

RAMPARTS
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The Future of Israel

by I.F. Stone

No journalist has been closer to the birth of Israel than I.F. Stone, for the last 15 years editor and publisher of the uniquely independent Washington newsletter, I.F. Stone's Weekly. He has been in Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey. He first reached Palestine on November 2, 1945, the day the underground Jewish Army, the Haganah, blew up bridges and watchtowers to begin its struggle against the British in order to open the country to the survivors of the Hitler death camps.

In the spring of 1946, Stone was the first journalist in the world to travel from Poland to Palestine as an illegal Jewish

immigrant through the British blockade on one of the Haganah's vessels. In 1947 he went on one of the British prison ships to spend Passover in the camps in Cyprus where captured illegal immigrants were detained. In 1948 he covered the Arab-Jewish war, and was the first correspondent to reach Jerusalem in the early hours of the morning when the siege was lifted. He returned to Israel in 1949, 1950, 1956 and again in 1964. His Underground to Palestine was published in 1946 and This Is Israel, a history of the Arab-Jewish war and of Jewish Palestine, in 1948. He was awarded a medal by the Haganah for his underground trip in 1946.

AFTER her swift military victory, Israel now faces a prolonged war of nerves. Her antagonists in this war will not be the Arabs but the two "superpowers," the Soviets openly, the United States more covertly. Both countries will bring strong pressure to bear on Israel to give up her territorial gains in return for new international guarantees at Aqaba, on the Suez, along her borders and in reunited Jerusalem.

Israel's diplomatic position is as difficult as her strategic position. On the one side are the superpowers for whom she has been a pawn; on the other the Arabs for whom she is an enemy. The Soviets voted for partition of Palestine in 1947 and recognized the state of Israel in order to dislodge British power from the Middle East. Two decades later, the Soviets armed Egypt and Syria against Israel in the hope of dislodging American power; they saw Israel as Nasser's means of reuniting the Arab world under a revolutionary leadership which would seize the oil fields and evict the Western powers from Arabia and Iran, just as Nasser evicted England and France from Suez. This was the Grand Design of Russian *realpolitik*.

Israel's unexpectedly swift military victory upset that design. By defeating Nasser, Israel did Lyndon Johnson an enormous favor, but it is a mistake to assume that he will reciprocate. From an Arab point of view, Israel appears as a Western tool: she was planted in Palestine under Anglo-American auspices; she is financially dependent on Western, especially American, Jewry; she joined with England and France against Egypt in the Suez adventure of 1956; and she has now handed a stunning defeat to the chief nationalist leader of the Arab world, for whom a coalition of feudal chiefs, Anglo-American oil companies and (according to Nasser) CIA agents have been gunning. But from an Israeli point of view, all of her Western allies let her down when the crunch came: the U.S. declared neutrality, France went back on her alliance with Israel, and Britain was abject in trying to assure the Arabs that she wasn't taking sides. Had Israel been overwhelmed—so the Israelis

feel—none of these "allies" would have come to her aid in time—if at all. In a showdown, for the West as well as for the Russians, the main concern is Arab oil and Arab numbers.

The ambivalence of American policy in this Mideast crisis is hardly new. It has been characteristic of U.S. policy since the beginning of Israel's struggle for independence. Although in November 1947 the U.S. voted for the U.N. plan to partition Palestine into linked Arab and Jewish states, the State Department tried desperately to prevent that plan's consummation in the first few months of 1948. When I left Washington in April 1948, to cover for the newspaper PM what everyone felt would be an Arab-Jewish war as soon as the plan took effect on May 15, Secretary of State Marshall was threatening privately to cut off United Jewish Appeal funds for Palestine if the Jews there went ahead and established a state. The Number One question with which I was greeted everywhere was whether the U.S. would actually carry out that threat. Ben Gurion was determined to declare statehood in spite of it, and there was a burst of jubilation in Tel Aviv—already blacked out in expectation of Egyptian air raids—on the night of May 15, when word came that President Truman had recognized the newly declared state. The United States was torn then, as it still is, between oil interests in the Arab states and the Jewish vote at home.

