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TREMORS IN ISRAEL-DIASPORA RELATIONS

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The Gap Between Publics and Elites

In democracies we like to think that the distance between publics and elites is not as great as it is, but this distance is great enough in the Jewish world today that it is becoming a matter of some importance to us. Most of the Jewish public in Israel and abroad probably have not changed much in their basic attitudes, but in Israel there has been a sea change, a great change in that segment of the political elite that is presently governing the state, a change which is moving the people of Israel to accept far more change in many areas than they ever anticipated. Many of these changes are in harmony with the sentiments of the activist Jewish communal leadership in the diaspora, but are just as surprising to many members of the Jewish public in the diaspora as they are to the Jewish public in Israel. The tremors come in great part from those in both places having to digest so many unexpected things.

Whether any of these changes are good or bad is a separate question that will not be addressed

here. Yet the fact is that we have a situation in Israel in which a political elite is pulling the country in a certain direction with relative ease, to a point where it will be extremely surprising if they do not get their own way with whatever they decide.

The most controversial dimension of the present government's policy is its apparent agreement with Syria and the United States to relinquish the Golan Heights in any peace treaty with Syria, which has generated the only significant protest with regard to the peace process that the country has seen. The protest of those opposed to the peace process with the Palestinians has been notably unsuccessful in terms of stirring things up; in terms of influencing policy it has been a dud. At the same time, there is no apparent or appreciable difference of opinion within Israel regarding the peace between Israel and Jordan. The Golan, on the other hand, has been the one area about which there has been an acceptable opposition.

The opponents of withdrawal, led by Labor

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party veterans, have taken their stand in a way that is acceptable to the Jews of Israel and they have attracted a great deal of attention and support. Yet in the end it may not make a difference; it seems that the deal is already done. The only question now is to work out the final terms, such as the final border, the length of time for the evacuation, and the continuing security components. Despite the present majority opposing evacuation, in the end I would guess that the Israeli public is going to applaud the peace, rightly or wrongly. Such is the power of leadership.

Radical Changes Lead to Tremors

As a result of these radical changes in policy on the part of the political leadership, certain tremors are taking place within the Jewish public framework both in Israel and abroad. In the diaspora there is a minority who oppose current Israeli government polity, just as there is a minority within Israel. There is an apparent majority in the diaspora who accept the policy, just as there is an apparent or working majority here. The Jewish public in the diaspora, which does not normally pay that much attention to these matters, is not going to change any policies. They are just going to go about their own business, but they will still feel the tremors.

The tremors actually come not so much from the change in policy itself, but from the kinds of ancillary issues that the change in policy allows to come forward. As long as there was a clear direction around which there was a sufficient consensus, then even if there was an argument to this or that side, the direction was clear, the consensus was clear, and other conflicts and possible sources of tension were contained and controlled within it. But if the direction of the overall thrust breaks apart, then all those other conflicts can come out of the cracks.

Can Israel Still Be a Jewish State?

One example which has particular impact on the Israel-diaspora relationship is the current debate in Israel over the future character of Israel as a Jewish state or state of the Jews. Among the political elites the matter is still clear. Perhaps 80 percent of the political elites still see Israel as a Jewish state much as they saw it ten or twenty years ago. This is not their issue right now. Their issue is the peace process and getting accepted in the Middle East. They are not particularly interested in raising the issue of Israel's Jewishness and, in fact, they would like to avoid it because it complicates the achievement of their peace project. But this is one issue that has been percolating,

certainly since the mid-1960s, and it is now able to come out through the cracks, as it were, as soon as the cracks become evident.

From as early as the 1960s, whoever was watching could see that things were developing in the direction of transforming Israel from a Jewish state to a state of the Jews, that is, a "normal" state, identified with contemporary world culture, that happens to have a Jewish majority, but at the time they were considered so outlandish in their perceptions that they did not really get a hearing. Now the division between those who want Israel to be a Jewish state in some culturally meaningful way (not necessarily defined on religious grounds) and those who want Israel to fulfill the promise of that wing of the Zionist movement that saw having a state as the key to normalization of the Jewish people, that is to say, that would enable us to become "like all the nations," is emerging as a struggle.

