

“Israel & the Future of Zionism”

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Ha'aretz

December 2006

MICHAEL CROMARTIE: Besides being a professor of law at George Mason University, he is also a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. He has written numerous books. We are very privileged to have these two gentlemen, and I'll introduce Ari after Peter. I give you now Peter Berkowitz.

DR. PETER BERKOWITZ: Thank you. In one respect at least, Zionism's future does not differ from the future of any other grand social and political movement. Like other such movements, Zionism's future can't be discussed reliably without understanding something of its present and past. Today I'm going to bring into focus certain features of Zionism's present and past, particularly the ideas that animated it.

I want to begin with three controversies in the present, or rather, three manifestations of a single protracted controversy; or better still, three appeals to a persistent, ugly prejudice about Zionism's animating ideas.

On March 23, 2006, the *London Review of Books* published “The Israel Lobby” by University of Chicago political scientist John Mearsheimer and Harvard University political scientist Stephen Walt. Mearsheimer and Walt put forward the incendiary claim that the past 30 years or so of American foreign policy in the Middle East, particularly the decision to invade Iraq in 2003, had been decisively determined by the Israel lobby. American foreign policy today, they argue, is no longer a function of a realistic assessment of American strategic interests — military, diplomatic, economic — because it's been hijacked by Israel and its supporters in the U.S.

Moreover, argue Mearsheimer and Walt, the Israel lobby has led American foreign policy astray not innocently but under false pretenses. The Israel lobby insists Israel has a moral claim on the U.S.: that the U.S. ought to give high priority to Israel's interest because, among other reasons, Israel is a liberal democracy in a sea of authoritarian governments. But, maintained Mearsheimer and Walt, Israel on moral grounds is undeserving of U.S. support. Israel, in their judgment, is guilty of betraying the essential principles of liberal democracy. This is the core of that part of their argument. I quote here:

"Some aspects of Israeli democracy are at odds with core American values. Unlike the U.S., where people are supposed to enjoy equal rights irrespective of race, religion or ethnicity, Israel was explicitly founded as a Jewish state, and citizenship is based on the principle of blood kinship. Given this, it is not surprising its 1.3 million Arabs are treated as second-class citizens or that the recent Israeli government commission found that Israel behaves in a "neglectful and discriminatory manner" towards them. Its democratic status is also undermined by its refusal to grant the Palestinians a viable state of their own or full political rights."

This paragraph from Mearsheimer and Walt, whose purpose is to deny or cast into doubt Israel's liberal and democratic credentials and call into question the vitality of Zionism, is a tissue of lies and malicious distortions.

First, Israel is not founded on the principle of blood kinship. To be sure, it is a Jewish state, and the law of return grants automatic citizenship to Jews, but Israel's declaration of independence proclaims, "Israel will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex. It will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture. It will safeguard the holy places of all religions, and it will be faithful to the principles of the charter of the United Nations." Moreover, non-Jews can become naturalized citizens in Israel in accordance with procedures similar to those in other countries.

Second, as in many liberal democracies, certainly in the U.S., some minorities — in Israel's case, its Arab citizens — lag behind the majority; in some cases far behind. The lags in income, literacy and health of its Arab majority are indeed an urgent problem in Israel, not only for Israel's Arab citizens, but also for Israeli society as a whole. But contrary to

Mearsheimer and Walt's argument, these lags have many sources and not because Arab citizens lack equality of rights, the defining feature of a liberal democracy.

Third point, as Mearsheimer and Walt write, a recent Israeli government commission [released Sept. 1, 2003] found Israel behaves in a neglectful and discriminatory manner towards its minority Arab population. This should be seen as a triumph of liberal democracy in Israel, the effort by the government to confront its own democratic inadequacies, face up to its failure, make good on the promises of its declaration of independence, and find democratic means to remedy the problem.

And fourth, while it's true Israel's democratic status is threatened by the absence of a viable Palestinian state, Israel more than any state in the world stands to benefit from the creation of one. The majority, perhaps a substantial majority, of Israelis recognize this. Today, however, the chief obstacle of the creation of a viable Palestinian state is not Israel, but the Palestinians' refusal to renounce terror, to develop their economy, to protect individual rights and to establish democratic political institutions.

While it runs contrary to the conventional wisdom, it's no exaggeration to say the freest Arabs in the entire Middle East are Israel's Arab citizens. Unfortunately, Mearsheimer and Walt have lent their prestige to nurse a prejudice that reverberates worldwide. The equation of Zionism with racism lives on and remains a respectable opinion in cultivated and influential circles.

This equation — between Zionism as embodied in the state of Israel and racism — has always been outrageous, but the outrageous equation does take advantage of genuine tensions within Zionism, particularly between the claims of Jewish nationalism and the claims of freedom and equality at the heart of liberal democracy. In facing this tension, Zionism is not distinctive, since tensions arise between all forms of nationalism — German, French, American, Japanese, Palestinian — and the claims of liberal democracy when these nationalisms seek expression in a sovereign state.

Zionism is distinctive in its genesis and in the manner it's grappled with these tensions. Before the 19th century, Zionism as we now think of it barely existed. Notwithstanding a few scattered Jewish communities in what is now Israel, Jews have lived in exile or

dispersion since roughly 7 BCE, when the Second Temple fell to the conquering Romans. Before the Enlightenment, before the French Revolution, before the spread of the liberal and large-sense idea that human beings are by nature free and equal, virtually all Jews regarded themselves, in the first place, as Jews. This was not peculiar. Christians before the Enlightenment regarded themselves in the first place as Christians, and Muslims in the first place thought of themselves as Muslims. It's only with the Enlightenment that some members of these faith communities began to think of themselves as human beings first and Jews, Christians or Muslims second.

Before the Enlightenment, virtually all Jews recognized the authority of the Torah, or Jewish law. Orthodox Judaism as much as reformed Judaism is a product of reaction to the Enlightenment. From the point of view of traditional Jewish authorities, dispersion or Diaspora was punishment for Jewish sins. One day it would be terminated, but that day would arrive in God's good time with the coming of the Messiah and the return by divine intervention of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland. Jews never ceased longing and praying for the return to Zion, the hill in Jerusalem on which the temple was built. But the reestablishment of Jewish life in the Land of Israel of which they, traditional Jews before the Enlightenment, fervently dreamt was primarily a religious life. Religious Zionism, patient not activist, pious not enlightened, otherworldly not this worldly, is as old as Diaspora Jewry. It's only with the Enlightenment that Jews began to imagine a Jewish life that was not strictly religious.

It was only in the 19th century that some Jews began to take the matter of the return to Zion into their own hands. To be sure, the first Jewish reaction to the upheavals created by the Enlightenment and the spread of liberal principles was not Zionism. Initially, some Jews called for the reform of Jewish religion in order to harmonize Judaism with the demands of liberal modernity.