The same pattern was visible in the new crisis. To take sides with Israel would have endangered the \$2.5 billion stake that American oil companies have in the Middle East. No politician from an oil state like Texas could fail to be aware of this. The

major oil companies are the most powerful influence on American foreign policy: Standard Oil (New Jersey) earns 54 per cent of its net income abroad; Texaco earns 35 per cent. The oil-rich Arabian deserts are the holiest places of the Middle East for the world's oil cartels. The *realpolitik* of oil dictated, firstly, a hands-off policy in any Arab-Israeli war, for fear that oil holdings might be sabotaged and expropriated. But secondly, it would have called for intervention, had Nasser won, for fear that oil-poor Egypt would then take over the oil resources of the Arab Middle East as she had seized the Suez Canal in 1956.

It was out of fear of Nasser and Arab nationalism that the United States provided pro-Western regimes in Saudi Arabia and Jordan with arms which were later mobilized against Israel. Had Israel fallen, the U.S. would have moved. The Middle East is more important strategically and economically by far than Vietnam, and the U.S. would have had to mobilize for a second "Vietnam" in the Middle East, with all the attendant risk of a confrontation with the Soviet Union. This is the dimension of America's debt to Israel, but it is not a debt Israel can collect, even though her very existence was at stake. And it was at stake because both superpowers had poured enormous quantities of arms into the hands of their respective Arab client states, while Israel had to scrounge all around the world in order to supply her armies. She owed her Air Force to a French conflict with Arab North Africa, long since healed and ended. Both Washington and Moscow will now be impelled to resume the rearmament of the Arabs in their rivalry for influence, while France no longer wishes to strain her new friendship with Arab North Africa and Egypt by supplying Israel with aircraft. Just as Moscow and Washington joined forces in 1956 to make the English, French and Israelis withdraw from Suez, so they will now, separately or in concert, pressure the Israelis to give up their territorial gains without firm guarantees from their Arab neighbors. Both superpowers will play for Arab friendship.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RAVINE in which Israel finds herself isolated looks as forbidding but, if scaled, would be more promising in the long run. This would be to independently seek reconciliation with her Arab neighbors. The problem is given a new urgency by the conquest of the Gaza strip and the west bank of the Jordan, which now puts the bulk of the Palestinian Arab refugees right back under Israeli control. It is as if, no matter how or where they turn, two million Israelis find themselves, even in victory, surrounded by the same sea of Arabs. The original U.N. partition plan called for an Arab state and a Jewish state linked together in an economically united Palestine. Gaza and the west bank were to be part of the Arab State. One wing of the Zionist movement, albeit a minority, had always supported a bi-national solution anyway, somewhat along Swiss lines. It is not beyond political ingenuity to work out a scheme whereby some kind of confederation could be created, perhaps also including Jordan by giving her a corridor to the Mediterranean. There could still be a predominantly Jewish state, but one linked fraternally with one or two Arab states, one Palestinian, one Jordanian. The funds for Arab resettlement could be spent in providing new homes in a developing economy for all Arab residents, whether they are refugees from Jewish-occupied Palestine or not.

Moshe Dayan himself has spoken cryptically if reluctantly of confederation. Israel's swift and brilliant military victories only make some such settlement and reconciliation all the more urgent. There lies the final solution of the refugee problem and permanent security for Israel. The funds which the world Jewish community has been raising to aid Israel could be diverted to this constructive and human cause, and diverted in gratitude that the war ended so swiftly with relatively little damage to either side. Imagine how impossible reconciliation would now be if Tel Aviv had been destroyed by the Egyptians, and Cairo or Aswan Dam by the Israelis. It was a moral tragedy—to which no Jew worthy of our best prophetic tradition could be insensitive—that a kindred people was made homeless in the task of finding new homes for the remnants of the Hitler holocaust. Now is the time to right that wrong, to show magnanimity in victory, and to lay the foundations of a new order in the Middle East by which Israelis and Arabs can live in peace.

