

Israel 2025

Scenarios of future developments



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Future developments - Scenarios

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Scenarios for Israel's future

What will Israeli society look like in 2025? What developments will it experience between now and then? Will it manage to overcome the profound rifts that characterize it today? And if not, what options for its future are available to the State of Israel? - It was answers to these questions that the participants in a scenario planning exercise, held from January 1999 to mid-2000, tried to find.

Initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the project followed the model of the "Mont Fleur" scenario planning exercise which the FES office held in Cape Town in 1991/1992 as South Africa made the transition from apartheid to democracy.

All the participants obviously realized that it is impossible to predict the future. But by carefully analyzing current developments, a number of potential variants on the future can be described. Using these "scenarios," a discussion can take place about the steps which must be taken in order for a particular future to occur -- or not.

At various times the scenario team comprised up to twenty public figures from the worlds of politics, business, and society, that represent the various political camps. In an extremely dynamic discussion process, which unquestionably also involved a steep learning curve, the planning-exercise participants managed, despite their diverse and, in part, conflicting political and ideological views, to agree on four possible scenarios for the future of Israeli society.

- * Dictatorship of the Jewish majority over the Arab minority (the "slave ship" scenario)
- * Loss of the Jewish-Zionist character of the State (the "ship adrift" scenario)
- * The disintegration and division of the State into autonomous units (the "three boats" scenario)
- * Only dialogue and a willingness by all sides to make concessions can avoid these developments and help implement a fourth, "optimistic" scenario (the "ship in calm waters" scenario)

(For further details, see pp. 10-15)

The group members managed to achieve a common language for describing not only these possible future variants, but also the present of the body politic in which they live. All participants were fully aware of the acute danger confronting the latter as a result of existing social and ideological divisions. Thus, even the year 2025 as an imaginary final point for the various scenarios is of symbolic meaning only: the developments described in the scenarios could just as well materialize as early as tomorrow.

The scenario method

Scenarios are an instrument of strategic planning which is used in the business world in particular, but in recent years has been increasingly applied in the social and political area. In scenarios, the focus of considerations does not involve a particular set goal and the ways and means of achieving it, but rather the question: "What if...?" - What will happen if events take place which cannot at the moment be specifically predicted but which definitely fall within the realm of the possible and may occur in any planning exercise? What can be done to prevent such events from occurring? When dialogue occurs between different social groups, this method has the advantage of enabling a number of possible variants of the future to be described. This method, rather than when arguing about a single desired future, makes it easier to establish a consensus. However, each and every participant in a scenario exercise must be prepared to acknowledge the likelihood of the future scenario offered by his or her political opponents.

Background

As early as 1991/92, the office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in South Africa, under its director at the time, Dr. Winfried Veit, implemented a scenario project. At the time the country was in the critical initial phase of the transition from apartheid to democracy. The scenario planning exercise was named the "Mont Fleur Project" - after the location where the meetings took place. The 22-strong project team comprised politicians, academics, industrialists, and trade unionists from practically every area of the political spectrum in South Africa, including a number of leading ANC figures, as well as industrialists and professors close to the white minority government. After a number of meetings the team reached an agreement about four scenarios for South Africa's political, social, and

economic development up to 2002. The scenarios were presented to the country's political elite as well as a wide-ranging spectrum of the public, and found their way into the political discussion and decision-making process at the time.

In 1998 Dr. Yair Hirschfeld, one of the initiators of the Oslo peace process, contacted Dr. Veit who at the time was head of the FES office in Israel, and suggested that the South African idea be adopted and a similar project be conducted in Israel too. Israel Harel, one of the founders of the settler movement in the occupied territories, and an interlocutor from the right-wing religious wing of the Israeli political spectrum was willing to engage in dialogue, also acted as a co-initiator of the project.

The scenario team

The scenario team met for the first time in January 1999. It comprised twenty public figures from the worlds of politics, business, and society, representing the various political camps. The team was briefed by Dr. Yossi Rein, one of Israel's leading strategic planners and an expert in scenario planning. He was assisted by a former high-ranking member of the Israel Defense Forces' strategic planning division. Project coordination was handled by Dirk Sadowski, the academic coordinator at the Israel office of the FES.

One of the conditions for a successful scenario exercise is that team members attend the individual meetings regularly. They must therefore be prepared to sacrifice a considerable part of their work and leisure time to the project. This is the main reason why a number of the team members had to drop out of the group in the course of the project. As a result, just thirteen of the 20 original members were involved in the final phase of the project, the drafting of the four main scenarios:

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In the following list, material in italics appears in the German but not the Hebrew texts. Question marks - fact/name to be checked.

- * Dr. Mor Altshuler, Kabbala researcher and research fellow at the Shalem Center. Also freelance journalist and columnist.
- * Gabi Botbol, deputy chairman of the Israel Broadcasting Authority and Shas Party member. Chairman of the "Tsei oo-Lamed" (Go Out and Learn) ultraorthodox academic college.
- * David Brodet, chairman of the "Yes" satellite corporation, chairman of the Israel Blue Square Co-op Corporation, and chairman of Hadassah University

- Hospital. 1995-1997, Director General of the Finance Ministry.
- * Chaim Falk, chairman of Young NRP (National Religious Party). Board member of the Zionist General Council, member of the District Planning and Construction Council in Jerusalem, and a board member of the World Ezra Movement. Settler activist.
 - * Gidi Grinstein, Senior Projects Director, Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF). 1999-2000 secretary for the Prime Minister's Office to the negotiating team with the Palestinians.
 - * Israel Harel, veteran freelance columnist and journalist, research fellow at the Hartmann Institute, Jerusalem, and head of the institution's leadership project. Co-founder (?) and former chairman (for some 15 years) of the Yesha Council of Settlers.
 - * Dr. Yair Hirschfeld, lecturer in Middle Eastern history at Haifa University. , Head (?) of the Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF). One of the initiators of the Oslo Process.
 - * Menachem Leibovitz, Director-General (?) of the Movement for Progressive Judaism (Reform) in Israel.
 - * Dr. David Ohana, historian, research fellow at the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem. Lecturer in history at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheba.
 - * Dr. Ron Pundak, lecturer at the Truman Institute for Peace Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Director-General of the Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF). One of the initiators of the Oslo Process.
 - * Raya Strauss Ben-Dror, Director and co-owner of the Strauss-Elite Group, member of the Dor Shalom peace movement.
 - * Dr. Hana Swaid, mayor of the Arab-Christian local authority of Elabun (?) in the Galilee. Member of the Supreme Monitoring Committee of Israel's Arab Citizens and member of the National Planning and Construction Council.
 - * Dani Tamari, Deputy head of the Beit She'an Valley Regional Council and Director-General of the Afikei Mayim Water Association. Former Director-General of the Religious Kibbutz Movement and Secretary to Kibbutz Beit Eliahu.

The scenario process

The team met about a dozen times in the course of 1999, on each occasion for one or more days. The initial encounters were used to create a common body of knowledge about current demographic, economic, social, political, and security-related developments. For this purpose, relevant distinguished experts

were invited to address the team. For example, they were briefed by Ami Ayalon, head of Israel's General Security Service. In subsequent sessions possible scenarios for the Future were discussed. Without ignoring the external factors affecting Israel's existence - the behavior of its Arab neighbors, the peace process, the Diaspora, and so on - as well as global political, social, and economic developments, the discussion concentrated mainly on the future of Israeli society. While the team members considered the process of accommodation with Israel's Arab neighbors to be basically irreversible, they recognized the tensions between the various groups that currently comprise Israeli society today as the greatest danger to their country's future.

After the team members had presented their personal scenarios for the future of Israeli society, an attempt was made at the subsequent meetings to reach an agreement on three or four future scenarios which everybody considered possible. On the whole, such an agreement was achieved in March 2000, concluding the first part of the project. In the second phase of the project, the results of the project were presented to a wider cross-section of the public, as well as important decision-makers in Israeli political life and society. Thus the then Prime Minister Ehud Barak was informed of the scenarios. Members of the group also presented them at a forum of left- and right-wing Knesset members, held under the auspices of Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg. Presentations were also made at various social-policy and political forums, as well as at schools.

The ship metaphor was chosen to illustrate the scenarios. It makes an immediate impression, and has proved to be highly effective in the public presentations and discussion of the scenarios.



Where is the "Israel Ship" Bound?

The starting point

The participants in the scenario exercise agreed that today, Israeli society is characterized by a series of deep-rooted conflicts and crises which are jeopardizing the State of Israel's continued existence in its current form:

1. Israel has still not achieved a permanent peace settlement with its Arab neighbors and is allocating considerable resources, both tangible and intangible, to dealing with this problem.
2. Israeli society is characterized by a large number of deep-seated conflicts which in part overlap and exacerbate each other.
3. The State of Israel defines itself as a "Jewish state," while the proportion of its non-Jewish citizens is constantly rising.
4. Within Israeli Jewish society there is increasing dissent about the role that religion and tradition should play in matters involving the State and the lives of its citizens.
5. There is increasing inequality in the distribution of resources (income, education, etc.). The main sectors to suffer from this inequality are the Arab minority, new immigrants, and oriental (Sephardic) and ultraorthodox Jews.
6. Israel's Arab citizens are increasingly trying to effect change in their legal status; at the same time, there are also more and more indications of a separate identity developing.
7. The struggles being waged between the various groups have a negative impact on democracy and are challenging the State's legitimacy and authority.

Unless corrective measures are adopted, a danger exists that a series of scenarios will come about which may lead to the elimination of the State of Israel or to drastic modifications to its character.

Israeli society is like a storm-tossed ship in danger of being smashed to pieces unless energetic measures are taken to caulk the leaks, mend the sails, unite the crew, and steer the ship around the rocks.



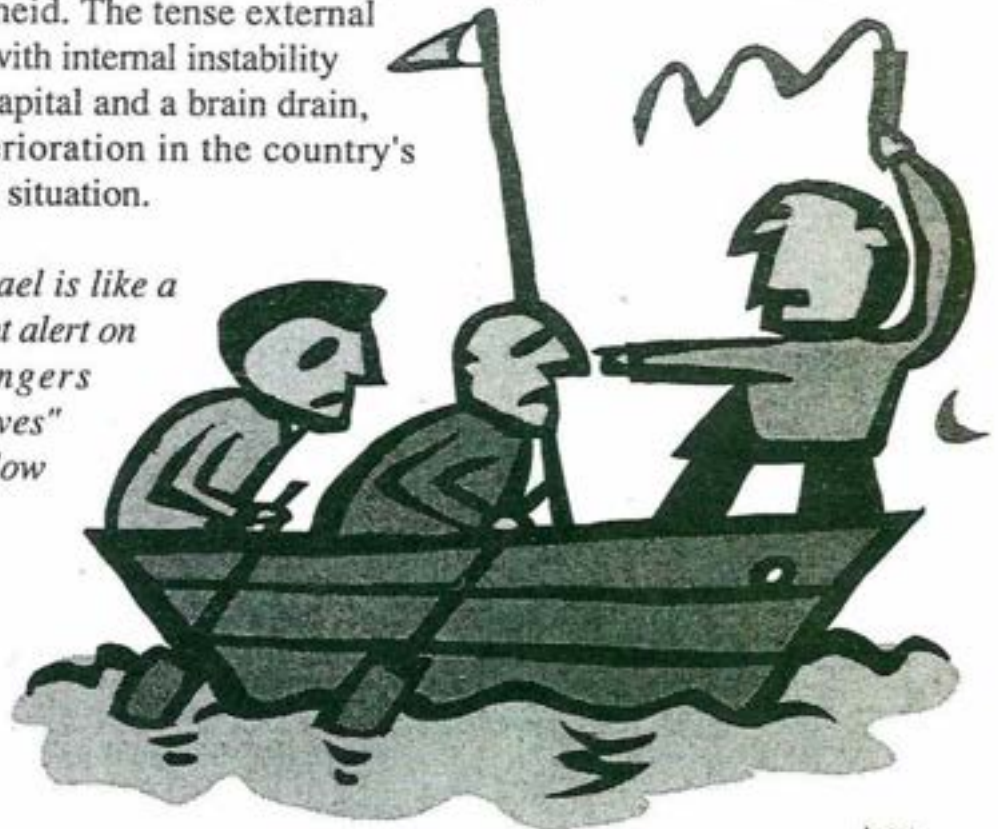


The "slave ship" scenario

The Arab minorities are deprived of important rights. Restriction of democratic rights for the Jewish population too.