Other Jewish thinkers opted for assimilation: shedding religious belief altogether and merging into general culture. Both reformers and assimilators took it for granted that as the Enlightenment unfolded, Jews would increasingly enjoy the rights of full citizenship in the various nation-states of Europe where they lived.

Modern Zionism represents a third Jewish response to the challenges of enlightened and liberal modernity. Modern Zionism, or more accurately, political Zionism, is — I'll quote here a formal definition — "the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel." It stems from several sources — intellectual, cultural and ideological — the most important of which was the commingling of ancient Jewish longings with Enlightenment and liberal sentiments, socialist economic ideas, and nationalist aspirations.

But political Zionism was jolted into existence in the 19th century in response to two shattering political events. The first, taking place in the East, was the Russian pogroms of 1881 following the assassination of Czar Alexander II [when Jews were blamed] for the czar's murder, and anti-Jewish rioting erupted in what is now Ukraine. Thousands of Jewish homes were destroyed, and families thrown into poverty. Pogroms set a mass exodus of millions into motion. Importantly, young Jewish intellectuals, brought up in traditional Jewish homes but exposed to the socialist ideas in the air at the time, were left to search for new forms of social and political existence.

The second catalyzing event taking place in the West was the Dreyfus affair. A little more than a decade later, in 1894, Captain Albert Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army, was court-martialed on flimsy evidence and in blatant disregard for fair procedure. He was convicted of treason and sent to Devil's Island. Five years later, when exonerating evidence came to light, Dreyfus was re-tried and re-convicted, and eventually pardoned by the French president. But the vicious waves of anti-Semitism generated by the Dreyfus affair shattered the confidence of many assimilated and assimilating European Jews that Europe would ever welcome them to the ranks of full citizenship.

The Russian pogroms of 1881 and the Dreyfus affair of the mid-1890s differed in a crucial respect. In Russia, Zionism arose in large measure in response to the failure of the Enlightenment to arrive. In contrast, Zionism arose in Western Europe in response to the Enlightenment's failure, 100 years after it arrived, to deliver on its promise to accept Jews as men and women, full citizens equally endowed with individual rights. The most important Zionist voice coming from Russia was Leon Pinsker. Pinsker was born in 1821 and trained as a physician. He was active in Jewish affairs and hopeful the Enlightenment

would one day come to Russia, enabling Jews to assimilate into Russian life and embrace Russian culture as their own.

The Russian pogroms of 1881 dashed his hopes. Appalled by the horrible spectacle of collaboration among common people, cultural elites and the government, and by indiscriminate violence against Jewish communities, Pinsker left Russia for Europe. In 1882 he came out with the first great work of political Zionism, called *Auto-Emancipation: Appeal to His People by a Russian Jew*.

Pinsker distills his argument into three simple propositions in the concluding summary of his book. First proposition: The Jews are not a living nation; they are everywhere aliens. Therefore, they are despised. Second proposition: the civil and political emancipation of the Jews is not sufficient to raise them in the estimation of the peoples [of the world]. Third proposition: the proper and only remedy would be the auto-emancipation of the Jews — their emancipation as a nation among nations by the acquisition of a home of their own.

In this summary Pinsker does not identify the name or location of that home. Nor does he do more than to allude to the process of organizing the Jewish people for the purpose of creating a Jewish state. These tasks fall to Theodore Herzl. Herzl is the true spiritual father of political Zionism in terms of his influence. Austrian-born and thoroughly assimilated, Herzl studied law, which he quickly gave up for journalism. His hopes were for Jewish assimilation; he was one of those whose hopes were dashed by the Dreyfus affair. In 1896 he published *The Jewish State*, which is a seminal work of political Zionism. Enlightened, liberal and nationalist sentiments pervaded.

The root of the Jewish problem, according to Herzl, was that despite their loyalty, sacrifice and economic and cultural contributions in all the countries in which they lived, Jews had failed to achieve assimilation. The reason for their failure was that the dominant national culture everywhere refused to accept them. Rights could make Jews equal in the eyes of the law, but it could not command equality in the hearts of their fellow citizens. The only honorable and effective response to these harsh truths about the limits of enlightenment and liberalism was for Jews to form a nation-state of their own.

In *The Jewish State*, Herzl insists Palestine is the Jews' "unforgettable historical homeland." It was Herzl who firmly set the course of world Zionism on the path to the creation of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. It was Herzl who created the organizational structure, and it was Herzl who recognized such a state would require Jews to cast off centuries of habits and attitudes and become artisans, manufacturers and farmers, among the many other occupations necessary to run a modern nation-state.

Zionism in his eyes was justified, though, not only by what it would do for the Jews. "The world will be liberated by our freedom," Herzl proclaimed, "and enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. Whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind." But, some argue against Herzl, political Zionism could never be enough. Physical, material and political existence, in the last analysis, was inseparable from spiritual existence.

Foremost among the cultural Zionists was Ahad Ha'am. According to the cultural Zionists, political programs and ideals must be grounded in national culture. Ha'am urged cultural renewal based on a conception of Judaism "that shall have as its focal point the ideal of our nation's unity, its renaissance, and its free development to the expression of universal human values in the terms of its own distinctive spirit." [*The Law of the Heart*, 1894.] But, argued the religious Zionists, cultural Zionism could never be enough, for the deepest dimension of Jewish culture was the Torah. When taken seriously, the Torah demanded to be read not just as another literary creation, however profound and influential. No, it demanded to be read and taken seriously as God's law, dictated to Moses and binding on God's chosen people.

The imperatives of Jewish faith, according to religious Zionists, require national renaissance in Israel. And national renaissance in Israel in turn will bring about the renewal of Jewish faith. All of these strands went into the formation of Zionism that helped create Israel.

The tensions within political Zionism give rise not only to the development of cultural Zionism and religious Zionism as a religious alternative to Zionism, but also give rise to the great secular challenge to Zionism within Israel known as post-Zionism.

To put post-Zionism in some perspective, I want to return to Israel's declaration of independence. Among other things, this declaration proclaimed "the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign state."

In the declaration's appeal to the Jewish people's "traditional and historic attachment to the land of Israel on the one hand, and to universal principles of justice and natural right on the other," the declaration gives expression to conflicting currents of religious, nationalist, liberal and democratic [thought] running through modern Zionism. The loss of faith among some Israelis today in the ability of Israel to harmonize these conflicting elements — in other words, the loss of faith in the Zionist dream — is what goes by the name of post-Zionism. While Israeli authors and artists once sang the praises of hardy settlers, brave soldiers and wise statesmen, much post-Zionist literature routinely portrays Zionism as a repugnant ideal and a Jewish state as a miserable country. Post-Zionist scholars have sought to show Zionism is in essence an anti-democratic and even totalitarian ideology. Post-Zionism activists have sought to abolish the use of the symbols and institutions of the state to promote Jewish culture. The cultural and educational resources of the state should instead be reserved, in the post-Zionist dispensation, for advocating the universal goods of democracy and human rights.