This alone can make Israel secure. This is the third Israeli-Arab war in 20 years. In the absence of a general settlement, war will recur at regular intervals. The Arabs will thirst for revenge. The Israelis will be tempted again to wage preventive war. The Israeli borders are so precarious, the communications so easily cut, as to be untenable in static defensive warfare. A surprise attack would cut Israel into half a dozen parts. A long war would be suicidal for a community of little more than two million Jews in a sea of 50 million Arabs. Only total mobilization can defend it, and total mobilization is impossible for any extended term in Israel, since it brings the wheels of the economy to a crawl. The strategic and demographic circumstances dictate *blitzkrieg*, and *blitzkrieg* is a dangerous gamble. To be forced to keep that weapon in reserve is ruinous.

It is ruinous financially and it is ruinous morally. It imposes a huge armament burden. It feeds an ever more intense and costly arms race, as each side seeks frantically for newer and more complex weapons. It brings with it a spiral of fear and hate. It creates within Israel the atmosphere of a besieged community, ringed by hostile neighbors, its back to the sea, skeptical, with good reason, of the world community, relying only on her own military strength, turning every man and woman into a soldier, regarding every Arab within her borders distrustfully as a potential Fifth Columnist, and glorying in her military strength. Chauvinism and militarism are the inescapable results. They can turn Israel into an Ishmael. They can create a minuscule Prussia, not the beneficent Zion of which the prophets and Zionists dreamed. The East will not be redeemed by turning it into a new Wild West, where Israel can rely only on a quick draw with a six-shooter.

In justice to Israel, no one can forget the terrible history that has turned the Jewish state into a fighting community. Events still fresh in living memory illustrate how little reliance may be placed on the conscience of mankind. Long before the crematoria were built, in the six years of Nazi rule before World War II, refugees met a cold shoulder. Our State Department, like the British Foreign Office, distinguished itself in those years by its anemic indifference to the oppressed and its covert undertone of admiration for the Axis; our few anti-fascist ambassadors, like Dodd in Berlin and Bowers in Madrid, were treated miserably by the Department. The welcome signs in the civilized world were few, and even now, if events were reversed and Israel were overrun, it could expect

little more than a few hand-wringing resolutions. If the upshot of this new struggle is the expropriation of Western Europe's oil sources in the Middle East, it will only seem to history a giant retribution for the moral failure that forced the survivors of Hitlerism to seek a refuge in the inhospitable deserts, drawn by the pitiful mirage of an ancestral home.

THE PRECEDENT OF THE CEASE-FIRE resolution at the U.N. is a most disturbing one. It accepts preventive war and allows the country which launched it to keep the fruits of aggression as a bargaining card. But Israel has a right to ask what the U.N. was prepared to do if Nasser had been able to carry out his threats of total war and the complete destruction of Israel. Who would have intervened in time? Who would take the survivors? These are the bitter thoughts which explain Israel's belief that she can rely only on herself. But to understand this is not to accept it. The challenge to the world is the creation of a better order, the first step toward which would be to remove the Middle East from the arena of great power rivalry; this alone can keep it from sooner or later becoming the starting point of another world war. The challenge to Israel is to conquer something more bleak and forbidding than even the Negev or Sinai, and that is the hearts of her Arab neighbors. This would be greater and more permanent than any military victory. Abba Eban exultantly called the sweep of Israel's armies "the finest day in Israel's modern history." The finest day will be the day she achieves reconciliation with the Arabs.

