of 120. In contrast, the rise of the far Right, exemplified by Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beitanu, initiated a series of measures such as the expansion within West Bank settlements and an assault on civil liberties directed at both liberal Israelis and far Left activists. This ignited a growing disillusionment in the Jewish Diaspora, where even hitherto establishment figures were beginning to sound like enraged dissidents. Aliyah – emigration to Israel – had fallen from 77,000 in 1999 to 19,700 in 2007 to 16,600 in 2010. There was particular disgust felt at the incendiary remarks made by far Right members of the Knesset about black South Sudanese migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers in south Tel Aviv in May 2012. Yet immigrants still arrived in Israel – and from unexpected quarters. In 2007, some 200 Jews were allowed to emigrate from Ahmadinejad's Iran. Diaspora Jews still turned their heads towards Israel, including ninety-two-year-old Mimi Reinhardt, who had been Oskar Schindler's secretary.

Although Israel was finally allowed to join the International Red Cross by using a red crystal as its emblem, the evolving diplomatic isolation of

<sup>13</sup> *Ha'aretz* 20 June 2008.

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Israel continued. It was complemented by a drip-drip campaign of delegitimization in Europe by the far Left, which depicted Zionism as a poisonous weed planted by the forces of imperialism to maintain their control of the Middle East in post-colonialist times. This dovetailed with the opposition to the invasion of Iraq amongst social democrats and the liberal intelligentsia. It presented a focus of resentment to often perplexed mainstream Muslims in Europe, following the backlash after 9/11. In general, there was little space for alternative explanations of episodes in the tortuous Israel-Palestine conflict.

Ironically, it had only been through Soviet support in 1947 that a two-thirds majority in the United Nations in favour of creating a state with a majority of Jews had been attained. Indeed, if it had not been for Stalin, it can be argued that a state of Israel would not have gained international legitimacy and might not even have come into existence. Stalin probably wished to eliminate the British from Palestine and to stop the Americans from taking their place. The Zionist Left was strongly pro-Soviet and believed itself to be the USSR's true representative in Israel. Moreover, the Kremlin would have been extremely pleased to make use of Haifa as a deep warm water port. All this changed dramatically after Israel's declaration of independence. Some objectives had indeed been achieved, but the Arab masses were a much better prospect for Soviet national interests compared to the socialists of Israel.

The Old Left in Europe, which had fought with the Jews against local fascists, lived through the Shoah and borne witness to the establishment of Israel in 1948, was rapidly fading away by the twenty-first century. The successor generation of the 1960s was characterized by the epoch of decolonization, by the struggle of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria against the French colons – and the Palestinians fitted much more easily into this imagery of many who were born after 1945. Social democrats and liberals were keenly aware of the abandonment of the Jews during World War II as well as, for example, the evils of apartheid. The conclusion was therefore to facilitate a space whereby Israelis and Palestinians could face each other within the framework of a two-state solution. For some on the far Left, however, revolutionary change preceded other considerations. A nation-state of the Jews was anathema.

'Zionist' became a pejorative term in the lexicon of political discourse and therefore could be separated from 'Jew'. Yet as Sartre pointed out in the 1960s, most Israelis just happened to be Jews. In intellectual circles, there was irritation that a majority of Jews were stubborn and refused to give up an identification with Israel despite having often profound reservations about

successive Israeli governments. Even Richard Goldstone, whose inquiry into Operation Cast Lead led to harsh criticism in Israel, felt the need to denounce accusations that apartheid policies were being pursued.<sup>14</sup>

Such developments dovetailed with the growing acceptance in the Muslim world – in the absence of any political initiatives – that Israel was truly an illegitimate entity. The idea that the Jews were solely a religious community and not an ethnicity in their own right gathered momentum. Palestine between the river and the sea was an Islamic endowment whose land could not be bartered away for a peace agreement. On the other side of the coin was Netanyahu's insistence that Israel should now be recognized as a Jewish state.

Moreover, the ongoing plight of the Palestinians and the move to the far Right in Israel offered the far Left in Europe an opportunity for recruitment and expansion. This in turn fortified the far Right in Israel in enacting a campaign against liberal and left-wing dissenters in Israel itself. Many on the far Right in Israel believed that anti-Zionism was solely a cover for anti-Semitism. Many on the far Left in Europe believed that anti-Zionism could never be anti-Semitic. The reality was somewhere in between.