This scenario presupposes that there will be no resolution of Israel's conflict with its Arab neighbors in the coming years and decades. Israel's security situation in the region, as well as domestically, remains precarious. This conflict will continue to devour a large part of national resources. Certain sectors of the population are particularly affected by the unequal distribution of the remaining resources and an ultraliberal economic policy pursued by the country's governments. Social tensions in Israel intensify. The demographically stronger and still discriminated Arab minority tries to obtain more rights and to assert its national rights, in part by the use of force, encountering the resolute opposition of the Jewish majority and the State. At the same time, divisions within Jewish society continue to grow, with two camps opposing each other on an almost irreconcilable footing: a strengthened religious-ultraorthodox-nationalist camp on the one hand, and a secular, non-Zionist camp. Through the democratic process the nationalist camp attains power in the State. In the country's parliament, the Knesset, its representatives push through legislations which severely restrict the rights of the Arab minority, and whose application is in part accompanied by the use of violence. At the same time, and in view of the growing "civil disobedience" within the secular camp, important general civil rights and liberties, such as the right to free expression of opinions, are also abrogated. A dictatorship of the majority over the minority develops, with characteristics of a (reverse) apartheid. The tense external situation combined with internal instability leads to a flight of capital and a brain drain, with a marked deterioration in the country's economic and social situation.

In the year 2025 Israel is like a ship with a permanent alert on deck, while passengers without rights - "slaves" - are transported below decks.



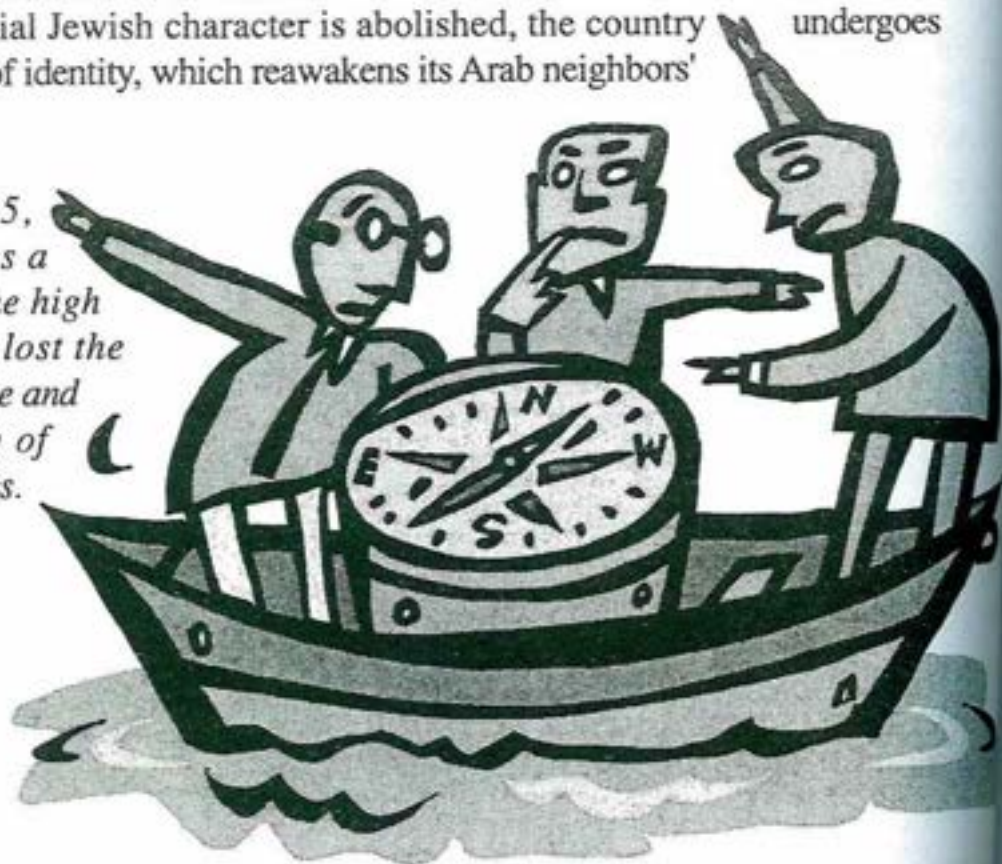


The "ship adrift" scenario

The state loses its special Jewish identity

This scenario assumes a compromise settlement of the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The energies of the diverse social groups are now focused on the country's internal conflicts, which are aggravated by the absence of dialogue and rampant inequitable allocation of resources. Jewish society is defined by two main antagonistic forces: the strengthened ultraorthodox camp, which considers Halacha - Jewish religious law - to be the only valid law (and which has extended its power at the cost of the National Religious camp and the traditional Israeli Right), and the secular camp, which is trying to cling to democracy in its most liberal form. This camp is reinforced by a large number of non-Jewish citizens who have taken advantage of the Law of Return to migrate to Israel in recent decades. At the same time, the Arab minority has increased and now makes up more than a quarter of the country's total population. After the abolition of all discriminatory measures, Israel's Arab citizens have managed over time to successfully integrate into Israeli society. They push for a - peaceful - change in the Jewish-Zionist character of the State, which the secular-liberal Jewish camp has long been calling into question. The Jewish-Zionist symbols of the State increasingly appear side by side with Arab-Palestinian national symbols also: in part the former are replaced by the latter (for example, in 2025 for the first time an Arab president of the State takes office). The relationship between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora - itself weakened - becomes more and more remote. As the Zionist consensus vanishes and Israel's special Jewish character is abolished, the country undergoes a major conflict of identity, which reawakens its Arab neighbors' covetousness.

In the year 2025, Israel resembles a ship adrift on the high seas which has lost the ability to navigate and is at the mercy of storms and pirates.





The "three boats" scenario

Division of the State into autonomous units

The starting position for this scenario is similar to that in the previous "ship adrift" scenario: a compromise settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors, accompanied by a simultaneous intensification of the conflicts between the various social groups within Israel. As the years pass, separatist developments develop among two population groups: the country's Arab citizens, and its ultraorthodox Jews. The efforts by the still discriminated Arab minority to achieve equal rights for itself and to change the character of the State encounter opposition by the Jewish majority and the State, which wish to maintain this character at any price. Clashes are sometimes violent. At the same time, however, the struggle about the character of the State taking place within Jewish society also intensifies. The issue here is whether there should be a halachic State (demanded by the religious/ultraorthodox) or a secular democracy. This conflict also involves a certain degree of violence. Both conflicts are fed by the continuing inequality in the distribution of resources, which especially affects both the Arab minority and ultraorthodox Jews. The clearly insoluble nature of these two basic conflicts within the traditional government setting leads to the realization that the only solution is to divide up the country into autonomous territorial units (an Arab, a religious-ultraorthodox, and a secular Jewish entity), where the individual groups can shape their lives to suit their own ideas. Israel becomes a federal state. Domestic matters such as infrastructure planning, judicial authority, cultural and social affairs are determined autonomously, while defense and foreign policy remain in the federal government's hands. The situation calms down, but this cannot hide the dissolution of the State of Israel in its old form, together with the growing alienation between the individual constituent states.

In the year 2025 Israel is like a ship whose crew, after a mutiny, have climbed into a number of small boats, each steering its own course.



Is there any possibility of avoiding these three "horror scenarios"? The participants of the scenario exercise were convinced that only through dialogue and a willingness on the part of all social and political groups to forego certain things would it be possible to avoid the developments described in the three previous scenarios. The general process would then continue along the lines of democracy, social justice, and preserving the State as a territorial unit. While some of the team members believed that according to this scenario, the development would tend more towards a "state of all its citizens," the majority considered that the Zionist-Jewish character of the state will in the end be preserved. The essential features of this scenario are as follows:



The "ship in calm waters" scenario

Israeli society is characterized by solidarity on the basis of dialogue and reciprocal renunciation

A comprehensive peace settlement has been achieved between Israel and its Arab neighbors. However, the new political order is opposed in particular by the camp of peace opponents. At the same time, the conflicts between the various social groups within Israel intensify. Clashes become increasingly violent. In this situation, the leaders of the different political and social groups realize that dialogue and a willingness to give in to each other are the only ways to preserve the country's future. Every group must be prepared to subordinate certain sectorial endeavors to the common goal: a stable, socially just, and prosperous State of Israel. The dialogue, which is accompanied by vehement conflicts within the individual groups, leads to the establishment of a social pact recognizing each group's right to an independent cultural identity, on condition that this does not diminish any of another group's rights and the foundations of the State as a common frame of reference remain untouched. Resolution of the individual conflicts is achieved in the following fashion:

- a) The State comprehensively implements the rights of the Arab minority, and all discriminatory measures are abolished. Only now can Arab



- Israelis feel completely integrated into Israeli society. For their part they renounce separate tendencies or efforts to change the character of the State.
- b) The State recognizes the non-Orthodox streams of Judaism, thereby strengthening the bonds between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. The ultraorthodox, who have lost their "religious monopoly," are increasingly integrated into society. The national-religious camp functions as an intermediary between the various streams, as well as between them and the State. In this way - having lost its previous *raison d'être*, the settling of Judea and Samaria - it finds a new destiny for itself.
- c) The energies which are unleashed with the settling of these two basic conflicts help to improve the economic and social situation: social rifts shrink, and with them also the tensions between the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic (oriental) Jews. The peripheral areas are strengthened compared with the center. A solution to the conversion problem helps to reduce the degree to which immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States and their descendants feel alienated from the State. They now play an important role in Israel's development into a modern economic nation.

In the year 2025, Israel resembles a ship which, after violent storms, is steering a course acceptable to the majority of the crew. Dialogue and a willingness to act in a spirit of tolerance determine the climate on board. Undamaged, the ship finally enters calm waters.