To achieve it will require an act of sympathy worthy of the best in Jewry's Biblical heritage. It is to understand and forgive an enemy, and thus convert him into a friend. A certain obtuseness was unfortunately evident in Abba Eban's brilliant presentation of Israel's cause to the Security Council. To rest a case on Jewish homelessness, and to simultaneously refuse to see the Arabs who have been made homeless, is only another illustration of that tribal blindness which plagues the human race and plunges it constantly into bloodshed. The first step toward reconciliation is to recognize that Arab bitterness has real and deep roots. The refugees lost their farms, their villages, their offices, their cities and their country.

Just as Jews everywhere sympathize with their people, so Arabs everywhere sympathize and identify with theirs. They feel that anti-Semitic Europe solved its Jewish problem at Arab expense. To a rankling sense of injustice is now added a third episode in military humiliation. Zionist propaganda always spoke of the role that the Jews could play in helping to modernize the Arab world. Unless firm steps are now taken towards a general and generous settlement, this will become true in a sense never intended. The repercussions of the 1948 war set off seismic tremors that brought a wave of nationalist revolutions in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. The repercussions of this current defeat will lead a new generation of Arabs to modernize and mobilize for revenge, inspired (like the Jews) by memories of past glory.

Considering their numbers and resources and the general rise of all the colonial people in this period, the Arabs must eventually prevail. Those who shudder to think that Israel, with all the cost in devotion and all she honorably won in marsh and desert, might be destroyed after a short life, as were the Maccabean and Crusader kingdoms before her, all who want her to live and grow in peace, must seek to avoid such a

solution. Israel cannot live very long in a hostile Arab sea. She cannot set her face against that renaissance of Arabic unity and civilization which began to stir a generation ago. She cannot remain a Western outpost in an Afro-Asian world casting off Western domination. She cannot repeat on a bigger scale the mistakes she made in Algeria, where Israel and Zionism were allies of Soustelle and Massu and the French rightists. She must join the Third World if she is to survive. No quickie military victories should blind her to the inescapable—in the long run she cannot defeat the Arabs. She must join them. The Jews played a great role in Arabic civilization in the Middle Ages. A Jewish state can play a similar role in a new Semitic renaissance. This is the perspective of safety, of honor, and of fraternity.

ONE CRUCIAL STEP in this direction would be, in the very hour of victory, to heal wounded Arab pride as much as possible, and in particular to reach a new understanding with Nasser. Both American policy and Israeli policy have sacrificed long range wisdom to short-sighted advantage in dealing with the Egyptian leader. He is a military dictator, he wages his own Vietnam in Yemen, he uses poison gas there against his own people, he runs a police state. But he is also the first Egyptian ruler to give Egypt's downtrodden *fellahin* a break. It is fascinating to recall that Egypt has been ruled by foreigners almost since the days when David and Solomon ruled in Israel. Not until Nasser's time, and the eviction of the British and French at Suez, have the Egyptians become the master in their own ancient house. Nasser's program has given Egypt its first taste of reform, on the land, in the factory, in health and educational services. His accomplishments certainly surpass those of a comparable military figure, Ayub in Pakistan. The U.S. oil interests, Johnson's animosity and Israel's ill-will have been united in recent years in efforts to get rid of him. They have all favored feudal monarchs like Saudi Arabia's whose day is done.

It is Nasser who represents the future and who can create the internal stability so necessary to peace. The alternative if he is overthrown will ultimately be some far more fanatical and less constructive force, like the Moslem Brotherhood. If war makes sense only as an extension of politics by other means, then Israel's victory will make political sense only if it leads to a new era of reconciliation with all her Arab neighbors. There is no reason why Israel's little "Peace Corps" could not do for the Arab states what it has done in many of the African states. To win Arab friendship will in the long run be worth far more than any military victory. Two millenia ago, Isaiah envisioned just such a war as we have now seen, and predicted just such a reconciliation as the one here projected. "And the land of Judah," the greatest of the Hebrew prophets foretold, "shall be a terror unto Egypt. . . . And the Lord shall smite Egypt; he shall smite it and heal it. . . . In that day there shall be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria; and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing into the midst of the land; whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."