No one familiar with the history of Zionism can fail to be pained and alarmed by the attacks on Zionism waged by some of Israel's best and brightest. If you step back and view it generously, post-Zionism can be seen as one of political Zionism's successes, certainly one of its offspring. Post-Zionism is not only part of a larger culture war and political program, it also embraces a thoroughly secular conception of the good life, [visible in] the World Cup soccer obsession, the beaches crowded every Sabbath and holiday, the Tel Aviv nightclub scene. Post-Zionism places hedonism over heroism and modern consumerism over piety. It reflects a desire on the part of many Israelis to cast off the rigor and, in their eyes, rigmarole of Judaism. But in all these things, post-Zionism follows a powerful strand in Zionism, which sought to enable Jews to live like all the nations. Post-Zionism differs from Zionism not in wishing to live like all the nations, but in believing that in order to live like all the nations, Israel must slough off also, and especially, the burdensome heritage of Zionism itself.

Modern Zionism is, then, a dynamic but vulnerable synthesis. By giving priority to the sovereignty of the Jewish people, it set aside the sovereignty of the Torah. As I mentioned, Israel's founding declaration promised "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex." In making this big promise, it rendered suspect all forms of particularism, including Jewish particularism. Post-Zionism draws on all these themes, but it often does so recklessly and resentfully. It radicalizes Zionism's quest for normalcy, the desire to live like all the nations, and the commitment to the natural freedom and equality of all human beings. But it has a tendency to forget what is central — the conviction that a Jewish state, with a respect for the Jewish tradition and special concern for the fate of its people, can also, because of that respect and special concern, protect freedom and equality for all.

The contemporary struggle between Zionism and post-Zionism is not a struggle between Zionism and its antithesis, but rather a struggle within Israel's soul between competing principles out of which Zionism was forged.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you for coming, Ari.

ARI SHAVIT: It's a pleasure and honor to be here. Let me begin with a confession. I'm a Zionist. I'm a critical Zionist. Sometimes I'm a skeptical Zionist. Much of the time I'm an anxious Zionist. Almost always I'm a tormented Zionist. I know our sins too well. I know our faults and our flaws extremely well. And yet at the end of the day I'm a Zionist.

Why am I a Zionist? Because I am a Jew, a secular Jew. As a secular Jew I'm committed to Jewish life. As a secular Jew I'm committed to the existence of a non-Orthodox Jewish civilization. As a secular Jew I believe there is no way to secure the future of a non-Orthodox Jewish civilization without maintaining a Jewish home. For me Zionism is just that: it's home. It's the attempt to build a home for a homeless people. It's an almost desperate, last-minute attempt to save a people and their civilization by giving them a home.

In order to understand the deep rationale of Zionism, one has to understand Jewish exceptionalism. Jewish exceptionalism is not about exceptional genes, good or bad. Jewish exceptionalism is not about exceptional virtues, faults or looks. It is about an

exceptional challenge. How to survive as a people for a millennium and a half without a territory or kingdom. How to maintain your unloved existence among others without vanishing into thin air.

The exceptional answer Jews gave to the exceptional challenge they faced was composed of two G's – God and ghetto. It was the closeness and the remoteness of the non-Jewish other that enabled the Jewish people to survive its diaspora. An intense love affair with an Almighty, a stormy and yet intimate relationship, gave a sense of meaning, pride and even privilege to an otherwise unbearable life. The walls of the ghetto gave this life some protection, [functioned as] some sort of shield. Hence, God and ghetto became the two pillars of Jewish existence.

By the end of the 19th century, as the speaker described, both G's were on the wane, and they were both diminishing fast. Jews were losing their eye contact with God, and they were watching the walls of the ghetto crumble. What was, was not to be. Jewish existence was at peril. If the Jews were to survive as a people, they had to act. In order to save themselves, they needed to transform themselves. They needed to go through the greatest and most radical revolution any people ever had to go through.

In this sense Zionism was a stroke of genius. Its founding fathers and mothers had a profound historic insight. Half a century before Auschwitz, they realized in a godless and ghetto-less world, Jewish physical existence is in jeopardy. They realized our beloved Mother Europe was turning into a Medea, with the spark of nationalism in her eyes, along with the bigotry, the xenophobia, anti-Semitism and the insanity of hating post-ghetto Jews even more than ghetto Jews. But the founders of Zionism had another insight equally important: that even if there were no physical threat to post-ghetto Jews from without, they would still be faced with a cultural, spiritual threat from within.

Because of the day-to-day trouble in the Middle East, because of the attrition caused by ongoing violence, we tend to ignore the historical significance of what was done. The 20th century turned out to be the most dramatic century in the Jews' rather dramatic history. The first half of the 20th century was our worst ever. We saw one-third of us evaporate. One-third. And yet the second half of the 20th century was our best ever. Best for at least 2,000 years. Why is that so? Because from 1945 on, we saw two amazing Jewish success

stories develop. One was the success of Zionism, the breathtaking achievement of renewing Jewish sovereignty against all odds. The other was just as astonishing: the establishment of the perfect Jewish Diaspora in this country.

In many ways the 20th century was the Jewish Big Bang. First, there was historical catastrophe. There was the immolation of East European Jewry, the brutal death of *shtetl* and ghetto. But then, out of the energy produced by the destruction, came into being two spectacles of Jewish renaissance. With all due respect to other Jewish communities throughout the world, the two pillars of contemporary Jewish existence are the free and vibrant Jewish-American community and the free and vibrant Jewish Israeli state, one a direct outcome, a brainchild of the 110-year-old Zionist idea, the other depending very much for its integrity, identity and continuity on the very same Zionist idea.

Hence, 110 years after my British great-grandfather made his first Zionist pilgrimage to Palestine, just ahead of the first Zionist congress in Basel in 1897, I can safely conclude the idea he was carrying with him into that wild, barren land was not only benign but a triumphant idea. As a consequence of that revolutionary and daring idea, Jews are as fortunate today as they ever were. The century that began with the pogrom of Kishinev in 1903 and went on to the crematoriums of Auschwitz and Treblinka was transformed by this idea to the century of Jewish revival.

This revival was achieved at great cost. In order to establish the Jewish home, we Zionists have committed three major sins. First, we have sinned in abusing the land. We have taken the terraced hills of Judea and turned them into fortress-like settlements. We have taken the Plain of Sharon and the orange groves of Jaffa and turned them into an urban cement megalopolis that in many ways is faceless and banal. There is much talk of Palestinian refugee camps. Rightly so. But metaphorically speaking we have turned the Holy Land into an enormous refugee camp for the Jews, squeezing a haunted people to a very narrow strip of land that cannot sustain it.