Note:

As was also the case in South Africa, the members of the Israel scenario team encountered problems in drafting a fourth, optimistic scenario for the future. Part of the reason for this is that this fourth scenario tries to describe a state of affairs in which all social groups live in harmony with each other. The discussion about such a harmonious scenario automatically turns into a political negotiating process about the desired future character of the State. In such a negotiating process it becomes more difficult to accept the other person's point of view than in a discussion process which involves only possible variants for the future.

The scenario "stories"

The following texts are intended as "illustrations" of the scenarios presented above. They are based on the rough outlines sketched in the scenarios. Once the scenario team had reached agreement on the four basic patterns for the future, a number of the group's members were asked to compose a "story" on one of these scenarios, which was then used as a basis for future discussion. These tales obviously involve interpretations with a highly personal slant, the upshot of the authors' particular political and ideological views, but not necessarily their desires for the future.

The stories were composed at the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000. Some of the developments described in them have in the meanwhile - the spring of 2001 - become obsolete, and some of the most pessimistic predictions are looking positively rosy in light of the current reality. Thus not even a "mini" settlement has been achieved between Israel and the Palestinians: the predicted unrest erupted as early as September 2000, and the "first Barak government" is also no longer in power. A comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Arab conflict appears to have receded into the remote distance - and the "slave ship" scenario currently appears the most likely of all options for the future. But in part the stories possess a degree of realism and a power of suggestion which is capable of astonishing and horrifying the reader.

Ron Pundak's "Spartheid" - a combination of "Sparta" and "apartheid" - is intended to illustrate the "slave ship" scenario. Israel Harel's "The Last Independence Day" describes the State's gradual loss of its Zionist-Jewish character, illustrating the "ship adrift" scenario. Two members of the team, Hana Swaid and Menachem Leibowitz, were asked for their interpretation of the "three boats" scenario. Finally, the "Tabernacle of Peace" story by Gidi Grinstein, David Brodet, and Mor Altshuler offers an optimistic prospect of the "ship in calm waters" scenario.

Spartheid

Ron Pundak



The rasping sound of the old digital clock woke me up with a jolt. I remembered that I had to order the old type of battery from the manufacturer. I gave a soft command - "Screen!" and the wall in front of me turned into 250 equal-sized rectangles. The top row showed Israeli channels. I wasted no time seeing what was going on there. They mostly showed religious programs, while others were already in the middle of game shows, and in any case the news channels, all controlled by the government or its private-sector henchmen, were full of lies. For more than five years I've been waking up early and swearing to stop zapping through the Hebrew-language news channels. And whenever I find myself weakening, I always feel reminded once again of Radio Cairo's threatening propaganda broadcasts back in the 1960s. This week too, once again a number of pirate stations have been broadcasting democratic and liberal messages. Generally the stations disappear within a day or two. I can't quite decide whether I listen to them because of these messages, which I so miss among the scores of other channels, or whether it's because of my feelings for the grandchildren of Salman Schocken, who, rumor has it, are behind this desperate venture. This morning too I kept turning over in my mind the question of whether it wasn't finally time to scrape together whatever resources I still had left and get the hell out of here. In recent years the situation had become so catastrophic that most of my friends who at first stayed on, had finally left the country. Generally it all began with their children or grandchildren taking to their heels. An entire generation of entrepreneurs and hi-tech industrialists simply vanished. Some of them emigrated to Europe, many to the USA, and some even went all the way to the Far East. The country which at the end of the twentieth century had been in the forefront in many hi-tech fields, and in the first decade of the twenty-first century was still known as the "world's leading molecular laboratory," has today lost most of its experts in this area. I still remember the optimistic forecasts of twenty-five years ago. The beginning was indeed highly promising. Israeli firms changed hands for billions. But nobody guessed how drastically GDP would decline over the last ten years.

On one of the channels the BBC was showing a special broadcast to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the State of Palestine. I couldn't help remembering the mistakes of the first Barak government. At that time, everything was ripe for us to sign the major historic deal with the Palestinians, which might perhaps have changed history - but then the government decided to go with a smaller and less inspired scheme which was imposed on the Palestinians, unleashing a tempest in the Middle East for which we are still paying the price today.

The final settlement negotiations conducted with the Palestinians during 2000 were arduous and constituted a return to the old pattern of zero-sum games. The Israeli government was not willing to allow the Palestinians to establish a state in most parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It tried to limit the right of return to the Palestinian state which was about to come into existence. In addition, it insisted on maintaining Israeli sovereignty over a broad strip along the Jordan Valley, and refused to allow the Palestinians to be genuine partners in managing the water in the aquifer underneath their territory. The discussions about Jerusalem also broke down when Israel demanded sovereignty over all municipal areas, including the 65 square kilometers annexed to the city from the West Bank in 1967, as well as full powers over Jerusalem's Arab population, at the time 200,000 strong and today approaching half a million. In the end it became clear to the Israeli government that the only way of achieving an agreement was to bring pressure to bear on Arafat and force him to accept an imposed Israeli "peace." Arafat, realizing that his days were numbered because of his illness, and wishing more than anything to be the founder of an independent Palestine, gave into pressure from Barak and America's President Bill Clinton, today better known as the husband of the USA's first woman president, Hillary Rodham, who was assassinated. He agreed to a deal when he was promised that under the agreement it would be possible to immediately carry on discussing those subjects which had been left out of the final agreement, including Jerusalem, refugees, and the forty per cent of the West Bank territories which under the agreement remained under Israeli control.

Along the new borderline which annexes some forty percent of the West Bank the Israeli government began to construct a high fence, protected by maximum-security anti-infiltrator paths and electronic sensors, in order to rigidly separate Israel from the Palestinian state. Simultaneously, the government continued its policy of reducing to the minimum the number of Palestinian workers in Israel. Israel stopped encouraging Israeli-Palestinian cooperation initiatives, and the Palestinian economy began to crumble.

In Israel the referendum easily gained the requisite number of votes. Perhaps too easily. But on the Palestinian side, as soon as Arafat signed the agreement, wall-to-wall opposition developed within the new state. Hamas forged an alliance with the Fatah Youth, until then the most outspoken supporter of the ideas of peace and co-existence with Israel. Leaflets issued by Fatah stated that democratic resistance to the peace agreement and the political struggle to obtain Palestinian rights would continue, parallel to further efforts to find ways of achieving a real peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples as equal partners. The principle would remain that of a Palestinian state side by side

with the State of Israel, based on the 1967 borders but with minor rectifications, including exchanges of territory.

By the time of his death a year or so later, Arafat had not (Translator's note - ? - German differs from Hebrew, pp. 19 German 21 Hebrew) managed to unite his people. His heir, Abu Mazen, became a puppet of the Palestinian security and intelligence services, which continued to rule with an iron fist, preventing the strengthening and consolidation of a democratic civil society which had begun to evolve. The excuse was patent: the security situation.

The next year tensions between the parties grew when fundamentalist Palestinian elements easily managed to penetrate the security fence and carried out bombings in Beit El, Kochav Yair,¹ and Makkabim-Reut. The government, which during this period had failed to invest in social affairs and continued to discriminate against Israel's Arab population in the fields of infrastructure, education, and industry, suffered a stinging defeat in the next elections. One of the reasons for its failure was the fact that Israeli Arabs voted with their feet. In the previous elections some 95% had voted for Barak: in contrast, this time about half of them voted for the Israeli Arab candidate, MK Azmi Bishara. At the same time, the Islamic Movement managed to convince about a third of Arab voters not to vote at all.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak was roundly defeated, and a new government was established under Ehud Olmert, who established a moderate right-wing coalition together with the Shas oriental religious party, which had yet again improved its showing in the elections. The new Prime Minister's first declaration was that any continuation of negotiations with the Palestinians was out of the question. As far as the new government was concerned, everything was over: a "cold" peace treaty existed between the State of Israel and the Palestinian state, which had in any case been given far too much.

The Olmert government had proved itself in the past as one masterful at trading water. The only reason Olmert was also successful in the 2007 elections was Israel's economic boom - the upshot of dozens of technological breakthroughs made by Israeli start-up companies whose shares were traded worldwide, attracting investors to the country. At the same time, tensions between Israel and the Arab countries continued to intensify. The fact was that a strong Israel was unilaterally preventing the continuation of negotiations with the State of Palestine about those topics which had remained unresolved under the agreement, being postponed until a permanent settlement negotiations. This led not only to a deterioration in relationships with Palestine, but also to growing tension with Egypt and Jordan.

When the former settlers - or rather, individuals living in West Bank settlements close to the new borderline with Palestine - began carrying out reprisals against Palestinian villages suspected of helping Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, tension

¹ Where Ehud Barak resided.

reached epidemic proportions. Egypt accused the Israeli government not only of encouraging these actions, but also of organizing and equipping these unofficial units. In the press this organization was dubbed "2101," a reference to the Israel military's legendary 101 Unit which had operated some fifty years earlier. Numerous Palestinian and Israeli acts of terrorism took place along the borderline in the Afula-Jenin area, and finally the government gave orders to occupy the Jenin-Nablus area for a number of days in order to "eliminate" terrorist infrastructure and then return to the international border.

The result was catastrophic. In Israel the action was lambasted by the opposition. European countries condemned Israel's move, and they were soon joined by the USA in harsh criticism. Palestinian police forces, waging guerilla war on the Israeli army, inflicted many losses on the Israeli tanks. Once more the IDF began to drown in a sea of Arab mud, without any public backing and in the face of world-wide opposition. After a week in which the operation continued, the "Forty Fathers"² movement organized a mass demonstration at Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. Tens of thousands of young people signed a petition calling on their peers "not to serve in the army of occupation," and rumors carried by the media reported that soldiers who were ideologically opposed to the operation were deserting the ranks of combat units in droves. The international press reported that the Ansar Three internment camp had been reopened and was full of thousands of Israel soldiers who had refused to obey orders.

When the IDF had been in Northern Samaria for a month, Jordan and Egypt announced that they were breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel. In reaction, a number of Israeli ministers, led by defense minister Ariel Sharon, called for IDF forces to be concentrated in the Jordan Valley in order to isolate the Palestinian State from any contact with the eastern front. The Israeli press carried reports of Iraqi forces moving towards the Iraq-Jordan border, as a reaction to Israel's deployment. It later turned out that these reports were in fact the outcome of a form of Israeli psychological warfare, which planted this disinformation in order to confer legitimacy on future moves and speed up a government decision about deploying Israeli forces in the Jordan Valley. The government did indeed take a decision, and the IDF took control of areas in the Jordan Valley, declaring its readiness "to repel any Iraqi attack." Forced into escalation, the Iraqi government, which already had the capacity to produce a primitive atom bomb, announced that it would react to any Israeli attack. Hard on the heels of every Iraqi communiqué came an Israeli one, and among right-wing circles in the Israeli government and public more and more calls were heard to launch a preemptive strike against the Iraqi nuclear threat. Prime Minister Olmert, desperately trying to stabilize the government, to bring IDF forces back to Israel and to slow down the escalation

overtaking the entire Middle East, was unsuccessful in his efforts, and his government was brought down by right-wing forces in the Knesset.