An inability to distance themselves from traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes affected the Palestinian Islamists far more than the Palestinian nationalists. A Hamas spokesman was therefore certain that 'the Jewish lobby' in the United States played a crucial role in fomenting the global economic crisis in 2008. The Iranian cleric, the Ayatollah Jannati, told worshippers that this was God's response to the misdeeds of both the Israelis and the Americans. Sometimes both messages were given. Hezbollah's Nasrallah told the Lebanese newspaper *al-Moharrer* that his organization's war was against Zionism and not Jews or Judaism.<sup>15</sup> A few weeks later at a Beirut rally, he told his followers that 'a few million vagabonds from all over the world, brought together by their Talmud and Jewish fanaticism, are celebrating their victory over the nation of 1.4 billion Muslims'.<sup>16</sup>

The underbelly of such political commentary was often far more insidious. In February 2011, the Obama White House accused the prestigious Lebanese Canadian Bank of laundering cocaine money on behalf of Hezbollah. A picture was painted of a network of connections between Colombian cartels and Mexican gangs, Lebanese Shi'ite businessmen and traders in conflict diamonds in Africa. Lebanon's chief drug enforcement

<sup>14</sup> *New York Times* 31 October 2011.

<sup>15</sup> *Al-Moharrer* 29 March 1998 in Nicholas Roe (ed.), *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayed Hassan Nasrallah* (London 2007) p. 186.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 188.

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officer said that one route into the country was ‘a weekly Iranian-operated flight from Venezuela to Damascus’.<sup>17</sup>

Outside this ideological maelstrom, Israel continued to make its mark. In 2011 the Nobel Prize in chemistry was awarded to Dan Shechtman for his discovery of quasi-crystals, after analyzing electron diffraction patterns in the early 1980s. This was the fourth time in seven years that an Israeli scientist had won the Nobel Prize for chemistry, including the first Israeli woman, Ada Yonath, to do so. Israel had also pioneered the use of reverse osmosis to develop desalination of sea water to a high level. It was estimated that by 2050, some 41 per cent of Israel’s drinking water would originate in the Mediterranean. The desalination plant on the seashore near Hadera serviced a million households with clean water each year. Since 2007 successive Israeli governments had invested heavily in the expansion of the Hadera, Ashkelon and Palmachim desalination plants. In August 2011, it was announced that a new plant would be constructed near Ashdod at a cost of \$423 million and would begin desalination in 2013. Israel was also a world leader in the recycling of waste water. Some 70 per cent of the country’s waste water was recycled compared to 12 per cent in Spain. Waste water was even seen as a means of energy production from the organic material found in it.

While such developments created a deep sense of pride in what had been achieved, the darker side of Israeli society was revealed when a bomb went off in the car of the Tel Aviv mobster Ya’akov Alperon – and killed him. This took place in broad daylight in a crowded Tel Aviv thoroughfare at the end of 2008. This was probably the eighth assassination attempt against Alperon, while his elder brother survived as many attempts against him as well. Other criminal fraternities, often centred around a family unit, were heavily involved in controlling the Tel Aviv drug trade or running a bottle recycling offshoot through offering restaurateurs protection in exchange for collecting empty bottles.

The power struggle between Ahmadinejad and Khomeini unsettled many Israelis. How would the nuclear question be used in this contest? Given that Iran possessed a land mass eighty times that of Israel and nine times the population, it seemed unlikely that Israel would actually unleash a military attack on Iran despite a cacophony of bellicose noises emitted from Netanyahu and Barak. Significantly, both the present head of the Mossad, Tamir Pardo, and his predecessor publicly opposed any military assault on Iran. In 2012 the former head of the Shin Bet, Yuval Diskin,

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times* 13 December 2011.

similarly declared his opposition to military action. Although the United States sold the most advanced bunker buster bombs to Israel, any attack on the Bushehr reactor would release radioactive material, which would not only result in the deaths of large numbers of Iranians but also drift over Bahrain and Qatar. Moreover, any aircraft carrying out the 2,000-mile round trip would have to be supported by airborne refueling planes. It was believed that Israel lacked sufficient numbers of the latter to carry out a successful raid on Iran.

Israel's technological edge in cyber-weaponry was believed to be the crucial factor in inhibiting Iran from the immediate acquisition of nuclear weapons. The Stuxnet computer worm rather than airstrikes was thought by many commentators to be Israel's response. The worm seemed to have been activated only when a series of processes in a centrifuge plant were detected. The centrifuges then accelerated out of control while false signals were transmitted to the host system to assure it that everything was quite normal. Meir Dagan, the outgoing head of the Mossad, told a Knesset committee that Teheran had run into technological problems that would delay the manufacture of nuclear weapons until 2015. This seemed to be a reversal of the normal line that Iran was on the verge of success.