Second, we have sinned in uprooting the Palestinians. Without getting into the details of the war of 1948, without drowning in the muddy debate about who is to be blamed for the Palestinian Catastrophe of that year, the bottom line is clear. We have dispossessed

hundreds of thousands who have now grown to be millions. We have replaced another people in much of our shared homeland.

Our third Zionist sin was towards ourselves. In order to make this gigantic leap back into history, in order to turn a politically passive nation into an active player on the world stage, we had to transform ourselves. In many ways we had to betray ourselves, turning our back on Jewish tradition and Jewish sophistication, turning our back on Jewish morality and Jewish identity, losing much of the creativity Diaspora Jews have, losing much of the flair and imagination and character richness, losing some of that subversive constructive spirit of those with multiple identity, losing that Woody Allen and Jeffrey Goldberg humor.

For years that was the balance: three sins versus a mind-blowing historical adventure. Three sins versus a spectacular success. Three sins and a miracle, if you wish. Over the last decade, especially since the collapse of the peace process in 2000, 9/11, the Hamas victory of February 2006 and the second Lebanon war of July 2006, a notion has appeared that the Zionist entity is getting out of balance, spiraling out of control. In some ways this notion is exaggerated. The Israeli economy is booming. Israel is the greatest research and development laboratory for the high tech industry outside the United States. Israel has more companies on the NASDAQ than France, Germany and Italy put together. Israeli society is vibrant. Among other things, the birth rate of secular Jews in Israel, let alone Arabs or ultra-Orthodox, is higher than in any other OECD country, even the United States.

Israel is in many ways a well-established fact. Just as the anti-Zionists were wrong about the life expectancy of the Zionist endeavor in the 1900s, just as the State Department officials were wrong about the life expectancy of the Zionist enterprise in 1948, so the alarmists of today might be wrong. They all underestimate the great need for maintaining a Jewish state. They all underestimate the enormous vitality of the Jewish state, for in many ways the story of Zionism is the story of vitality against all odds.

Yet, there is room for concern. One can say the three sins of Zionism are now challenging the miracle. First, Israel — north of Beersheba — is already the most densely populated country in the West. In 20 years time the population explosion of both Jews and Arabs

will make life in the Holy Land unbearable. Not only will the landscape be gone, but it will be very hard to maintain even any semblance of reasonable life in that tormented land.

Second, the Palestinian issue is not going away. The hope of solving it with an elegant peace treaty is basically gone. No realist would believe today there is any brilliant formula or shining piece of paper that will end the Palestinian-Israeli tragedy in our time. The conflict is there, and the conflict will go on. No end is in sight, definitely not a happy one.

Third, the difficulty Israelis have with themselves, with their identity and their Jewish past was masked for two or three generations by the powerful Zionist ethos. As that ethos has weakened in recent decades, and especially in recent years, a vacuum has revealed itself. The disintegration of the labor movement, the kibbutzim and the pioneer spirit is not arbitrary. The profound leadership crisis and the decay of the political system is not arbitrary either. They all spring from a deeper ideological and even spiritual crisis caused by the Zionist revolution, which was exposed as the revolution lost its conviction and inner might.

Now we are challenged. The 20th century is gone, and the 21st century is a challenging one for us as Zionists, Israelis and Jews. Roughly speaking, Israel is faced with two well-known existential threats, and one of which is more silent and profound. First, there is the nuclear issue. If Iran goes nuclear, Israel is not immediately doomed. But if Iran goes nuclear, Israel is back in a real existential fight for its survival. Even if no mushroom cloud appears in the blue skies over Tel Aviv, the notion that mushroom cloud might appear is dramatic. It would change the region, and it would change dramatically Israel's standing in the region.

Then there is the occupation issue. Israel is caught in a dilemma. If it does not end occupation and retreat, it will lose both its integrity as a Jewish democratic state and its international legitimacy. But if Israel does end the occupation and withdraw without a peace accord, which is not in sight, that will be perceived by its neighbors as an act of weakness and will expose Israel to new waves of attack, terror, low-intensity warfare, and, eventually, total war.

The third challenge I refer to as the inner Israeli challenge. If it is to survive facing the external challenges, Israel must pull its act together. It must reform its political system, it

must come up with decent government. But it must do more than that. It must create a new, relevant narrative that can keep the nation together and give meaning to the hardship it faces.

As I said before, Zionism was a revolutionary movement. It achieved what it achieved by cutting our traditional Jewish roots, by creating a new and somewhat superficial Israeli culture whose foundations are not deep. Israel's Jewish complex, almost anti-Semitic at times, prevents Israelis from being relaxed about their Jewish identity. This creates an identity limbo. It creates the deep crisis of Jewish Israeli culture. Israel must deal with that. It must write the new narrative that will help us endure what is awaiting us, just as the old God-based narrative helped us endure nearly 2,000 years of Diaspora life.

What do these three challenges tell us? The question of Zionism is still an open one. Zionism was insightful in its critical analysis of the Jewish condition in the modern world, and it was astonishing in its ability to move from critical analysis to the creation of a new form of Jewish life, which has proven to be vibrant, energetic and exciting. But the jury is still out on whether the Zionist solution works, whether the Zionist remedy doesn't have disastrous side effects. The drama is still unfolding. It did not end in 1948, or in 1967, or in 2000. It is up to us Israelis of this generation to decide whether the 20th century revolution of Jewish life is an astounding success or a colossal failure.

MR. CROMARTIE: Thank you very much.

JEFFREY GOLDBERG, *The New Yorker*: My question is for Ari. It's the central question I think about every day, which is, you're right that we have two promised lands. But neither one is perfect. Israel is safe for Judaism. It's safe for Judaism but it's not safe for Jews. And America, while safe for Jews, is not safe for Judaism precisely because it's so safe for the physical Jews. Which one is better for preserving the Jewish people? If there is actually no solution to the problem of Israel's existence, no possibility of peace in the coming generations, isn't then the Jewish responsibility to save Jewish life? To say it's more important to save the Jewish body and get those people out of Israel before they are annihilated rather than leave them there as this noble but ultimately doomed experiment?

Peter, I wanted you to respond to the second of Ari's Zionist sins, the sin against the Palestinians. I'm curious to see how sinful you think that sin is.

DR. BERKOWITZ: Ari's obviously right. Sins have been committed against the Palestinians. The thing I would add is it is necessary to understand those sins in context. I could enumerate, at the risk of boring everybody, the obvious facts, well-known for the last more than 100-plus years of history, about Jewish efforts in settling Israel, to seek cooperation and live with Arabs, and repeated acceptance by first the Jewish settlement in Israel, and then [the state of] Israel, of peace plans that were blatantly rejected by Arabs, by the Palestinians.