The next elections brought a more sharply right-wing government to power. The religious parties' electoral campaigns were based on biblical verses hinting at the desired solution, along the lines of Deuteronomy 2:33-34: "And the Lord our God delivered him [Sihon] up before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed every city, the men, and the women, and the little ones; we left none remaining"; Deuteronomy 3:3: "So the Lord our God delivered into our hand Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people; and we smote him until none was left to him remaining"; Deuteronomy 19:1: "When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations, whose land the Lord thy God giveth thee, and thou dost succeed them, and dwell in their cities, and in their houses;" and Deuteronomy 20:16: "...of the cities of these people, that the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth."

The new prime minister's winning slogan was: "Remember that which Amalek did to you. Arabs within and Arabs without - a danger to the State of Israel."

The struggle between Israel and Iraq did not, however, conceal the growing tension between the Arab minority in the State of Israel and extremely broad sections of Jewish society in Israel. In the previous ten years, the number of Arabs in Israel had grown by about 700,000, including the quarter of a million Arabs in East Jerusalem on whom Israeli citizenship was imposed. The Arab population in Israel tried unsuccessfully to integrate into the civil life of the State and to become citizens with absolutely equal rights. The Israeli political system failed to tackle the problems and gaps which had developed on the ground, and this situation led to unrest among the young Arab population. The young people had cast off the traditions of their parents' generation, accustomed as they had been to getting things only by means of personal ties and requests to their "lords and masters" at the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Housing, and the General Security Service.

In a TV interview, Knesset Member Azmi Bishara, one of the supporters of a "state of all its citizens," gave a cogent description of the process affecting the politics of those Palestinian Arabs who were Israeli residents, outlining the following moderate scenario:

Stage 1: Dropping the partnership with the Zionist parties

Stage 2: Founding independent Arab parties.

Stage 3: Forming a single front in the Knesset together with post-Zionist parties in order to speed up the process of "Israelizing" the State.

Stage 4: Returning to a partnership with Israeli parties which define themselves as Jewish.

Buzzwords at the time also included references to Arab autonomy within the State of Israel. Supporters of this idea did not necessarily mean geographic autonomy, but rather a cultural and functional form of self-rule. The idea received support from Jews in Israel, both on the Left, which saw this as the only way of normalizing relationships within the State which were teetering on the brink of a destructive explosion, as well as among moderate Jewish religious circles whose aspiration was simply to preserve the Jewish and democratic nature of the State of Israel. As they saw it, the idea was to achieve an internal separation which would preserve the Jewish-national character of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. The right-wing government was implacably opposed to this idea.

As a result of the political and diplomatic stresses and strains between Israel and the USA, the Americans stopped providing Israel with financial, civil, and defense assistance. Dialogue with Diaspora Jewry also lapsed. As the years passed, neither the government nor the Jewish Agency managed to develop any alternative, more relevant system for maintaining ties between Israel and the Diaspora, where assimilation was rampant. The younger generation of Jews in the USA and Europe were repelled by the changes taking place in Israeli society.

The tense security situation that had prevailed in recent years along Israel's borders led to vast sums being invested in the strategic defense budget, as well as in routine security expenditure. This immediately led to slashes in funds invested in education, infrastructure, industry, as well as the Ministry of Interior's budget. The economic situation also triggered a drop in exports and a brain drain. This in turn generated a disquieting phenomenon which in turn affected GDP. The first to suffer from cutbacks were the Arab local councils and towns. The government's undeclared motto was "Charity begins at home" - i.e. among the Jews. Unemployment in Arab areas soared, crime spiraled, and resentment of the government and Jewish society in Israel reached new heights.

At the same time, the new government decided to revoke a decision to found a new modern Arab town in the predominantly Arab area of the Triangle. This decision, which had been taken by the previous government, had already been endorsed by all the planning committees. This was the last straw. The day that the ceremony was due to take place to lay the cornerstone for the new town, which the Arab Israelis called "al-Amal" - "Hope" - some 200,000 demonstrators, including tens of thousands of Jews, turned up. Orders to the police were unequivocal: the demonstration was not legal, and hence it was to be dispersed by force. The next day 25 people were killed, including three police officers, and some 150 people injured, including 30 policemen who suffered burns when one of the demonstrators torched a police bus.

The government reacted swiftly. A state of emergency was declared, and the same

night a curfew was imposed on the Arab villages and towns in the Triangle area and the Galilee. In the early hours of the morning, dozens of Arab Israeli leaders were taken away for questioning: some of them were placed in administrative detention on charges of subversion. The Knesset was in tumult. Representatives of the government's New Kach Party called for the detainees to be expelled from Israel. More and more voices in the Knesset called for a change in the democratic rules of the game in Israel. A year earlier, the Knesset had already resolved that Arab MKs should not be allowed to take part in votes concerning the "Jewish character of the future of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and all matters relating directly or indirectly to this issue." Minister Kahane (Jr.) demanded the enactment of a law similar to the legislation which had applied in the American democratic system until the early 1960s, so that at election times the vote of an Arab (in the US it had been of a Negro) would be worth one third of a Jew's vote. "This is the only democratic way of preserving the democratic Jewish majority in the Knesset," said Kahane. The proposed law which was submitted to the Knesset failed to pass by one vote, but five years later, when the demographers were forecasting that in under 30 years the number of Arabs in Israel would rise to 45%, there was a clearcut majority for a similar proposal.

In Jewish Israel too the social fabric began to crumble. The economic slump gave rise growing xenophobia bordering on racism. The underprivileged neighborhoods of the country's large cities were home to some 500,000 foreign workers, most of whom were in the country without valid residence and work permits. Many of them were the second generation to live in Israel. Their numbers grew as Jewish employers, who had long since stopped employing laborers from the Palestinian State, also stopped employing Israeli Arabs. Hundreds of thousands of workers from Romania, Yugoslavia, China, Poland, Nigeria and other countries lived in conditions unfit for human habitation. Most of their families never enjoyed the benefits of the health and welfare system, and most of their children fell through the net of the education system. The tension between them and the Israeli population was aggravated when at Christmas 2015 the bodies of three Orthodox Jewish children were found. Although the murders were never solved, Israeli fascist-racist elements accused black foreigners of killing them, claiming that the murders were part of an African religious rite. The upshot was that wide swathes of the country's cities turned into ghettos where Israelis never set foot.

This development, however, was secondary to the worsening confrontation between the liberal secular minority, which was responsible for producing most of the country's GDP, and the religious establishment, the Rabbinate, and its government supporters. The fragile right-wing coalition was forced to surrender to the dictates of the rabbis. Paradoxically, the less Jewish the State became demographically, the

more it was ruled by strict religious law. The laws and regulations which were passed at this time included the withdrawal of recognition for civil marriages, and the end of civil burials; the end to the transport system which had operated on the Jewish Sabbath, including arrangements tolerated on the basis of the status quo system; the ban on selling and supplying unkosher meat anywhere in the country apart from Arab towns and villages; opening a restaurant was made conditional on employing a kashrut supervisor; the closing of theaters and places of entertainment on Sabbaths and Jewish festivals; companies, including hi-tech industries, were banned from working on the Sabbath; and Ben-Gurion Airport was completely closed on the Sabbath. Rumors about the Religious Affairs Ministry's intentions of interfering with university curricula proved to be true.

In the 2017 elections, with the State of Israel heading for chaos on the domestic as well as the international front, practically the entire country supported a call for "reviving the hope of the beginning of the century." Elder statesman Ehud Barak was called back to power, to set up a second government. In order to overcome the major obstacle of the right wing, Barak promised a government to rescue the nation, based on experts rather than politicians. The Barak of 2017 was a mature leader. In his government's early months, he spared no effort vis-a-vis the Palestinians and the Arab countries in his attempts to get the diplomatic wheels rolling again. His proposals were exactly the same as those which he should have made 18 years earlier. What Barak failed to realize, however, was that what might have been relevant in 1999 did not necessarily apply to this new era.

The Palestinian leadership did not believe in the messages coming from Israel, nor was it clear whether they were capable of selling the deal to the Arab population, still embroiled in clashes with IDF forces in the occupied areas around Jenin and Nablus. Barak's good intentions failed to convince the Israeli public, who on the whole seemed to prefer confrontation to any diplomatic solution. A year later, a new government was set up.

The next seven years were the hardest times that Israel had lived through since its founding. The IDF became embroiled in a complex and costly form of "rearguard war" against guerilla forces in the occupied territories. Tactics had changed little since Israel's period in Lebanon at the end of the twentieth century. Palestinian terrorism became more focused, targeting only Israeli military personnel and "settler" civilians in those areas which were supposed to be part of the Palestinian State. Although these attacks were extremely painful, the Israeli public within Israel proper was indifferent to what was going on in the conflict-torn areas. Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon were closed to Israelis. Not only were the peace agreements, still in force on paper, not implemented by the two parties, but apparently none of the parties was concerned by this state of affairs or had considered

of submitting a complaint to the International Court. The Israeli government's point of view was that "in any case it never was a real peace."

The constant tension along the country's borders swallowed up enormous financial resources, resulting in the slashing of budgets for development, education, and other vital areas. Every year, the army had to contend with thousands of 18-year-olds who refused to be drafted, while Israeli-Jewish national solidarity declined noticeably. The situation of the Arab minority in Israel, which had increased to nearly two and a half million, continued to worsen. As during the period of the Palestinian Intifada forty years earlier, certain parts of the Galilee were unilaterally declared "independent areas" by their residents. Most of the Arabs in Israel stopped paying taxes, and the deterioration in the level of services was clearly visible in every town and village. Most of the Arab localities in the Wadi Ara area were placed under curfew every day from six in the evening until first light the next day. From time to time the number of Israeli Arab administrative detainees topped ten thousand. The various camps also housed Jewish detainees who were suspected of collaborating with the Arabs in Israel.

On the international front, Israel's situation hit new depths. Certain European states announced that they were imposing a variety of sanctions on Israel, but not before the European Union passed a surprising resolution allowing each member state to independently determine its commercial and cultural ties with Israel. Israeli doctors, researchers, and scientists were no longer invited to international congresses. In the various international organizations, and especially those belonging to the United Nations family, Israel was regularly condemned. The government treated this state of affairs with manifest derision, announcing that it refused to pay attention to any of these "troublers of Israel." When the United States more recently began to regularly endorse condemnations and statements threatening sanctions by the U.N. Security Council, the government issued a declaration to the effect that "the entire world is against us." A number of religious ministers added, "it is still hard for the world to accept the fact that we are the Chosen People and a light unto the nations, and as such we are allowed to do things which will not be understood until many years hence."

In response to the condemnatory statement issued by the Security Council on December 31, 2025 concerning Israel's continuing control of West Bank territories, an Israeli government spokesman issued a short statement which included a quotation from Deuteronomy 11:23-24: "Then will the Lord drive out all these nations from beyond you, and ye shall dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness, and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the hinder sea shall be your border."