North Korean involvement in the Iranian nuclear project increased in 2011. There were reports that North Korea had supplied a computer programme that simulated neutron flow in reactors and that it had trained Iranians in its use.<sup>18</sup> The programme, MCNPX 2.6.0, had originally been developed at Los Alamos, and although it was subject to stringent US export controls, it had somehow found its way to Pyongyang. The sources argued that the calculation of neutron flow was a crucial component in building any nuclear weapon.

Following the success of Hezbollah's defensive warfare against the Israeli attacks in 2006, Iran concluded an agreement for 100 field operatives to undergo training in Pyongyang with the North Korean special forces – and particularly in the areas of counter-espionage and intelligence work. Under North Korean guidance, Hezbollah was believed to have expanded its bunker and tunnel system into the Beka'a Valley. In 2009, several consignments of weaponry in ships and planes for delivery in Iran en route to Hezbollah were uncovered. One chartered jet which was intercepted in Thailand in December 2009 was owned by a company in the United Arab Emirates, registered in Georgia, leased to a front company in New Zealand and then chartered to another front company in Hong Kong.

<sup>18</sup> *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* 24 August 2011.

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A UN report in 2010 detailed Pyongyang's attempts to circumvent sanctions using multiple intermediaries, front companies and overseas criminal networks.<sup>19</sup>

In 2012, the prospects for Israel's economic development looked surprisingly good despite the problems in other parts of the world. In 2011 the Israeli economy grew by 4.8 per cent. Houston based Noble Energy Inc. declared that their off-shore explorations had concluded that Israel possessed twice as much natural gas as the United Kingdom. There was probably close to 30 trillion cubic feet of gas in the eastern Mediterranean. This opened up the potential for Israel to emerge as an exporter of gas to Asia and Europe as well as decreasing its own dependency on Egypt.

The idea of a socialist, egalitarian Israel was finally laid to rest in 1985 when the rotational government of Shimon Peres promoted deregulation and globalization to accompany the revolution in technology. A blueprint was formulated to transfer public control to private enterprise, to transform nationalized industries into private ones. In 2010, the annual Merrill Lynch–Capgemini World Wealth report commented that there were 10,153 millionaires in Israel with assets of \$52 billion in liquid funds. This was an increase from \$43 billion in 2009. The donation of \$20 million by the Israeli shipping magnate Sami Ofer to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, later retracted, was an indication of how far the society had changed from the time when a home-grown millionaire would have been an oddity and perhaps an outcast. Senior executives for companies that traded on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange were reported to have doubled their monthly salaries from 378,000 shekels to 703,000 shekels between 1998 and 2007.<sup>20</sup>

The changed situation, however, raised the awkward question of why Diaspora donors should fund projects in Israel, as Israeli philanthropy stood at only 0.73 per cent of GDP compared to 2.1 per cent in the United States. While Israeli philanthropists were urged to follow in the path of Bill Gates, annual poverty reports issued by the National Insurance Institute continued to demonstrate little variation from the fifth of Israeli families living below the poverty line. In 2010, this comprised 1,733,400 people – of whom half were children.<sup>21</sup>

The growing disparity between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' in Israeli society erupted in 2011 through a proliferation of tent cities throughout the

<sup>19</sup> *Ha'aretz* 28 May 2010.

<sup>20</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 14 December 2008.

<sup>21</sup> *Ha'aretz* 17 November 2011.

country. Although the protesters were initially disparaged by the government as disaffected members of the Tel Aviv elite, Netanyahu recognized their legitimate concerns and established the Trajtenberg Commission, which recommended a 2 per cent wealth tax on incomes above one million shekels, a 5 per cent rise in the capital gains tax and an increase in the corporate rate tax to 25 per cent. Yet the Netanyahu government dallied on initiating relief. In July 2012 Moshe Silman, a fifty-seven-year-old son of Holocaust survivors, set fire to himself in Tel Aviv in protest about his situation. He died of his injuries a week later.

