
Daniel Pipes

I shall interpret the symposium's delicately phrased question to ask this: What significance has the debate now taking place among the Jews of Israel about the continued need for a sovereign Jewish state? Others in this symposium, better qualified than I, no doubt will discuss the internal Jewish discussion over the future of Zionism. I will restrict myself to the external implications of the loud argument now taking place.

Broadly put, two Arab strategies exist to eliminate the State of Israel. The dominant one through half a century, and even today, has been a violently destructive one: Get rid of Israel through a combination of military, economic and political means. In the 1950s this meant invading the country and "throwing the Jews into the sea." In the 1960s it meant mounting a guerrilla campaign to force them out, like the French from Algeria. In the 1970s it meant using oil revenues to strangle the country. Today it means acquiring weapons of mass destruction. This frontal assault continues, but has few notable successes.

A second, less obvious strategy has always existed, lurking furtively in the background; it holds that the Arabs should take over the Israeli state from within. This integrationist approach accepts the notion of a binational state and looks ahead to the time when Arabs will achieve parity or even outnumber Jews. Rather than assert the petty sovereignty of a Palestinian Authority, it would have the Arabs under Israel's control petition to become citizens of the state. Instead of boycotting the Jewish state, this strategy would embrace it and change it through contact—for example, making the use of Arabic, Israel's other official language, more central to its daily business.

The debate over Zionism among Jewish Israelis offers enormous encouragement to partisans of both these strategies. To those who would destroy Israel, it signals the demoralization of the Zionist enemy. The powerful state

of yesteryear, prepared to do whatever was necessary to defend Israel's interests, seems to be no more. Arabs may once have paid no heed to developments in Israel, but are now closely attuned to them. They have picked up on the transformation of the Israeli will. For example, note a remarkable statement by the head of the Hizbullah, a Lebanese Islamist organization. In October 1997, shortly after Israeli troops killed this man's son, an interviewer asked him this question: "Are your emotions not running away with you? Hizbullah is only a small resistance movement, and Israel is one of the biggest military powers in the Middle East." The Hizbullah chieftain's response bears close attention:

You do not seem to be watching what happens.... How do you interpret the Zionists' behavior after each military debacle in the occupied territories in southern Lebanon? The lamentations in Zionist society can no longer be ignored. [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu said recently: "I am prepared to withdraw from southern Lebanon, if someone guarantees that Hizbullah does not follow us to northern Israel." Just think what these words mean—coming from a head of state of what you consider as one of the biggest military powers in the region.... Netanyahu no longer demands a peace agreement with Lebanon. He no longer demands a security zone, he only wants us to leave him alone.

He then disparaged the Israeli army and warned Netanyahu that his troops will not leave Israel alone.

Plenty of evidence indicates that other of Israel's enemies have picked up the same signals and no longer fear the Jewish state. Saddam Hussein threatens Israel at will, sometimes even launching missiles at it, then watches as its citizens scurry for cover. Other Arab leaders disdain and threaten Israel, as well. Note, for example, comments made by Osama El-Baz, the Egyptian diplomat directly involved longer in the peace process than anyone else (indeed, since its very inception in 1974), as quoted by *Yedi'ot Aharonot*: "If you Israelis allow the occupation to continue, you will be forsaking your entire moral base, which means that the Holocaust of the Jewish

people could recur sometime in the future.” El-Baz subsequently denied making the threat, seemingly of nuclear weapons, but it rings true.

The Israeli debate over Zionism also encourages the second school too, the integrationists. It shows their success at implanting a non-Zionist way of thinking into the Israeli body politic. The process of integration must be fairly advanced when the head of the Labor Party justifies terrorism against his country, saying he would do the same were he a Palestinian; when a leading retired general compares soldiers’ patches bearing the Star of David with the Nazi swastika; when a television series commemorating Israel’s fiftieth anniversary portrays the state as morally questionable; and when a whole school of historians devotes itself to proving that Israel was born in sin.

Jewish uncertainty about the validity of the Zionist enterprise, then, encourages Israel’s enemies, both those who would destroy it violently, and those who would take it over quietly. It is hard to imagine a more suicidal course.

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