The last Independence Day

Israel Harel

Eve of Independence Day 5785, 2025 A.D. Following a protracted - and sometimes violent - public and parliamentary debate over how the State should celebrate its 77th anniversary, the President of the State, Dr. Abdul Aziz al-Hindi, decided to cancel his participation in the festive Knesset session which was held every year on this occasion. He also canceled his attendance at other events, such as the memorial ceremony for those who gave their lives in Israel's wars, held at the Western Wall Plaza at the beginning of Remembrance Day for Israel's Fallen. "I will not appear at any event containing a reference to 'Independence Day,'" declared the President. "Remembrance Day is not a remembrance day for myself and the members of my people. In addition," Dr. al-Hindi added, "this day symbolizes the consequences of the unlawful wars which the Zionist armed forces waged against the U.N. Partition Plan and the brutal ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian Arab people which they carried out as part of the hostilities initiated by them."

Following the President's statement, Knesset Speaker Mohammed al-Hatib announced that in light of this dramatic development, the traditional festive Knesset session, which had been held to mark Independence Day over the previous 76 years, would lose its character as a state event, and he was therefore forced "with great regret," as he put it, to cancel it. Thus it was that - despite vociferous protests by a majority of the Jewish Knesset members in the House - a national festive and symbolic tradition which had lasted for three quarters of a century came to an end.

Not all of the Jewish members of Knesset accepted the Speaker's decision. A group of MKs, mainly from the "People's Party," which had emerged from the remnants of the former right-wing parties (the Likud, the National Religious Party, the National Unity Party, and Shas) nevertheless gathered at the Knesset in order to mark what they called the "continuation of the tradition of a festive Independence Day session." However, on the Speaker's orders, the Knesset ushers prevented them from holding a debate in the Chamber. They were therefore forced to convene in the meeting room of the Audit Committee, whose chairman was veteran MK Chaim Falk, a former settler and self-styled religious Zionist who had the authority to make the committee room available for the ceremony.

Some of the bereaved families who had lost sons and daughters in Israel's wars also refused to be put off. As was the custom, they gathered at the Western Wall. However, because in the President's absence the ceremony lost its official character, the Chief of General Staff, General Eiram Ganot, was not able to attend. He instructed the Chief Army Rabbi, elderly Brigadier-General Gad Navon, to deliver a short address on behalf of the Chief of General Staff in addition to reciting the Psalms which he had been reading out at this ceremony for the last fifty years. Although the Israeli media allowed criticism to be voiced of the steps taken by the President and the Knesset Speaker, they nevertheless reacted negatively to the

holding of the "pirate" ceremonies as they were called in the editorial in the on-line Ha'aretz newspaper, the country's most influential publication. As renowned poet Shahaf Ahavim - who is always asked to give the intellectual's viewpoint when dissension flares over fundamental ideological issues - wrote in Yediot-Ma'ariv, "Memorial ceremonies which lack the consent of Israelis as a whole," increase the polarization and alienation which are in any case prevalent in this split country, and do not serve the goal which those who planned the ceremonies wished to attain. The nature of the ceremonies and symbols in a constitutional state is determined by those acting by virtue of the law. Those who head the prescriptive and proscriptive hierarchy of symbols and ceremonies," the author of the article underscored in his normal authoritative fashion, "are, after all, the President of the State and the Speaker of the Knesset. And we must all," he ruled, "respect their decisions, even if some of us do so with gritted teeth. Because anyone who undermines the position of the President and the Speaker of the Knesset," warned the nation's conscience, "is harming the very existence of the State as a binational, multicultural polity." The influential poet concluded his article in the mass-circulation newspaper (the country's two most widely read dailies had merged after the Yediot Group, in a brilliant stock-market coup, took over "Hachsharat Ha-Yishuv," the owners of Ma'ariv. The newspaper was mainly influential with those readers who had not managed to get used to e-papers, remaining faithful to the printed press whose circulation had begun to decline after 2005).

When President al-Hindi realized that the Jewish sector, at least at this stage, went along with his measures, he decided to publish the letter which he had sent to a number of leading Jewish figures. "Since the Arab public, which makes up more than 30% of the country's population, cannot accept the exclusively Zionist nature of the country's independence celebrations," President al-Hindi wrote to the Prime Minister, Ofer Pines, the President of the Supreme Court, Dorit Beinisch, and the State Comptroller, Ron Pundak, "and since the ethos of independence has been constructed on the basis of the Nakba, the disaster which befell my people, the Palestinian people, it is not befitting for the President, or the Speaker of the Knesset, which is in any case shortly to change its name, to attend these events. Moreover," the President added in his letter, "within the fabric of Israeli society generally, those Jews who continue to define themselves as Zionists today constitute a minority in the country. We, the Arabs, make up a third of all its citizens. Some 10% of the population declare that they belong to the 'new Israeli nation;' as a result, even if they are of Jewish descent, they have freely opted to renounce their affiliation with the Jewish nation, instead preferring a new identity; a new national admixture has come about in this country, also including the members of other peoples who have naturalized here, including Arabs who have renounced their former nationality. All

¹ Long-standing Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Defence Forces, who resigned in January 2001 after 30 years of being in service.

these people, together with the offspring of the foreign workers and the Jews who prefer a state of all its citizens over a Jewish nation state make up some 55% of the population resident in the country, i.e. an absolute majority.

"Our common task now is to establish a stable civil framework to be shared by Jews, Arabs, and citizens of other backgrounds. If the Jews have objections, they will have to address these and deal with them among themselves. They were the ones who brought here, whether with the status of 'olim' - immigrants under the Law of Return for Jews - or of foreign workers, hundreds of thousands of non-Jews, mainly to stem the emerging Jewish-Arab demographic parity. But they failed to take into account the possibility of these migrants joining forces with those circles, such as the Arabs, who prefer a state of its citizens over a Jewish nation state with manifestly religious and nationalist, not to say racist, attributes. "I therefore recommend to that part of the Jewish community which, despite the far-reaching changes which have taken place in the country, insists on continuing to mark this day as a national holiday, that they do not make a point of celebrating what they call 'Independence Day' in a festive state-based fashion. Overdoing their celebrations is likely to cause pain to, or even anger among, the Arab population, the non-Jewish and non-Muslim population, as well as the growing part of the Jewish population who, as demonstrated by the results of the last three elections for the Knesset, prefer Israel to be a country comprising different communities, a polity which is a state of its citizens, no longer insisting that it is the home of the Jewish people. Most of the country's citizens realize," stressed the State's paramount representative, its head of state, "that given the State's present-day demographic and political structure, it is no longer appropriate to mark the Zionist independent day as a national holiday. A solution must be found on an overarching national basis, as is the case in most democratic civil societies, which will be acceptable to most of the country's population from myriad backgrounds and communities who today constitute a clear-cut majority of the State's population. For unfortunately those Jews who insist that the identity of the State must remain Jewish fail to understand this state of affairs. Nowadays such an attitude is the most blatant chauvinism, which does not even have the support of most Jews.

"Moreover," continued the President in his missive, which aroused mixed reactions in the ranks of the "One Israel" party, of which he was a member, "as we have seen, most of Israel's inhabitants are also willing to accept a change in the country's name, which is manifestly nationalist-Zionist-Jewish. The High Court, as you are aware, has already instructed the government (following a petition submitted in 2020 by Ganit Shamesh-Rantissi) to set up a commission to examine this sensitive issue. However, it was only in the wake of the mass pro-change demonstrations by the Arab public that the Commission was finally set up. Moreover, it is highly

regrettable that because of the procrastination caused by certain elements in the Commission, the publication of the requisite conclusions has not yet taken place in light of the enormous changes affecting the country in the last quarter of a century in the areas of demography, values, and ideology. I consider it my duty to issue a warning, through this missive, that if the country's name is not changed in the near future, there will most likely be another petition to the High Court, which has already indicated its dissatisfaction with the failure to act on its ruling. Those who can no longer put up with the procrastination can still use the weapon of mass demonstrations - and let us hope that these will not spill over into violence. "It is not only the country's name which must be changed. It is also impossible to continue to accept the Declaration of Independence - both in terms of the ethos represented by it, and certainly in terms of the legal status ascribed to it as a form of preamble to the Constitution. Now, my dear brethren from the Jewish sector, do not be horrified at the revocation of the Declaration of Independence. We will all become accustomed to its revocation, just as we became accustomed to the withdrawal from the conquered Arab lands or the dropping of Hatikva as the country's national anthem. In 2000, as so many people remember, the Knesset rejected by an absolute majority MK Barake's proposal to change the national anthem. In 2005, when MK Al-Huzail presented the bill again, it received the support of a third of the House's members, including quite a few Jews who understood that it was necessary to adjust to a changing reality. And in this way the majority against the change shrank every two or three years. Four years ago, as is known, the government acted on the promise given and kept by the coalition to support the adoption of a new anthem.

"This was somewhat painful, but when the Jews got used to the changes, they wondered why they had insisted for so many years on perpetuating the occupation or using the nationalistic and certainly irrelevant words of the old anthem. After we have all become accustomed to it, the same thing will happen after the revocation of the Declaration of Independence, referring as it does, in part in language bordering on the racist, solely to the Jewish people's rights to Eretz Israel.

"I would like to remind you further that another commission is currently sitting, the commission charged with finding an alternative to the country's current flag, which is also the flag of the Jewish people outside Israel. This commission, thank goodness, did not come into existence as a result of a High Court judgment, nor in the wake of violent demonstrations. All it took was the power of the Arabs, in conjunction with other progressive forces in the Knesset, to compel the government to set it up. And regarding the flag too, I am sure we will reach

an understanding, just as we reached an agreement, by virtue of the Arab vote which has grown from one election to the next, concerning the appointment of Arab ministers, and an Arab President, and an Arab Speaker of the Knesset. Admittedly, even now that the Jews no longer constitute a majority, equality is currently expressed solely on the level of representative functions. However, on certain occasions, in particular ceremonial events which express collective identity, it is non-Jews, who today determine the nature of these expressions, with all the concomitant ramifications.

"I would therefore remind the Jewish sector that the identity of the State is no longer what it was, and that it is up to us, with the assistance of the non-Arab political forces who support us, using the international pressure that we can bring to bear for this purpose and with the assistance of the liberal Supreme Court, to change the nature of the State so as to bring it into line with the country's changed socio-political structure.

"While we all remember the vehement and violent protests of the Jewish nationalist right wing, we also remember that that selfsame right wing has been worn down and wearied by the protracted political struggle and the Intifada, and has come to terms with the realities of the situation, just as it previously came to terms with the evacuation of the Golan Heights and most of the settlements in Judea and Samaria. The same thing will also happen, inshallah, with regard to the change of the country's name, the revocation of the Declaration of Independence and the Law of Return, and the changing of the flag. What counts are the demographic realities, together with the greatly reduced importance which Israelis attach to their Jewish nationalism."

As a number of the "new" or revisionist historians commented, the contents of the President's letter reflected the gradual developments which began as long ago as the Intifada in the 1990s, in which the Arabs, in conjunction with liberal and progressive Jewish circles, managed to undermine the Jews' belief in the justness of the Zionist cause and their absolute right to the country. "Once the germ of doubt began to nibble away at people, on both a personal and a political level," wrote the venerable scholar Ilan Pappé, one of the country's leading "new historians" of the 1980s and '90s, "it became clear that the Jewish state was living on borrowed time - and not in terms of security."