One could talk about the colossal sin committed against the Palestinian people by Yasser Arafat, who over the last 10 years of his life stole \$10 billion from his people, thereby depriving them of the resources they needed to build roads, hospitals, factories, schools and houses in their land, to alleviate the real misery in which they live. He understood perfectly well that to alleviate the misery in which they lived would also sap the will to fight, engage and sustain the murderous hatred of Jews.

I could go on longer like that, but I wouldn't want that enumeration to cloud the assertion that the Palestinians have been sinned against by the creation of the state of Israel and by the state of Israel. I would just want to insist that the sins committed by Israel and the sins committed by the Palestinians, not only against Israel but by the Palestinian leadership against their own people, be weighed together in the balance when attempting to reach a judgment about Israel.

MR. SHAVIT: If you really care about maintaining the Jewish life you've heard about, there's only one way to do that, and that's to become ultra-Orthodox [in] America. If this is your concern, then that's the solution.

For those of us who are not willing to do that, it's a serious question. You're much more pessimistic than me in your question, Jeff. Had I thought we were facing annihilation, then that would be a different sort of question.

Should [annihilation] be the case, it would not be a problem of the Jews or the Israelis. In this sense Israel is Czechoslovakia. If Israel goes under, the West will be in deep trouble. Perhaps it might survive, but just might. It's not 1920. Israel is part of the West, although much of the West does not want to acknowledge it, and it is definitely seen that way by the relevant radical Muslim forces.

The conflict is not only about the Jewish state. It's about Israel as a free society. Suicide bombers don't go for yeshivas, and they don't even go for settlements. They go for nightclubs and cafes and shopping malls. Their war is more against Israel as the frontier line of the West than against the Jewish entity. It is sexy to die the symbols, the icons of the Western way of life. Therefore, if, God forbid, something happens to Israel, the implications for the West would be dramatic. I don't know if beyond repair, but dramatic.

One of the things 9/11 and the events of the last decade changed is, up until 2000, many Israelis had a feeling we are stuck in this struggle, we got ourselves into a trouble spot. Now there is a strong sense of there is nowhere to go as Jews, [especially] when you look at Europe. North America is different, but Europe is deeply troubled. Beyond that there is nowhere to go. The idea of running away won't work. You can buy time but you cannot solve the problem. Appeasement does not and will not work with these forces.

I'm saying harsh things. I'm saying them to Israelis and in many ways to Westerners because it's a time to gather all we have. Definitely in Israel but really throughout the West because we are all challenged. My mood is not that of lament. It is that of seeing it's a really critical and dramatic [situation right now]. I do believe, as I hinted, that if you have the right spirit and gather your forces, then you can win. But if you don't — one thing that is troubling, in Israel and in the West, is this lack of willpower. If Western civilization does not prove it has willpower, then Hassan Nasrallah and Ahmadinejad will win.

JAY TOLSON, U.S. News & World Report: Do you think post-Zionism's moment was irreparably lost back in 2000 with Arafat's refusal of the deal? Is post-Zionism a dead doctrine? Or does its spirit continue? Was post-Zionism ultimately, a suicide pill for the Jewish state? Can it be a way forward again?

MR. SHAVIT: I do think it was a poisonous, suicidal pill. I agree with everything you assume in your question. Up to 2000 it was getting stronger and stronger. This is one of the many major mistakes made by the Israeli left: The moment you went into a peace process in 1993, you should have made sure, both internally and externally, there was solid recognition for the Jewish state and a willingness to take the risks involved in bringing Arafat back, giving land back and eventually moving toward this two-state solution with a major dramatic withdrawal. At the same time you should have made sure you are safe at home. Even while you are giving back what you shouldn't have had to begin with, you should secure our core existence.

But the left in Israel made a mistake, and perhaps you'd see some similarities with some mistakes made by the left in this country. At that point I was still one of the crowd, and we got so excited about the idea "it's real peace." As I like to say, the only statesman who took Fukuyama seriously was Shimon Peres. Everywhere there was this feeling, "end of conflict, end of history, end of everything, let's move on." There were two manifestations of that. One was the individualistic, consumerist, "let's just do business, nothing is important." This is why the left lost the elections of '96 because it basically said peace is about money. It completely missed the politics of identity Netanyahu captured and that's why he won the election.

The other aspect was the more radical manifestation, the intellectual, which was post-Zionism and an attack on the core of the Jewish state. It's not only that Arafat refused the deal. Rather than going the old Ben-Gurion way, being moderate and willing to make sacrifices and compromises and at the same time being very realistic and disciplined, we went into a frenzy, and in many ways we went berserk. It all collapsed, and this is why the roof fell in on us in 2000.

I'll say this: Post-Zionism is relevant in one way. Through academic life and through some pages in my paper, it has a poisonous effect on Europe. This is the only way post-Zionism is relevant. It's not relevant in Israel. It's not relevant to reality in the Middle East. People who live an illusion in Israel, who are very few, feed the European illusion. That's all there is to it.

DR. BERKOWITZ: Post-Zionism draws on intellectual currents that nourish post-modernism in Western Europe and in the United States. So it's not likely to disappear entirely any time soon. It is sustained not just by streams coming out of modern Zionism, but by intellectual streams in the West. That little role Ari says it may continue to play is actually a significant role. It's not nothing to be encouraging prejudices among European intellectuals about Israel and Israel's place in the Middle East. That's significant, even if discredited inside Israel.

MARK PINSKY, *Orlando Sentinel*: How is the rise of Christian Zionism seen from your side of the ocean?

MR. SHAVIT: Most people on my side of the ocean don't see it. You have very few right-wing Israeli politicians who are close to these Christian Zionists. I mentioned Netanyahu. There is an interesting alliance going on between the national religious, the *haredim*, who suddenly see this evangelical support for Israel as "I have something they can follow." They are trying to study the patterns, how it works.

But these are marginal figures. Netanyahu is not a marginal figure but — Netanyahu is a secular person. I wouldn't call him a liberal but he has no affinity to this ideology whatsoever.

Some of these other guys might find areas of agreement. You have a very interesting coalition now in Jerusalem, not with the Christians though they're aware of it. When we have this gay parade, you have the religious Muslims and the religious Jews working together against it. There were a few Christians there as well. Most Israelis would like to get any support from wherever it comes, but there is no real alliance there.

Israel is a free society in a very deep way. Israel is very, very secular and very open. The issues you are dealing with in this country, about abortion and the gay rights, although we have this influential, ultra-Orthodox minority, three-quarters of Israel would find all these discussions bizarre. The spirit of the country, although it has this religious minority, is very, very open and in many ways much more open than in this country, and even than Europe.