Even if this issue had been present before, those Jews in the diaspora who were concerned about Israel did not pay much attention to it. They did not see it as a likely issue to perturb them. They saw Israel, at the very least, as unequivocally a place whose Jewish majority wanted to have a Jewish state. Many went even further, seeing Israel's Jewishness as a surrogate for their own. They laid upon Israel the burdens that back home they laid upon their rabbis, saying, in essence, "You have to be more Jewish than we want to be because you set the tone for us. You are the example. You are the symbol that we want to present even if we are not willing to take on all of that responsibility, other than a little of the responsibility of supporting you." In the diaspora many continue to believe they have been supporting Israel with their contributions to a far greater extent than has been true since the early 1950s.

How the Tremor Spreads

The present state of Israel-diaspora relations rests upon habits. Among those habits is the notion that Israel will be the surrogate for the Jewishness of much of the diaspora. Now many Israelis are saying that Israel does not want to be the surrogate. It wants to be like all the other nations, who also do not act as surrogates.

The demand for "normalization" has become clearly enunciated by voices reported regularly, particularly in the *Jerusalem Report*, even more so than in the *Jerusalem Post*. Ze'ev Chafets writes a column arguing that position week after week, and he is far from the only one chiming that normalization is what Israelis

want and that Jews who want otherwise — in Israel or the diaspora — should get off their backs about all the rest of it. So the whole world knows the scope of the differences of opinion and of the struggle that is in the making. As this case gains momentum, a tremor goes through the whole Jewish world.

This tremor, like a tidal wave, moves outward in concentric circles. At first, only those know about it who are close to it, namely, those in Israel or who come to Israel regularly. Eventually, it begins to reach people who are not so close. It finally gets to people who do not care very much about it either. This is a different story because, while in a sense it may concern them less, it also legitimizes the problematics that their behavior provides for diaspora communities. Most of these people are not connected with Jewish life in any particular way; they are Jews who just happen to be Jews. They like Israel well enough, many consider themselves friends of Israel, but it just does not affect their own personal behavior. Suddenly they find that they are not so different (if they even think about it) from what a lot of people are demanding in Israel itself, in the holy of holies, as it were. Much of the tremor comes, or will come, from the widening of the circles in this way. In other words, it is not the earthquake but the tidal wave that comes after the earthquake that brings about the real problems of the tremor.

Israel's Post-Six-Day War Image

The present Israel-diaspora relationship was formed after the Six-Day War in 1967. In May 1967 a book appeared that then was dismissed out of hand — Georges Friedmann's *The End of the Jewish People?* In it Friedmann wrote about everything that we are seeing today, but he had the misfortune of bad timing. The book was published just before the Six-Day War, which set off its own earthquake, so everybody considered Friedmann's book nonsense. If we were to take Friedmann's book down from the shelves now, we would find enormous relevance in much of what he wrote that we so casually dismissed at that time.

Why did we dismiss it? Because of the successful war, but more importantly, because of what came after the war. The relief in the diaspora over Israel's being saved and the relief in Israel over the victory certainly had their own kind of impact. But what came after that, the good relationships that were developed between the Israelis who went out and met the diaspora and the diaspora people who came in and met Israelis, was what made it long-lasting. For twenty-five years the consensus that was forged in 1967-1968 was accept-

ed as an article of faith by a majority of the Jews in Israel and in the diaspora. The emotional and practical urges and needs evinced by the victory generated a new bond between them.

Part of that bond unquestionably was the newly expanded Israel. Here the issue was not about keeping or returning territories. Rather, it had to do with reaction to the fact that we had occupied those territories in 1967 and suddenly there were truly historic places to visit, that the cradle of Jewish religious civilization was in our hands and open to us.