Education Minister Mossi Raz gave instructions for the presidential letter to be learned by heart at all of the country's schools. No protests were raised to this return to outmoded educational method, discredited for over fifty years. "This is a historic moment in our history," said the Minister at a meeting of school inspectors. "For me, it is a happy ending to a campaign which, as

General of the Peace Now movement, I waged at the end of the 1990s against the violent pro-annexation settlers who threatened to turn our lives into a permanent hell on earth."

Unsurprisingly, the President's move triggered major reactions worldwide, including in the Arab countries. The New York Times, for example, led with his missive. In its accompanying editorial, the paper wrote that the Jewish population of the State of Israel would have to reconcile themselves to the facts on the ground which their President had correctly interpreted. "The Jews in Israel may well feel uncomfortable in the wake of the dramatic changes taking place in their country, which they made such supreme sacrifices to establish as the Jewish nation state," the editorial stated. "However, they failed to create a state which possessed the ideological, economic, and social qualities to act as a magnet for the Jewish people outside Israel. Because most members of this people refused to emigrate to their nation state - and also because of low natural growth and the loss of belief in Zionism - a situation arose in which they lost the majority required in order to remain a classic nation state, such as in Europe and Asia. It may therefore be said that the Jewish national movement, known as Zionism, which was so successful in laying the foundations for a Jewish state, in fighting for its independence, and in striving to defend itself and maintain a civil society for over three-quarters of a century in the impossible conditions of the Middle East, has now been forced to come to terms with facts on the ground for which the responsibility largely lies in its own backyard." The world's most important newspaper went on to contend, "This failure has been put into words by Israel's Arab President, and all of this country's citizens must acknowledge the validity of his analysis. Those who are unwilling to come to terms with the facts on the ground must not resort to undemocratic means in order to oppose the development, however painful it may be, which has come about as a result of their own failings."

The editorial finished with the following observations: "The Jewish state has dropped it into the Arabs' hands like a ripe fruit because of disintegration, not because of subversion, of which nationalist circles in Israel accuse their country's citizens of Arab descent. All the steps taken by the Arabs in order to bring about this situation have been reasonable in the context of the contest between the Jews and the Arabs over the country's character and future. History is sometimes very ironic and cruel: it turns out that in this historic contest, it is the Jews who are the losers. "The Fall of the Third Temple," as many of them interpret the situation, is certainly not a correct description. The Jews have lost their absolute rule over their country almost willingly, certainly without a physical confrontation,

and it in no way resembles the fall of the Second Temple which led, albeit two thousand years later, to the Third Temple - the State of Israel. This time, unfortunately, the quasi-voluntary disappearance of the Jewish state is likely to lead, as is already happening in the United States and Europe, to the assimilation of the Jews in their homeland as well."

As it had done just before Independence Day, ever since the State of Israel came into being, the Central Bureau of Statistics published statistical data, showing the following picture: a population close to 10 million, inhabiting an area of 21,500 square kilometers (Israel managed to retain control over just a thousand square kilometers of the former occupied territories in the wake of the permanent settlement with the Palestinians, which nobody any longer calls the "peace agreement"), making Israel the most densely populated country in the world according to U.N. figures. Only 4,752,000 define themselves, first and foremost, as Jews. About three and a half million are Arabs. Around one million are non-Jewish migrants, or the offspring of these migrants, who came from the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States or arrived as foreign workers, with another 750,000 who refuse to indicate any voluntary affiliation with either of the majority peoples. The CBS document also indicates that around 50% of all those at preschool, elementary school and junior high are Arabs (as opposed to 32% or so in 2000); 20% are ultraorthodox Jews; which leaves just 30% from the secular and religious-national Jewish sectors, as well as those who do not belong to either of the two ethnic groups, Jewish and Arab.

The President's letter, and of course the cancellation of the official events, triggered highly emotional reactions among part of the secular Jewish population, as well as, unsurprisingly, among the ultraorthodox Jewish population. Although the President was right in asserting that most Israelis of Jewish descent had become accustomed to the dramatic changes taking place in the country and had learned to live with them, this time the affront was particularly painful and acute, going to the very roots of their identity.

For the second time in the history of the State, instead of celebrations there were demonstrations on Independence Day - the only Israeli festival to be added to the calendar of Jewish religious festivals since their introduction. (The first time was at the beginning of the 1980s when the Peace Now movement held a demonstration on Har Bracha, a mountain where a provisional Jewish settlement had been set up.) The initiative was taken by the Dor Hemshech (or "continuing generation") movement, headed by descendants of settlers, and the central demonstration was held on the "shouting hill" next to the Knesset. The police,

still a public holiday, charged the demonstrators, using nightsticks and tear gas to disperse them. The Knesset Guard, too, acting on the direct orders of the Speaker, for the first time took part in dispersing a demonstration. There was also a confrontation between the demonstrators and the Speaker's personal guard, overwhelmingly made up of people from his own ethnic community from the Galilee and the Negev, as well as a few young One Israel members, both Jews and Arabs.

Although, as public opinion polls showed, secular Jews were also furious at the canceling of the independence celebrations, only a few of them joined the demonstrations. The resulting impression was that it was only the Jewish religious community - this time including the ultraorthodox also - who were up in arms at this removal of Jewish symbols from the State's public domain. As a result spokespersons for most of the political parties, with the exception of those on the Right, the successors to the Likud, the National Religious Party, and the National Unity Party, were able to denounce what they called the demonstrators' "violent and populist defamation" of the holiday and offending of the sensibilities of the majority who prefer to celebrate it in the absence of nationalist symbols. The spokespersons also condemned the extreme nationalistic statements expressed at the demonstrations, such as calls for a return to the old flag, halting the procedure to change the country's name, opposing the change in the Law of Return, and revoking the Declaration of Independence. They argued that such statements were inflammatory and might lead to bloodshed, given the sensitivity among the Arab population to these extremist demands emanating from the lunatic fringes of the Israeli Right.

In the evening after the holiday was over, instead of their scheduled programs the television channels broadcast in-depth interviews with well-known Israeli figures. The most eminent interviewee was Aharon Barak, the venerable but, at the age of 88, still entirely lucid former Supreme Court justice, who made the following comments: "We are currently experiencing a rapid process of normalization and positive, albeit painful, freeing of ourselves from the encumbrance of Jewish nationalism. Today, at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, most Jews - who are generally agreed to be an enlightened group - also realize that their State cannot remain ethnocentric. A nation state is an anachronism, in conflict with the march of history." Such were the pronouncements of the man who was largely responsible for those processes which have steered the State into its present ideological condition in the year 2025. "This is particularly true of the situation in the Middle East, where the Arab states, which are following a path which runs counter to the global trend,

evidence of how dangerous it is in such an advanced age, in which the world finds itself, to cling to the nationalist-religious model of the nation state. This is a recipe for everlasting conflict, as demonstrated by the constant hostilities between the State of Israel - its provisional name - and the Arab countries, a conflict which has failed to reach a legally secured and practical end even after 76 years of violence and a number of actual wars. As I speak," concluded the former President of the Supreme Court, "we are witnessing continuing tensions which are likely to spill over into a general war throughout the entire Middle East, because Israel has insisted on holding onto one thousand square kilometers of land in the West Bank, where it has concentrated most of the settlers. Had it not done so, it is highly likely that the conflict would have come to an end. Whereas now, at a time when there is no national consensus about anything whatsoever, the United Nations, following the dictates of the Arab-European-American bloc, will resolve that the State must implement Resolution 181 and accordingly withdraw to the lines dictated by it, i.e. the lines of the 1947 Partition Plan. And in my waning years, I say to you now that accepting 181 is our last chance to live in peace in the Middle East. If we had accepted Resolution 242, instead of delaying things by 35 years, we would have had a state within the 1967 borders. Because we had delusions of grandeur, annexing areas which the Palestinians were forced to renounce to us against their wishes, we became embroiled in our present impossible domestic and external situation. This time, let us show wisdom, rather than insisting on being in the right. Let us put an end to these demonstrations, which seem to be getting out of hand, and accept the facts on the ground. Only in this way will we be able to salvage at least something of the vision for which we have made such great sacrifices." The Dor Hemshech representative, who was on the panel with Aharon Barak, became very worked up at the latter's comments, which he called "a declaration of capitulation, the upshot of general weakness, by the most senior representative of the Oslo generation still with us. Under his leadership, the Supreme Court steered the country from a Zionist nation state to a state of its citizens, lacking backbone and the determination to exist. He is the last person to lecture us and tell us that we have erred. It is this miscreant who has erred and erred, and Jewish history, which has a very long memory and is capable of judging those who have done evil in the name of the Lord, will judge him too as he deserves." Fifty-year-old Matanya Levinger's voice thundered as he proclaimed, "We have had enough of constantly being pliant, giving in time and time again, and meekly accepting facts on the ground. Our people, even during periods of pogroms and the Holocaust, never despaired and never gave in. What this man

today is to succumb. And I hereby proclaim that this will never happen. The tumultuous demonstrations which took place today are just the beginning of the path that will lead us back to normality. There is no way that the Land of Israel will become the land of Palestine; we will not allow people who have 23 countries of their own to devour the Jewish people's only country, and we will not allow the goyim in our midst to dictate our future to us."

The program's moderator interrupted Levinger's outburst in order to read out a note which he had been handed as a matter of urgency. "It is my sad duty to inform you," said the moderator, his voice quivering, "that an explosion took place a few minutes ago in Shefaram, where the President of the State, the Speaker of the Knesset, and other notables, including Jewish figures, were celebrating the cancellation of the independence festivities. The police report that there have been dozens of casualties. At this stage it is not known whether the President and the Speaker are among the casualties. Our political correspondent reports that the Prime Minister is already making his way to the location of the attack by helicopter, and he has given instructions that if it becomes clear that this was a deliberate attack, a state of national emergency is to be declared, together with a general curfew. I'm sorry - I am being informed through my earphone that all those sitting at the table in Shefaram were injured, apparently by a bomb placed underneath the table. From Amman the spokesman of the State of Palestine is reporting that the army of this State has been ordered to move up from the Jordan, the location of the border according to the permanent settlement, in the direction of western Lower Samaria in order to offer assistance to their Arab brethren in Israel. Our military correspondent adds that troop movements are being observed in Egypt and Syria also. Our political correspondent, who is in touch with senior figures in the American administration, has just updated us, reporting that President Ontschenklos will shortly address Congress in order to make an important announcement. And an IDF spokesman has announced that because of the situation, citizens are asked not to leave their homes, to check the condition of their shelters, and to constantly monitor radio and television broadcasts in case announcements are made directly concerning the public's safety."



Arab Autonomy

Hana Swaid

In 2025, relations between the State of Israel (the Jewish People's state) and the Arab population in the Galilee and the so-called Triangle (totaling some 2.2 million people) have been settled by the introduction of Arab self-rule within the State of Israel, which has become a federal state. This agreement was achieved with the aid of the neighboring countries which are on friendly terms with both parties - Palestine and Jordan.

The background to this development was the Arab-Israeli population's unsuccessful attempts to achieve an acceptable form of citizenship and become integrated in civil society, whilst in the process achieving full equality before the law. The Arab population's desire to participate in the country's political, social, economic, and cultural life fell on deaf ears, even among liberal and open-minded circles of Israeli society. Both the parties of the political Left and the liberal-minded Jewish-Zionist parties tended to patronize the Arab population, expecting them to behave as inferiors towards their masters.