Concerning Israelis, there is no coming together ideologically of these two movements.

DR. BERKOWITZ: My father is deeply disturbed about evangelical Christian support for Israel, and he speaks for many left, liberal, more or less assimilated Jews. Myself, I'm not so disturbed. It's a very difficult time for Israel, and one should be open-minded when it comes to friends who reach out. The second reason is, I consider it an obligation in democratic politics to regard, at least in the first place, my fellow citizens as fellow citizens and not a menace, enemies, foreign creatures

CARL CANNON, *National Journal*: Is there a backlash among American Jews? Not that it would be reasonable, but I'm asking if it exists that: "These evangelicals are for Israel, maybe I'm not." Maybe the left.

MR. SHAVIT: The issue is about the lack of empathy in the left towards Israel. I can give you a personal example. My neighborhood café in Jerusalem was exploded by a suicide bomber, and I heard it, and it's the only time in my life I actually grabbed my notebook and ran. I was there a minute after the bomb went off. I was there with the dead young men and women on the floor, and it was a really — I'm not used to it. A shocking experience. It was horrible.

The next morning I was interviewed by Dutch television, and I could hear the lad on the other end of the line [being unsympathetic.] This situation was very simple. On that day, we were the victims; literally our blood was in the streets. And I could hear the coldness from Amsterdam to Jerusalem, and this lack [of empathy]. Have whatever criticism you want — Israel is apartheid, Israel is that — but in that moment, as a reporter, it's very clear where things stand.

For me that moment in the morning was in a sense more terrifying than what I saw the night before. This is a very deep sentiment among Israelis and people who care. You feel not only shut out but you also feel the lack of empathy beyond the political debate. This situation calls for debate about what happens in left-wing circles, but it creates a lack of sensitivity among Israelis and pro-Israelis, too. As Peter said, when others, whoever they may be, reach out and hug us in this kind of situation, it's very difficult not to take that hug.

CATHY LYNN GROSSMAN, *USA Today*: The generation of American Jews who are the unquestioning Zionists, the “my Israel right or wrong” crowd — your grandfather, my grandfather, my parents — is aging and, I think, shrinking. The young, the non-Orthodox cultural Jews, the Reform and Conservative Jews in this country — to a large extent they’re almost mystified by Israel. They don’t get it politically, and they don’t get it religiously because they don’t recognize the Judaism there. In Israel you can debate all these things ferociously, but in the United States it’s very difficult to have open debate. When Jews argue about Israel in the United States, one side or the other is going to get excoriated by CAMERA or somebody else. Why is there so little free debate in this country?

DR. BERKOWITZ: On campuses you see a dramatic change in the last 30 years in student participation at Hillel. Maybe 30 years ago the dominant group at campus Hillels would have been secular Zionist kids who wanted to go to Israel after college and live on a kibbutz; they wanted to work the land. Now, 30 years later, the most active students in Hillels and Jewish organizations on campus tend to be conservative — conservative in terms of Jewish denomination, education, or [adherence to] modern Orthodoxy. These students maintain an attachment to Israel and continue to travel there. It’s not that there’s no student commitment to Israel but it’s shifted. Those who have Conservative day school or Orthodox training are much more likely to spend a summer in Israel and know something about Zionism.

On the question of freedom of speech, I want to say excoriation is not censorship. I don’t regard the fact that CAMERA will lash out at a critic of Israel or, for that matter, that a proponent of Israel will receive sharp criticism from the academy as a lack of freedom of expression in this country. Harsh criticism is not the same as lack of freedom. When Mearsheimer and Walt complained bitterly about being censored, about the impossibility of criticizing Israel and the United States, it struck me as close to nonsense. They have their platform, lots of platforms. They talk as critics and proponents and have their [own] magazines and web sites; nobody gets thrown in jail. If you can’t take excoriation then you’re not ready for free speech. The answer is to suck it up.

MR. SHAVIT: I don't want to be an advocate of Zionism here, but this is one of the advantages of having Israel — and there are many disadvantages. One of the advantages is we in Israel are much more relaxed in this sense. When you are a minority, and you have to keep your boundaries, the stress is much greater. When you feel somewhat liberated about this issue then discussion [is easier to have.] Again, what is remarkable about Israel is the freedom and vitality of discussion and thinking. I would almost say anything goes.

There is something of anarchism in our mentality or genes. It breaks out in Israel in a very wild way, and sometimes it's part of the roughness and the wildness and the fact we are not that civilized. But on the other hand we are truly free in ways I don't see in many other places.

Regarding your first question, I think what you describe is right. Again, one of the ironies or problems with Israel is it's a very free and secular society in many ways, but because of the political power of the religious minority and because there is no separation of church and state, you have all these difficulties for Reform and Conservative Jews. But as well there is an element of mystique because I remember traveling in this country six months ago, visiting some Jewish organizations and lecturing to people, and they were very much concerned about these issues. On the way back I flew with a group from Birthright, these kids who go to Israel. It is amazing to see these kids when they come. I don't know if you know, but these are kids get a free 10-day vacation in Israel. The idea is any Jewish youngster has a right to 10 days in Israel. This is a project started five, six years ago, funded by a few Jewish-American billionaires, but mostly by the Israeli government. It's a spectacular success because when you take these 17-, 18-, 19-year-olds — and they are not Reform or Conservative or anything, they come from nothing — and you bring them in touch with young Israelis, it's electric. It works.

A lot of what you describe is the perception you get through the media, through the talk. In this globalized world, this is something that can be overcome; it is a product of communication failure and not that substantive. As an Israeli I would of course like us to open up, to be liberal also in its establishment [of religion], not only in its spirit, and we have to deal with that on our side. But I think this issue is somewhat exaggerated.

MR. CROMARTIE: Why is it evangelicals appear to be more vocal and visible about their fascination with Jewish people? What do you think was the engine for that?

MR. PINSKY: It's a development that's happened in the last six to ten years. It's been growing and gaining speed. It may peter out in the next two or three years, I don't know. I don't know the source of it exactly. There's a whole debate within the evangelical community about how to relate to Jews theologically because there is the fate of the dual covenants and different routes to heaven. Part of it is the interest in eschatology, but that's not the majority view. There's sincere belief that Christians should recognize the Jewish theological roots of their own faith and also support the state of Israel. But there's something going on, that's for sure. It's really accelerated in the last two or three years.

MR. WOODRIDGE: How bad do you think the situation is in Europe in terms of hostility to Israel? What are the implications of the rapid growth of the Muslim population for foreign policy? You see someone like Jack Straw changing foreign policy because of having a huge constituency of Islamic people who are opposed to the war in Iraq. How do you see that playing out in politics?