Beyond that, there was a feeling that there was a whole new frontier out there and that we could work together in various ways to build that frontier, to settle it. Some people really wanted to go out and settle that frontier. Most did not, of course, not in Israel and not in the diaspora, but they were happy to follow the progress of settlement of an expanded Israel in any case. They were certainly happy to be able to visit the Old City of Jerusalem, but they were just as happy to be able to get to Mt. Hermon and to Sinai.

The aftermath of the Six-Day War transformed the diaspora image of a small, beleaguered Israel, a refugee place, which those in the diaspora who were living well had to continue to help so that the refugees could live better, into a strong place, an expansive place, a growing place. That changed the image and made Israel something even more people wanted to work for. Nothing succeeds like success.

After the Six-Day War, diaspora leaders suddenly felt that they were not merely philanthropists but were participating in Jewish history, that what they did meant something in the larger picture of Jewish continuity and Jewish history. That was the spirit of the time. It was an expansive spirit which was easily visible in the reopening of Israel's land frontier.

Israel had gone through a period in which it had settled that frontier with the 1949 borders earlier, but at that time most of the diaspora was looking elsewhere. They were not all that interested in Zionism because Zionism was for refugees. After the Six-Day War, suddenly the resettlement of these territories was exciting, even if that was not their major interest.

Redefining the Frontier

Now, suddenly, we have a dilemma in which, in order to have peace, Israel has ended that kind of expansion. In Israel, many supporters of the peace process recognize that Israel's economic growth is not dependent upon there being two more settlements on the Golan or in Judea and Samaria. Those settlements

may be nice or not nice, depending on one's point of view, but Israel's growth is going to come from economic development, the improvement of business, worldwide connections, all those things which are money-producers today, none of which have to do with putting settlements on the land.

The real question is, essentially, how can Israel retain its sense of expansiveness that will radiate not only in Israel but also in the diaspora. A good half of Israel thinks that Israel is being expansive now. To many, just because we may or may not give up settlements does not mean we will not be expansive. We read all the time that business is good, Israel is getting connections with more and more countries, a \$150 million investment in the Arava is planned to link Jordan and Israel, backed by the International Monetary Fund, the Casablanca Economic Conference is to be held — it sounds really exciting and busy here. Yet it is not clear whether this is something that can radiate beyond Israel in other ways to strengthen Israel-diaspora relationships in the same way that the previous thrust did.

There are also questions of interests. In a certain sense, among the elites, interests have converged now in ways that they did not for the previous fifteen years. More of the leadership of diaspora Jewry and the leadership in power in Israel are closer together now than they have been since the Likud-led coalition won the elections of 1977. What is amazing is the strength of the Israel-diaspora relationship that was forged on the basis of 1967 and how well those two leadership groups came together on tactical matters even after 1977 separated them in their views, certainly between 1977 and 1983, and even afterwards. The Lebanon war in 1982 jarred that relationship to some extent, but whatever their other disagreements, they stayed together on most matters because they perceived a larger shared interest. Now they do not have that problem.

From Ideological to Territorial Democracy

There is another problem of interests that affects the Jewish publics and will ultimately affect the leadership too. The interests of the Jewish publics are growing apart. Of all the diasporas, we see this most when we look at the diaspora in the United States because trends are usually more advanced there. The U.S. is larger so it generates more echoes, but in all the diasporas one sees much the same thing, either further or slightly less advanced. As the Jewish publics in those diasporas become more a part of the countries in which they live, their interests become the interests

of those countries. So, too, as Israeli Jews become more a part of the Middle East and the soil of Israel, their interests also become more separately articulated.