Poverty was particularly severe in the haredi sector of Israeli society. Towns such as Bnei Brak were amongst the poorest in the country. This was accentuated by the economic downturn outside Israel, which limited easy earning opportunities, and Diaspora donations began to dry up. Even so, a Freedom of Information request in 2012 revealed that Ateret Yerushalayim, a religious Zionist seminary and educational organization, had received donations of upwards of 1.5 million shekels from numerous anonymous donors. The Ministry of Justice's registrar of charities had unusually agreed to the non-publication of the donors' names. This provoked considerable controversy because a central task of Ateret Yerushalayim had been the settling of Jews in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Approximately 800,000 Jews – one in seven Israeli Jews – espoused an ultra-orthodox lifestyle. The average haredi father had six or seven mouths to feed – almost three times the non-haredi average. The population of the haredi community was expected to double by 2020.<sup>22</sup> Unlike their counterparts in the Diaspora, haredi schools did little to prepare their charges with relevant skills to enter the labour market.

In 2011, a quarter of those entering the first year of school were haredi children, compared to 7 per cent in 1960. This posed future problems for Israel's military forces. The head of the IDF Manpower Directorate predicted that by 2020 some 60 per cent of eligible Israelis would not be serving in the military forces.<sup>23</sup> The largest proportion of those conscripts exempted were those at yeshiva. David Ben-Gurion agreed with the sage the Hazon Ish to excuse several hundred students from military service, but since the early 1950s there had been an extrapolation from the brilliant and gifted downwards to include the mediocre and the indolent. The Tal Law, passed in 2002, permitted yeshiva students to work for a year in civilian service programmes without being conscripted. A choice would then have

<sup>22</sup> *Jerusalem Report* 1 February 2010.

<sup>23</sup> *Jerusalem Post* 20 November 2011.

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to be made between a return to study or a shortened national service. In 2012 there were 4,000 haredim in such programs – three quarters of whom worked in welfare.

Yet there were haredi sections within the IDF such as the Netzah Yehuda battalion. Haredi men also trained as aircraft mechanics and technicians. The IDF also began to adapt to the religious sensitivities of those haredim who wished to serve in their country's armed forces. In March 2011, haredi men trained as social workers were attached as non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to haredi units. In conventional non-haredi units, such posts were usually filled by female workers – something which in the context of discussing personal matters would have been deemed unacceptable in the haredi world.

There were continuing clashes between the state, its laws and its understanding of societal norms and the rabbis, their interpretation of halakhah (Jewish law) and communal standards. The Supreme Court twice ruled that barriers designed to separate men and women during the festival of Succot in the ultra-orthodox neighbourhood of Mea She'arim were illegal and should be removed. A protest march by the secularist 'Free Israel' movement, despite a heavy police protection, was eventually called off for fear of violence. This followed growing demands for segregation on buses which ran mainly between haredi areas and the removal of women from advertisements and billboards in Jerusalem. Such 'mehadrin lines' existed in Jerusalem, Safed, Ashdod and other areas to ferry the haredim between ultra-orthodox centres of population. Moreover, in May 2012, there was a vehement reaction from haredi political parties when the Supreme Court ruled that the salaries of several small community Reform and Conservative rabbis should be paid by the state. The ranking of nations, delineated by their gender gap, by the World Economic Forum indicated that Israel had fallen from 35th to 55th between 2006 and 2011 – behind Burundi, Sri Lanka and the Kyrgyz Republic. Yet such moves galvanized many Israeli women, both religious and non-religious, to protest, and they were supported by Hillary Clinton in December 2011.

This difference in the interpretation of Jewishness manifested itself in a clash between former chief rabbis of the armed forces and the defence establishment. The rabbis argued that if an officer gave an order which contradicted halakhah, it should first be referred to the Chief Rabbi of the IDF. If this was not done, then the individual had to consider whether refusing the order compromised security.

Moreover, there were some rabbis who believed that the evacuation of settlements on the West Bank contravened halakhah. And young soldiers often had much closer relationships with the rabbis who mentored them

than the imposed rabbis of their military unit. Who had the loyalty of the recruit? The rabbis also demanded that the Har Bracha yeshiva should be reinstated in the hesder programme for religious recruits after its head had supported refusing any order to evacuate a settlement. In a survey by its Manpower Directorate, the IDF further discovered that the motivation to serve in combat units was highest amongst West Bank settlement youth.

Within the IDF's Personnel Directorate, there was a continuing struggle for authority between its component Education Corps and the Military Rabbinate – and especially over the status of female soldiers and officers. The growing tensions between the religious and the secular in the army were reflected in a letter to the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff by nineteen reserve Major Generals. It requested them not to alter the status quo in accommodating the demands of some religious leaders to end singing by women during public events.