MR. SHAVIT: There is a very serious problem, and it's a combination of two or three problems. One is the 50- or 60-year grace period of the Holocaust is gone, and therefore you have the return of the ugly feelings toward Jews. You have the European colonial complex, and Israel walks right into that. Then you have the anti-American complex, and Israel walks into that, too.

I have a wild theory there is a new version of the old Christian story [about Jews] because the religion in Europe now is the religion of human rights. Its formative moment, like the crucifixion to Christianity, was the Holocaust. Jews were the protagonists of drama; they were at the heart of it. Yet they of all people did not take the lesson and went back into this bloody history in the Middle East, which Europe is trying to escape.

The depth of feeling is very, very difficult to deal with. But I do see positive forces. In France there were positive phenomena, after a dark period, of the establishment realizing there was a problem and trying to fight back. There is a real struggle even before the

Muslim element gets into the picture. Nothing new to say about that, but definitely the growing Muslim population creates tension.

This element of Jews not hearing the call, like in the past, goes into the heart of European problems, that they are not related to Jews or Israel. My interpretation of Europe is there is an unwillingness to face up to historic reality. The success of postwar Europe created a bubble in which you can live, quite shielded, and be anti-American but trust the Americans will save you.

DR. BERKOWITZ: European anti-Israel attitudes are connected at the hip to European anti-American attitudes.

JANE LITTLE, BBC: Bearing in mind there is real hostility in Europe toward Israel, to what extent do you see that as a legitimate concern, when anti-Zionism is equated with anti-Semitism?

A related question: for a documentary, I interviewed young Arab Muslims on the streets of Paris who saw no nuances, no distinctions, between anti-Zionism, anti-Israeli-ism and anti-Semitism. "Jew," "Israeli" and "Zionist" were used in interchangeable and very hostile ways, often followed by conspiracy theories. In that context isn't it your duty, Ari, to stand up for Zionism in a world where Ahmadinejads, and mini-Ahmadinejads, are violently attacking Zionism and Israel?

MR. SHAVIT: I cannot change myself. As I said, I'm a Zionist. I have a deep debate with anti-Zionists, but I think anti-Zionism is legitimate. Anti-Semitism is not legitimate. I make that distinction; it's as simple as that. I do feel I have to stand up for Israel and Zionism. I don't believe in simplistic views, in fanatic views. Anything that is not complex does not interest me.

DR. BERKOWITZ: I would deplore the disgraceful tactic of using charges of anti-Semitism or anti-Israeli-ism or whatever to silence critics of the Jews or of Israel. At the same time, there are certain telltale signs when criticism goes beyond the bounds of fair and reasoned criticism. One telltale sign is this: when a single standard is applied to Israel but never applied to any other liberal democracy, to say nothing of other states in the region.

If Israel is held to an abstract ideal of what a liberal democracy ought to be, and no other states are subject to criticism for their tremendous departures, then I would begin to worry about the good faith of the critic. But such charges should not be used to stifle debate or criticism.

PAUL RICHTER, *Los Angeles Times*: Ari, American planners are already thinking about what happens after Iran gets the bomb. How would that affect Israeli society?

MR. SHAVIT: First of all, I'm not apocalyptic. I do not believe if Iran gets the bomb that immediately it would be used. I don't see mushroom clouds in the Middle East in a few years' time. But the immediate consequence of Iran getting the bomb is not only that within very short time the whole region will go nuclear. You will have a multi-polar nuclear situation in a very unstable region. Egypt will go nuclear, Saudi Arabia will go nuclear. That would be one implication.

But also you will have a return of conventional wars. While observing the bad news coming out of the Middle East over dozens of years, we did not realize how relatively stable it was since 1967 or 1973. One of the major reasons it was relatively stable is — what I have to say here as a good citizen of Israel — what is perceived as Israel's nuclear hegemony in the region. That perception actually stabilized the region, and the result was we did not have major conventional wars except for the one foolishly launched by the Israeli government in 1982 in Lebanon.

My fear is the moment the hegemony is gone, then the roof is taken out, and you'll immediately see the eruption of conventional warfare. I don't know about total war, but I think it will happen throughout the region, not only with Israel, but definitely concerning us. The main implications of having Iran going nuclear are having other countries going nuclear and having conventional violence on a much larger scale than we've seen in the last 40 years. Then comes [the problem of] countries falling under the influence of Iran.

What will happen to Israeli society is of course the crucial question, and I do not have an answer. That depends a lot on some of the things I mentioned.

We have proved in the past, not only for Israel but also for Zionism, that when we see a challenge and get ourselves prepared for it, we are very good in dealing with it. We have gone through things over these 100 years of the Zionist saga that seem almost impossible to other nations. I'm a great believer in the grassroots strength of Israel society. I'm an admirer of the people, and I despise the politicians and leaders. If some of that inner strength is translated into decent leadership and a more rational way of running public affairs and state policy, then we have a good chance of dealing with that challenge. But it is a truly existential challenge, a dramatic challenge that brings us back almost to 1948, if Iran goes nuclear.

DR. BERKOWITZ: People sometimes speak lightly, as apparently they do in Europe, about the Israeli Defense Force being able to take care, if necessary at the last moment, of the Iranian nuclear threat. But that overlooks a couple of things. There are spots in Iran more than 1,000 miles further away than the furthest point in Iraq. It's not like 1981. The nuclear facilities are widely dispersed and built-in. Most analysts I've spoken to agree that to seriously set back operations would require waves and waves of sorties, days and days of attacks. It's not conceivable the international community would allow the Israeli air force to make those days and days of attacks to accomplish a serious setback. That only heightens the seriousness of the problem. The Israeli air force's offensive threat is not as great a deterrent as some strategists lightly chatter about.

JOHN DICKERSON, *Slate*: You talked about the failure of willpower in the West. Give us some tests of where the West needs to show willpower. Is it just with Iran, and if it is with Iran, where does it come? What moments should we look for?

MR. SHAVIT: Let's stick to Iran for now. It's the most important and so obvious. Look at the options. You're either going to have Iran go nuclear, of which I explained the consequences, or what is thought of as an American or Israeli act [against Iran's nuclear capabilities]. But they are going to create a horrible storm in the Middle East with horrible consequences. Iran is going nuclear, it's clear. The only reasonable route was to have a very, very effective, aggressive political campaign.

The leaders of the West were aware, in a serious way, of the challenge since the summer of 2003. As far as I know, there isn't much difference on that among Washington, London, Berlin and Paris. But because the climate in all these countries is such that the leaders did not feel they could act, they did not act. The one sensible option that could have evaded catastrophe was not taken. Because it's probably too late, if something on that route can still be done, [it should] definitely [be done] today.