Even after trying to apply pressure on the Israeli establishment by means of boycotts and separatism, the Arabs continued to be treated with contempt and disdain. In the wake of violent clashes which took place between the Arab population of the Galilee and the Triangle and the security forces against the background of the expropriation of Arab land and the bulldozing of homes, establishment circles decided to look for a formula which would safeguard Israel's territorial integrity on the one hand, while severing ties and preventing friction and escalation with the country's Arab population on the other. Israel's neighbors, Palestine and Jordan, which had close and diverse economic ties with it and feared that any disturbances among the Arab (Palestinian) population in Israel would spill over into their own countries, decided to intervene in order to help find a solution.

The formula which was ultimately accepted by both sides involved the granting of autonomy or self-rule to the Arab population in those areas with a majority Arab population (mainly in the Galilee with a Wadi Ara 'panhandle' and the Triangle). In practical terms, self-rule meant that the Arabs would independently administer their own civil society (planning and construction, cultural and social affairs, legal system, as well as a number of other civil domains), while security, foreign affairs and foreign trade would continue to be handled by the federal Israeli government.

The Story of the Self-Rule Areas

Menachem Leibowitz



November 2001

The national unity government under Prime Minister Barak has reached the point of implementing the first stage of the agreement with Syria. At this stage, Israel is due to start withdrawing its forces to within two kilometers of the lower slopes of the Golan Heights. Actual implementation of the withdrawal depends on a positive outcome to the referendum in Israel. Mass demonstrations by supporters as well as opponents of the agreement lead to violent clashes. People on both sides sustain injuries, but so far there have been no real casualties. Ultimately public pressure by the majority and the outcome of the referendum, in which a massive majority votes for withdrawal, result in both opponents of withdrawal and the Golan settlers being forced to accept the majority opinion. Despite some local pockets of non-violent resistance, the stage of withdrawal from the Golan Heights begins.

March 2002

The new Center Party submits a parliamentary bill for the separation of religion and State, precipitating the first real government crisis. The ultraorthodox/religious bloc tries unsuccessfully to bring down the national unity government. The agreement between New Likud and One Israel that was reached when the government was set up, in order to prevent smaller coalition parties from being able to "threaten" to bolt the government as a tactic for extracting advantages for themselves, now bear fruit. A majority in the government votes to set up the Malchidor Commission on Religion and State, with the participation of representatives from the various religious streams. The main topic that the Commission must tackle is conversion to Judaism in Israel, an area which has become increasingly problematic in the wake of the increased numbers of immigrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Rabbinate's inability to keep pace with the massive numbers of conversions that must be performed in Israel. Other topics covered by the Malchidor Commission's mandate include recognizing marriage registrars who do not belong to the Rabbinate, proper organized and recognized conversions in the CIS performed with the full cooperation of all streams of Judaism, the official recognition of all streams and denominations of Judaism in Israel by all constituent parts of the government and the establishment, civil marriages, and other related matters. Official representatives of the religious parties and the religious establishment are unwilling to sit on the Commission, but young rabbis from the settlements

and the Religious Kibbutz Movement do join it. Mass ultraorthodox and secular demonstrations are held as the Commission begins its sessions in Israel, and at the same time more mass demonstrations take place in the U.S.A. outside the Israel Embassy in Washington. The bill to revoke the direct election of the Prime Minister is defeated as a result of common vested interests on the part of the small parties, Israel's Prime Minister, Sharak, and his "personal bodyguard," Amon. At the same time the country's leading politicians spearhead a plan to change its electoral system from a proportional one to a region-based one.

January 2003

As signs appear that the Malchidor Commission is nearing agreement, extremist religious elements issue threats against the lives of the Commission's members. The religious/ultraorthodox parties resign from the coalition, establishing a religious/ultraorthodox alliance to run in the May 2003 elections. A bomb goes off in Jerusalem at the Conservative Rechter Center, but there are no casualties. The previously unknown "Keepers of the Faith" organization claims responsibility for the attack, and threatens action against members of the Malchidor Commission. Intimidating telephone calls are made to the Reform Movement's Center in Jerusalem. The General Security Service provides protection for all of the Malchidor Commission's members and the heads of the non-Orthodox streams of Judaism in Israel. New Likud and One Israel announce their intention of forming a government of national unity after the elections. The real race is between Garon and Sharak, the respective heads of their movements, with the key campaign issue involving the social and economic spheres. Polls show New Likud to be gaining supporters from Shas, the New Center Party from Meretz, and One Israel from the Russian parties which want to join one of the larger parties. The main reason for Sharak's edge over Garon in the polls is his aggressive opposition to the ultraorthodox/religious block. The Arab parties join together to form a single bloc headed by Dibi.

May 2003

Sharak is elected Prime Minister. The New Center Party triples its performance at the expense of Meretz. Between them, New Likud and One Israel gain 25% more seats than in the previous parliament, the extra coming from the Russian parties and Shas. The Arab bloc doubles its number of seats. The ultraorthodox/religious bloc loses 10% of its representation. The small parties

disappear as a result of the higher minimum performance required.

June 2003

Overnight a coalition is set up between New Likud, One Israel, the New Center, and the Religious Party which withdraws from the ultraorthodox/religious bloc, leaving both the Arab bloc and the ultraorthodox bloc in opposition.

2004-2005

Enormous sums are being invested in Israel and its neighbors, tourism is booming, unemployment is almost negligible, and social gaps start to shrink in response to massive injections of finance in the social and economic spheres. At the same time, the ultraorthodox bloc enlists the support of the ultraorthodox community worldwide to provide massive support for its educational establishments in the wake of the strict and unambiguous criteria which have been issued for the equitable allocation of public funds to all institutions in Israel. The ultraorthodox institutions begin to shed their dependence on establishment handouts, as the ultraorthodox sector moves towards actual self-segregation. At the same time, the Israeli government recognizes the right of those bodies which represent the ultraorthodox and the Arabs in Israel to self-administer their own social and educational affairs, enabling these population groups to run their own sectors on an equitable footing with the country's other residents. In parallel, the Malchidor Commission submits its conclusions to the government as recommendations for future policy.

2006

Marathon Israeli government meetings debate the recommendations of the Malchidor Commission. The sessions are closed to the media, and there are no leaks. The ultraorthodox hold a mass fast, threatening to break away from the rest of the country. Giant secular demonstrations take place in support of the government, which issues a communiqué advocating compromise between Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jewry. At a mass demonstration held at Levin Square, three fragmentation grenades are thrown into the packed crowd, killing 64 and injuring a further 371. During the evening, the demonstrators manage to catch the three men who threw the grenades. Although the security forces manage

prevent the lynching of the assailants, they sustain serious injuries. Tens of thousands of demonstrators march towards Ganei Yerek, the neighboring ultraorthodox town. IDF forces are deployed to bar their way, preventing them from entering Ganei Yerek; despite rioting in which the IDF clash with demonstrators, the demonstrators are dispersed by the security forces. The Israeli government declares a state of national emergency, announcing its acceptance of the Malchidor Commission recommendations and asking for Knesset endorsement. Under the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Yibrael Tau, and his Sephardic counterpart, Rabbi Takshi Horon, Israel's Chief Rabbinate remains on the sidelines, contrary to its previous position in opposition to the Commission's recommendations. Rioting has occurred throughout the country in many localities, resulting in bloodshed, with loss of life and many others sustaining injuries. As a result, any further pronouncements by the Rabbinate concerning matters of State and religion would trigger further rioting, fanning the flames which are already burning at diverse locations throughout the country, albeit on a small scale.

Malchidor Commission recommendations:

- * Civil marriage to be approved in Israel.
- * Conversions to Judaism to be carried out throughout the world by all denominations using an accepted procedure, with a final test by a joint rabbinical committee.
- * The "nationality" entry in Israeli IDs to be scrapped.

In a majority vote, the Knesset endorses the Commission's recommendations. Those who vote against the recommendations (the coalition withdrawing the whip and allowing its constituent parties to vote as they see fit) include the Religious Party, the ultraorthodox parties, and the Arab bloc. The Arab bloc fears large-scale immigration of converted Jews from all over the world. The Knesset accepts the government's recommendations that a social state of emergency be declared and postpones elections to 2008. It supports the recommendation of the Constitutional Committee under its chairman, Tseridor, that elections be held in 2008 as regional elections. For obvious reasons, the Arab and ultraorthodox blocs in the Knesset oppose this approach. In Arab towns and villages, local rioting erupts. Main highways are blocked by Arab mobs, which are dispersed by the IDF and the police. In Jerusalem and Ganei Yerek, thoroughfares are blocked by ultraorthodox mobs which are dispersed by the IDF and the police. An Arab and ultraorthodox intifada develops along the country's main highways and adjacent areas, with many people being injured

and killed. The Knesset approves the electoral regions: 10 of them have an Arab majority, while 12 have an ultraorthodox majority. The basis for these regions is the number of inhabitants in each region. A parliamentary committee is set up under the chairman of the Knesset's Interior Committee, which for each year in which elections are to be held, has the power to change the electoral regions in accordance with their number of inhabitants. A process of internal migration begins, with people moving from one region to another. As a result, on the eve of the 2008 elections there are already 14 electoral regions with an absolute Arab majority, and 11 electoral regions with an ultraorthodox majority (moderate religious people have moved from ultraorthodox regions to others). The government representatives coordinating the talks with the Arabs are Geres and Peilin, while Tariq Garon (?) and Lavid Tevi represent the government in coordinating talks with the ultraorthodox.

2008 after the elections

The Israeli government allows the ultraorthodox and Arab regions to run their own affairs on a self-rule basis, with the exception of foreign and defense affairs.

2025

All the tensions between the country's different sectors have subsided completely. There is a stable government with Arab and ultraorthodox representation proportional to these sector's numbers in the general population, with only four political parties. The economy is flourishing, and unemployment is at an all-time low. Socio-economic gaps are shrinking as a result of investments. Socio-economically based internal migration from one region to the other becomes commonplace, irrespective of affiliation with a particular sector of the population.



The Tabernacle of Peace

Gidi Grinstein (With David Brodet and Dr. Mor Altschuler)

On the eve of Jerusalem Day, in the month of Iyar 5782 (2025), Devora Ben-Yehuda settled comfortably in her armchair. As Prime Minister of Israel, she had reason to be proud. That very morning, she had launched Israel's very first spaceship, making her country the latest member of a prestigious club of countries which controlled outer space. The astronauts who had blasted off this morning included her own daughter, Yael, a former fighter pilot, who gave her mother many moments of pleasure mingled with nagging fears. The Prime Minister smiled. She remembered her days as a quiet, obedient girl; her revolt, as she called her entry into politics, came later, after her parents had passed away. As she remembered her mother and father, the Prime Minister closed her eyes. She thought back 25 years, to the somber days of 2000 and her father's miracle, which happened on Jerusalem Day that year. 2000 was a dark year for Israel. The then Prime Minister had tried without success to put together a stable coalition out of those groups which supported a permanent settlement with the Palestinians. As the negotiations came ever closer to a climax and the public became aware of the extent of the compromises which would have to be made, the rejectionist camp became a broad-based, popular movement, comprising a good part of the Jewish population.