I described this in 1968 as a movement from ideological to territorial democracy (see my monograph *Israel: From Ideological to Territorial Democracy*). Such a movement has happened in every other new society that was founded in the modern world. The first generation was imbued, to a greater or lesser extent, with ideological fervor and sought to establish new settlements so as to build up a better society, by their lights. For example, the Puritans came to British North America in the seventeenth century to build God's kingdom on earth, what their governor, John Winthrop, referred to as "a city upon a hill." On the other hand, British Chartists went to Australia to build a secular labor commonwealth there in the mid-nineteenth century. In Israel we actually had both kinds of ideological dreamers. The socialist founders of this country, and most of the other founders too, came with strong and varied ideological notions of what kind of Jewish people they wanted to rebuild. The religious Jews, socialist or otherwise, had their own visions as well.

People born after that first generation do not have that fervor. First of all, they are not self-selected. The original settlers in all of these countries chose to come. A Puritan in England in 1620 made a choice. He could have stayed in England where he had his family, his work, and his house. He was not as comfortable as he would like to be, but could work to reform England and thereby express his ideology. Others felt England was doomed and took all the risks of crossing the ocean to establish a new England where they sought to make a new world.

The same thing happened with the Jews. There were those who chose to go where it was comfortable, even though they believed in Zionism, and there were those who were willing to risk the swamps and the malaria because they wanted to build a new way of life. Some of their children grew up imbued with their ideology, but few indeed could have developed the same spirit of dedication that came out of the self-selection of the first generation.

The Puritans in New England discovered this problem a generation after their settlement, around 1660. They had to come to grips with it directly because to be a good citizen of Puritan Massachusetts or Connecticut, one had to be a member of the Puritan church, the Congregationalist Church. To be a member of the church one had to enter into the church covenant,

which required being "called." There were two kinds of second generation Puritans, those who falsely claimed to have been "called," and those who really did want to become part of the church but had just not gotten a "calling" and would not claim one falsely, often the best of their generation. So the Puritans invented something called the half-way covenant for people who did not get a calling but who believed in the Puritan religion. They could thereby be admitted into the church and into citizenship. In essence, that was the same problem that the children and grandchildren of the founders of Israel have been facing for the past thirty years under modern conditions.

The people in Israel today are, for the most part, those who were born here, and increasingly will be, whose ties to the country do not stem from an ideological commitment but because this is their home, the land they are from. As such, their interests develop differently from the interests of the people who share an ideological fervor.

The result is that both in Israel and in the diaspora, the two publics are simply growing apart. Ultimately, their leaders will have to reflect that since they come from the same backgrounds as their publics in both places. Moreover, when things begin to grow apart, normal misunderstandings, of course, become exacerbated.

So now we are returning to the days of Georges Friedmann, only matters are even worse. For twenty-five years his words were simply ignored, they were irrelevant, but meanwhile the world moved on. Now, for example, Israel has television, with thirty or more channels on cable from around the world. Every idea that is ever heard of anywhere will find its expression in that world of television and will therefore reach Israelis as those ideas reached the Americans a generation ago.

Domination by a Secular Minority

For example, there is no question that Israel always has had a strong and very articulate secular minority. Indeed, the secular population in Israel reached 35 percent at its highest point in 1947-48. These were not people who were traditional or religious in the Orthodox sense, but people who really were secular. Today their number is down to around 20 percent, according to the surveys. But in present Israeli society they dominate the mass media almost as they please. Their equivalents dominate the mass media in every other country of the world too. Would anyone even know that church membership in the United States has been

rising regularly for the last twenty years if they looked only at the American media? Would we know about the religious revivals that are taking place in China? Today one hears more secular ideas from the secularists in Israel than was probably heard when there were nearly twice as many people of that persuasion.

Even more Israelis now fit into a category whereby they are not exactly secular but have been infected with a kind of hedonistic individualism. What they are concerned about are all those things which have been called "the good life" in the United States, an attitude that has come to Israel. That kind of view of what it means to be Jewish, like the feeling a Frenchman has for France — a matter of course rather than a matter of vision — is death for the Jewish people. Peoples like the Americans and the Jews have to have a vision that mobilizes them, otherwise they become something else — like all the nations — and their malaise, when they have one, is usually because the vision that mobilized them no longer does.