All this conflict overflowed at the end of 2011 when radical haredim verbally abused religious primary schoolchildren on their way to school for being immodestly dressed.

Both Shas and National Religious rabbis opposed separation on buses and argued that there was no basis in Jewish law for this. Yet there was also a difference of view within the haredi community itself – and particularly between those born in the Diaspora and those who had grown up in Israel. Significantly, many haredi rabbis and the haredi media neither commented nor reported on what had been happening. Within the haredi community, there was a traditional reticence to step out of line, particularly since being labelled would produce a stigma – real or imagined – and this might well damage their children's chances of securing a suitable spouse. This opened the way for radical elements in the haredi community to set the agenda on the separation of the sexes.

However, the demonstrations against separation in Beit Shemesh by both secular and religious voiced the wider fear of the encroachment of the haredim upon the mainstream norms of Israeli society. This broadened out into a wider debate on their contribution – or lack of it – to society. All this was highly resented by the haredi community. Yet the fact of the rapid growth of the haredi community through its much higher birth rate was often raised. In Israel, 28 per cent of the population was younger than fourteen, whereas the figure for most western countries was 17 per cent. In 2012, haredi and Arab children accounted for half the entrants into primary school.

The release of Gilad Shalit in 2011 after more than five years' imprisonment by Hamas was an occasion for an outpouring of public emotion

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in Israel. Many Israelis could identify with the ordinariness of the sallow, pale recruit who emerged into the sunlight. The Shalit case typified an ongoing Israeli dogma – to recover its soldiers whether dead or alive from hostile territory. Since 1957 there had been eight prisoner exchanges. Some 12,482 Arab prisoners had been released to secure the return of 15 Israelis. In Shalit's case, 1,027 Palestinian prisoners were exchanged for one man. Some 41 prisoners were deported to Qatar, Turkey, Jordan and Syria – as Israel had originally refused to negotiate over their fate. The head of Hamas's military wing commented that the deportees had killed 569 Israelis.<sup>24</sup> Many of these were civilians killed in suicide bombings – and there was therefore strong opposition from the families of the victims. Others opposed the swap and argued that it would be a source of encouragement to repeat the exercise.

The heavy hand of the state bureaucracy continued to be placed on the shoulders of Israeli citizens. While special needs provision for children was far better than in numerous western European countries, the State Comptroller revealed in his report in 2011 that disputes between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry for Welfare Services had caused children who had special needs to miss school and not receive the medical supervision to which they were entitled. The State Comptroller listed a total of forty inter-Ministry disputes affecting fifteen ministries. Moreover, the desire for advisors and consultants now permeated Israeli governance. Imitating practice in countries such as Britain, the number of political aides in the Prime Minister's Office had increased sixfold since the death of Rabin in 1995. Yet there were often quiet examples whereby solutions to problems were swiftly located. After a complaint about the lack of parking places for disabled people in Bnei Brak, the municipality quickly installed them. In 2009, the Ministry of the Interior refused the applications for exit permits to visit the grave of the prophet Habil near Damascus by forty-three Israeli Druze women, while there were no such problems for their men. A complaint to the office of the State Comptroller reversed that decision.

As Israel approached the seventieth anniversary of its establishment, there were few who believed that it had reached its natural life span, that its vigour would dissipate, that it would become a passing episode in Jewish and world history. Yet the problems that beset the country remained, intensified and multiplied. Islamism with its absolutist approach towards Israel was clearly emerging as a dominant force within the Arab world. Would the Muslim Brotherhood and its Salafist allies tighten their hold on

<sup>24</sup> *Ha'aretz* 20 October 2011.

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Colin Shindler

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Egypt and restrict liberal and secular opinion? Would the Israel–Palestine conflict evolve into an existential one between Jews and Muslims?

Hamas too seemed to be changing and distancing itself from Assad's Syria in favour of the new Egypt. Teheran in turn reduced its funding to the organization. On 23 December 2011, Khalid Meshal instructed Hamas's armed wing, the Qassam Brigades, to desist from the military struggle against Israel. While some disaffected members of Hamas joined Islamic Jihad, Meshal was expounding his appreciation for the victorious Islamist Ennahda party in Tunisia. Was this the prelude to a unity government with Fatah and the eventual takeover of the PLO? Would the Islamicization of the Arab world produce a long-term ceasefire, but absolutely no recognition of Israel? As the developing world progressed and the first world seemingly declined, Israelis wondered what sorts of new alliances would need to be constructed and what kinds of political contortions they would now have to undergo.