There was great astonishment at the announcement that Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat had, after protracted and exhausting negotiations, managed to come up with a final settlement. Despite the experts' prediction that it would be impossible to bridge the gaps between the two sides, the two leaders did manage to reach an agreement. The price for both sides was high - each side had to make compromises over central elements in its own national narrative. During the period leading up to the Israeli referendum, what had happened in the summer of 1995 was repeated, with large-scale demonstrations and confrontations taking place as rejectionists blocked traffic at major intersections, burning tires and clashing with the police and army. Wracked by feelings of guilt for what had happened in the summer of 1995, the supporters of the deal also took to the streets, determined not to let the Prime Minister down this time. As both the Right and the Left geared up for a last showdown, the likelihood of a bloody confrontation loomed ever larger. Among the Palestinians, too, the rejectionists gained in strength, ever more determined to stop at nothing to stymie the process. Their supporters held massive street rallies, protesting against the Palestinian Authority's failure to stand firm. In the wake of two major terrorist outrages in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, most people were in despair: the "alliance of extremists" that they had feared most was coming true before their very eyes.

The situation teetered on the brink of the abyss. The unprecedented levels of protests seemed to be taking the country to within a stone's throw of the most vicious civil war. But then it became clear that the lessons of the past had not been

At this highly dramatic moment, a number of leading public figures from among the settlers issued the following call:

"Dear brothers and sisters: the die is cast. Our efforts to establish ourselves in the Land of Israel and to establish ourselves in the hearts of the Jewish people have failed. The Israeli public is not willing to make the sacrifices needed in order to continue to hold onto Judea and Samaria. The choice we are forced to make is a cruel one: a State of Israel without Judea and Samaria, or a civil war, destroying the State and losing the entire country in the process. We do not want there to be a civil war. Given these alternatives, we have concluded that we must mobilize all of the national camp's forces in order to prevent bloodshed. We will never forget the loss of parts of the land of our forefathers, but we are looking towards the future. These violent protests must be stopped immediately before blood is spilt."

One of the signatories to this call was Rabbi Ya'acov Ben Yehuda (Yehudovitz), the Prime Minister's father. His daughter never forgot the moment: the agonizing before the decision, the trepidation about reactions, the feeling of loss and betrayal. Although it broke his heart, her father accepted the decision at the time. He had no idea of the silver lining to this dark cloud; with a single stroke, the rabbi and his colleagues managed to turn the entire country aside from its headlong plunge into the abyss. As a result of their call, the situation on the streets quietened down. Further attempts to continue violent opposition were met by public hostility. Even in the settlements the extremists were ostracized. Stability was restored.

As the situation in Israel settled down, so too did the situation among the Palestinians. The moderates among them now realized that rejecting the agreement was likely to lead to the smashing of their national aspirations. A broad-based political front in favor of the peace process very quickly emerged. This bloc, which resulted in ratification of the agreement, would bring about the establishment of the Palestinian entity in the 21st century, after the Arafat era, with the democratization of Palestinian society.

But the call issued by the heads of the settler community had a far more profound influence. It constituted a turning point in Israeli political history, and the dawning of a new age - a period of generosity and mutual consideration. The feelings of hatred, anger, and hostility that many left-wingers had previously had for the settlers and right wing gave way to genuine feelings of deep respect for their supreme sacrifice, together with great compassion and sympathy. This was a time of listening, sensitivity, and attention. Careful not to be carried away with joy at these developments, the Israeli Arabs also adopted a moderate stance.

In the referendum, a majority of Israelis supported the permanent settlement. As settlers were evacuated to the settlement blocs remaining under Israeli sovereignty, heartrending scenes took place, but other than in a few cases, the army did not

have to intervene. It was painful for the settler population to abandon everything that an entire generation had struggled for, but in doing so they resolved to link their futures with that of the entire country. The Prime Minister sighed as she remembered the pain that accompanied the uprooting of the little towns and villages. At the time her daughter Yael, who today was blasting off into space, was five years old, the third generation of Judea and Samaria settlers. She remembered how, puzzled and confused, the little girl looked on uncomprehending as grandpa and grandma rent their garments and sat on the ground with ash on their heads, while her mother and father dug a hole in the yard in which they buried books. Looking back, had the sacrifice been worth it? The Prime Minister sighed once again. On such a festive evening, dark thoughts should be banished, she decided: The good that came out of all that pain must be borne in mind: in the wake of the agreement, Jerusalem and its environs finally came under Israel sovereignty, thus achieving closure, with international recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace. Since then, Israel's security situation had improved by leaps and bounds, as agreements and alliances were forged. Advanced technology also played its part, with the country finally becoming a member of the prestigious club of countries to have territory out in space too. Admittedly, this was landless territory, but nowadays air was also extremely valuable.

The Prime Minister smiled. Her thoughts took her back to the beginning of the third millennium and her introduction to the world of politics. She had been one of the women who urged reconciliation between the "hawks" and the "doves." The end of the struggle over land was succeeded by the "Big Bang" in Israeli politics: public figures, on both the Right and the Left, came together to form a middle-of-the-road political alliance with centrist Zionist values. The establishment of the Palestinian state injected new life into the consensus over defining the country's identity: the State of Israel is a Jewish state, whose Arab citizens are entitled to completely equal rights and at the same time acknowledge the meaning of the existence of a Jewish nation state. The Palestinians' national rights were implemented on the other side of the border, in the Palestinian entity.

In the sixty-fifth year since Israel gained independence, the centrist political alliance reiterated its commitment to safeguarding the welfare and well-being of the State of Israel in the spirit of the Zionist vision. Despite the opposition of the ultraorthodox, a social pact was drawn up governing the status of religion in the State, and guaranteeing equal rights for the Reform, Conservative and secular sectors, whose beliefs and way of life were legally recognized. The ultraorthodox sector was profoundly shaken by this loss of its monopoly over religion. There were more and more energetic protests about the old-style leadership which had led this sector into a dead end. The protests were borne along on feelings of frustration at the

grinding poverty, lack of technological education, and growing hostility on the part of the secular public, which was furious at the fact that the ultraorthodox failed to assume their fair share of the national burden. The ultraorthodox world was finally ready for a change.

At the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the quiet revolution in the lifestyle of the ultraorthodox world began to bear fruit. Important rabbis' tacit consent to the conscription of young ultraorthodox men for army or alternative community service had a far-reaching effect. These young men subsequently came home determined to acquire a technological education and integrate into the labor market. The establishment of an ultraorthodox university in 2005 solved their dilemma about falling into bad ways. Henceforth, they could study a particular subject without severing their ties with the ultraorthodox community, and without giving up their special way of life. Disagreements about issues of religion and faith could be sidestepped: at the ultraorthodox university, men and women are separated, and there is no liberal arts or Jewish studies faculty. Any such topics could be addressed at a yeshiva. Gradually the ultraorthodox sector's standard of living improved, as the community increasingly integrated in society as a whole. This development was accompanied by growing identification with the State of Israel and a desire to contribute to it and make it stronger.

There is no doubt at all that the quiet revolution which took place in the ultraorthodox world was one of the factors which made the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century into years of economic growth. What happened was that the application of brilliant minds which had been sharpened by the study of Talmudic arguments gave Israel's sophisticated industries a real shot in the arm. As a result, they put on an impressive spurt in the technological race. The economic seeds which had been planted during the years of internal rifts now bore fruit: the country's revenues grew by leaps and bounds, and what had previously been a dream now came true. Many major infrastructure projects were implemented, with rail links being established with Beersheba, Yeroham and Dimona in the south, and Tiberias and Kiryat Shmona in the north. As a result, hi-tech parks were established in localities situated in these far-flung parts of the country, where children enjoyed quality education from a young age and high-caliber health services.

As the economy evolved, so too did values. Israel's youngsters, who were able to compete successfully with the hi-tech giants worldwide, were instrumental in introducing new criteria. Quality became a highly prized value in all walks of Israeli life. Expressions such as "trust me" and "it'll be OK" came to symbolize the old obstacle course missed by none. Instead, the criteria of "perfection," "precision," and "cleanliness" percolated downwards from people working in technology via the universities to the young teachers, and ultimately to the municipalities and

government ministries too.

The map of Israel also changed as the so-called "clusters program" took shape. Many people, in pursuit of quality of life, moved to what twenty years earlier had been known as "development towns" - concentrations of social frustration and hardship. With decent public transport and communications facilities, enabling business and leisure centers to be reached easily, these localities became attractive places to live, with their pastoral scenery, peace and quiet, and space. In the information economy, where physical distance is irrelevant, many companies happily set up shop in more distant locations. After the engineers and software specialists moved in, they were followed by the legal experts and attorneys-at-law, restaurant owners and business people. No longer was there a yawning gap between the central parts of the country and its outlying areas.

The prevailing spirit of compromise and reconciliation, combined with the country's impressive economic progress, encouraged a lively public debate about the social role of the State. After protracted, stormy discussions, here too a new social pact was drawn up, requiring the State to provide educational, health, and welfare services on the level expected in western countries. It was agreed that money for these purposes would come from the budgetary surpluses which had accumulated as a result of the country's prosperity and the defense establishment's failure to use funds allocated for security. After a number of years during which the quality of the educational system and infrastructure in Arab localities was upgraded as the principle of egalitarianism was finally applied, the fruits of this development began to emerge. The improvement in infrastructure and the educational system, the opening up of large numbers of government jobs to Israel's Arabs, and the country's economic prosperity which also affected Arab villages has made Israeli Arabs into Arab Israelis, citizens who enjoy equal rights in a country which wants them as its inhabitants and whose sovereignty is acknowledged by them.

With Israel's position now unchallenged, new substance could be injected into its role as the state of the Jewish people. The leaders of the different Jewish streams or denominations in Israel have assumed the mantle of Jewish leadership worldwide, successfully making a distinction between domestic political controversies and Jewish dialogue throughout the world. Israel has become the Jewish education center, acting as a magnet for Jewish young people from all four corners of the globe. Many of them spend extended periods in the country and learn Hebrew. These young people then become envoys of Jewish education and the teaching of Hebrew in the Diaspora. The State of Israel, which was established thanks to the efforts of the Jewish people, is now presenting Diaspora Jewry with the most precious gift of all - a national and historic memory and the feeling of belonging. The era of internal peace has dawned, an era of political tolerance and the quest

for the common denominator. The dramatic call made by the settler leaders twenty-five years ago still reverberates in people's hearts - including that of the Prime Minister, Devora Ben Yehuda, teacher and a rabbi's daughter. She got up, and went over to her book cabinet. She took a Bible which her parents had given her many years ago, and opened it at her favorite passage, in the Book of Jeremiah. For her, Jeremiah was the prophet of rage and destruction, who also knew the secret of consolation. In a whisper she repeated the words (Jeremiah 23:7-8): "Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say: 'As the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt'; but: 'As the Lord liveth, that brought up and that led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them'; and they shall dwell in their own land."