Secular Israelis often do not remain Israelis for more than a very short time. Why? Because there are better places to be to pursue one's personal interests if one really has no reason to be in Israel. The ones who, for all intents and purposes, cease to be Jews often go elsewhere, naturally. Hence, to describe those Jews seeking normalization as being simply a different kind of Jew would not be accurate. They would not remain Jews at all.

Some Basic Realignments

What is likely to come out of all this? First of all, almost all of the old alignments in the Jewish world are going to crumble, along with many of the old institutions. Both in the United States and Israel, there are people who are talking about new institutions in concrete ways. This talk is as yet underdeveloped but it is happening.

Two basic alignments are going to come into being in this new Jewish world. There are going to be those who want to see a Jewish future and there are going to be those who are happy that Jews can live any which way they want and see no particular need to have any kind of Jewish future. There will be those who see as important and who want to be part of what in North America is called Jewish continuity, who at the same time want Israel to be some kind of a Jewish commonwealth, that is to say, a state whose norms and purposes are Jewish, as well as those for whom all these matters are really incidental. In Israel, these latter are the ones who argue that Israel should become a civil society like

all others. To be a civil society, which is a good thing for larger countries in the world, is to claim, in effect, that anything goes as long as people play the game by the rules, and there are those now who are arguing in those terms.

A second divide has to do with those people who lose their nerve and those people who do not. In both Israel and the diaspora there are those people who are losing their nerve in various ways when it comes to questions of Jewish survival. They are tired of the fight. It has been a long fight and it continues, and they have other things that they are more interested in doing, but the principal thing is that they are tired and are losing their nerve. On the other side are those who have not lost their nerve.

Again, this does not divide in the normal ways. There are those people who oppose the peace process who say the peace-makers have lost their nerve, and there are those people who support the peace process who say, "We have to take all these risks because it is the only way we are going to survive and we have to have steady nerves in order to do it." Neither of these groups have lost their nerve.

The new alignment will consist of those people who keep their nerve and who want some kind of Jewish continuity and Jewish commonwealth, as opposed to those people who have lost their nerve and who want to live in a state and society where "anything goes," an outlook which in Israel has been dignified by the otherwise important and even hallowed term of "civil society."

This division is going to cut through both Israel and the diaspora, and it will require an institutional structure that can accommodate at least those people who keep their nerve and who are concerned about Jewish civilization. They will need an institutional structure that can consolidate and strengthen the people on that side of the line and at the same time not allow the line to grow so deep that they cannot continue to have interrelations and influence on the people on the other side of the line. This is not going to be an easy task and may require at least a generation of trial and error before the institutions emerge to help those of us who are concerned with continuity and commonwealth to continue our efforts.

While we are already beginning to develop those institutions, one problem is that we may not know exactly what institutions to develop. For example, the World Zionist Organization has set up a committee to reform itself. According to one position, the WZO should wait until 1997, have a big 100th anniversary celebration at the last Zionist Congress in Basle, and then close its doors. On the other hand, perhaps this organization, which has a distinguished record of achievement, can be redesigned, as was the March of Dimes when it switched its focus from polio victims to those with birth defects.

The Council of Jewish Federations and the United Jewish Appeal in the United States also are currently in the process of thinking about restructuring. They may do better in the end, but their start appears to be based entirely on last generation's thinking, which is certainly not going to do the job. They would be better to let things alone and not go through all the upheavals that are attendant upon reorganization than to do what they initially had in mind.

It does not seem prudent to destroy existing institutions because in a period of trial and error there is a need for some continuity. Therefore, existing institutions that play a role, which may not be an optimal role but is still a reasonable role, deserve to be retained, not just out of sentiment, but for the functional virtue of being able to deliver at least as much as they do. If we tear them down there is not going to be even that much delivered. This is not always a very popular position because it is much easier to suggest radical changes. But there are going to be enough changes that take place within existing institutions to make everybody happy.

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