That proves the point. It's really not Israel. The West is challenged, and the West does not react in a rational way: That's the most alarming proof to that lack of willpower that I can imagine.

MR. DICKERSON: The test has happened, and the West has failed?

MR. SHAVIT: It's a bizarre situation where we know it and yet we don't; it's relevant to all of us in our profession. We know but we are not aware. When people will look back at this period of time, they will not believe what state of mind we were in. The disconnect between what we know and the fact we do nothing about it — the incompetence, the impotence. That's the Western malaise of our time.

MR. COOPERMAN: Peter, what would it take for Israel to regain the sympathy of the liberal intelligentsia in the United States? Ari, what is the single most important divide within Israeli society today?

DR. BERKOWITZ: There are a lot of things. One springs to mind. Israel has not had an effective, eloquent spokesman representing her in the United States since before Bibi Netanyahu was Bibi Netanyahu in the mid-1980s. But it's hard to remember Israeli spokesmen who have made Israel's case well in the United States.

MR. SHAVIT: There is a problem within Israel. First of all, I agree: Netanyahu is interesting in that he really succeeded. He filled the vacuum at that time. What was and is the vacuum? This goes to the deeper problem of Israel I mentioned, the identity problem, the spiritual problem. The people who passionately care about Israel and are willing to actively fight for it do not speak the internationally acceptable language. The people who speak the internationally acceptable language do not care enough about Israel. They care

in a passive way, but they are not there to fight for it. But we have now a successful ambassador in the U.N., which surprised us all. But by and large you don't have the cadre of people who should be there. I agree, potentially, they are there, but again, it's not a technical or political problem. It exposes a deeper problem in Israel.

By and large Israel is not that divided any more. While there are debates about Ehud Barak in Israel, I want to give him what is called the Israel Prize for his life's work because he brought us back from the great divide. Up to 2000, and it went on a bit afterward, we were speaking different languages within the country. The perception of reality was totally different, and in many ways that's history. What's striking is, apart from tiny minorities here and there, there is an enormous Israeli consensus about the world we live in. If you force me, I would say the divide is between the center and the periphery. The crisis of Israel is the crisis of the Israeli elites. I am very critical of the Israeli elites, almost all of them: business, media, academia, even judiciary. As I've indicated before, you have a very healthy, even sophisticated people. When you talk to the guy in the street, he's quite impressive in his rough way. For years now, for a generation, we have a deterioration of the elites' contribution to public life.

KATHY SLOBOGIN, CNN: In this morning's session we talked about how the development of modernity, to a lot of people's surprise, came along with an explosion of religiosity. It seems from what you're saying that's not true in Israel. Could you talk about why Israel seems to be immune from that, except for a religious fringe or the settler movement? And where is the settler movement right now in the psyche of Israelis?

BYRON YORK, *National Review*: Could either of you discuss the consequences for Israel of the possible outcomes of the Iraq war, all of which look pretty terrible at the moment?

DR. BERKOWITZ: There's a simple explanation why you don't see this explosion of religiosity, as opposed to other countries. The principal founders were overwhelmed with the religion [of European Jewry]. Political Zionism was meant to throw that off, leave it all behind. Then what do you know, within 20 or 30 years, religious Jews were a force in Israeli politics. Their parents meant to escape it, but it was powerfully present.

The explosion in religiosity that modernity can unleash is partly related to life in an atomized society. But atomization, at least among the first couple of generations, was not the problem in Israel. Elites coming from the kibbutz yearned for atomization, not for a return to an inclusive, tight-knit religious community.

I'll make one comment about the Iraq war and its implications for Israel. I run a program in Israel, and we bring American scholars and journalists to Israel to speak about constitutional democracy in the United States. Two years ago we brought over a number of people — two on the right, two on the left — to talk about the democratization agenda of the Bush administration. The reaction of the Israelis in the crowd was interesting. Left, center, right, they all despised the democracy promotion agenda.

You have to understand this reaction in context. It should not be understood as simple Bush-bashing. When the Israelis look to the east, they see Jordan and ask themselves, "Are we better off with a Western-leaning, relatively friendly king, or would we prefer to see the people emancipated?" They know where they stand. They have similar thoughts about Egypt, 70 million people, atop of which sits Hosni Mubarak. Do they contemplate the possibility of releasing the democratic energies of civil society in Egypt? Or do they think of, to borrow language from President Bush, continuing to coddle dictators in the Middle East? Their vote is for coddling dictators in the Middle East. This mentality is not a result of the Iraq war, but certainly the Iraq war and its aftermath has consolidated this opinion.

MR. SHAVIT: I've been stressing the secular elements of Israeli society in this conversation. You do have a very powerful and important religious minority, so there is a kind of religious explosion ongoing in Israel. But my point is it's not exactly the fringes, but it's not the dominant force in Israeli political life. Israelis are junkies of modernity, sometimes in a dangerous way. There isn't a conservative bone in our spiritual structure. We are for change. We want tomorrow.

My cheap psychoanalytic explanation is there's so much agony and pain in the past you build a future-oriented, almost obsessive persona, which is true for him personally and in a sense generally true for the country. We are so bad in conserving anything. We always look for the next thing. We are hyperactive; we are crazed with tomorrow. Even within

the religious and ultra-Orthodox world, modernity has a very, very strong pull. I'm expecting an ultra-Orthodox perestroika because the rabbis are not controlling their crowd any more. The young people and women are liberated, not religiously, but they are so much part of the globalized world and part of Israel that they are, in the way they live, rebelling against the old version of religion.

The settlers, in a sentence, are completely forgotten. They've lost the battle and they are completely isolated for the moment. They frightened me before. Now I almost pity them because there is no sympathy for them, no understanding. They've been totally marginalized.

A sentence about Iraq. I agree with what was said, but I'll bring a different tone. I was worried about the war in Iraq, to put it mildly. I was in Washington when the war started. I had great respect for the neocons for seeing the problem and having the courage to try to do something about it. But I thought the ideas, to begin with, were simplistic and dangerous.

But I don't forget the other aspect, which is that all the others would not see the problem and definitely did not have the courage to do anything about it. Now, when they [neocons] are such a haunted minority, I must say something for the record. The tragedy is something dramatic was not tried in Palestine, because the place where you should have started to test this theory was Palestine, not Iraq. There is no dictator there providing stability who, once he's removed, you unleash all sorts of forces. You have a society that is more open and potentially ready for democratic thinking than any other Arabic society. You have a mess, so you are not losing anything in its destruction. And it's small; it's manageable.

Had the project been a democratic Palestine — you could have called it that but you should not be naïve about it. But a constructive Palestine, what I call a life-loving Palestine, that would have been the right project. Because if there is no conversion of political life in Palestine, Israel is in trouble, the Middle East is in trouble, the world is in trouble, and it takes enormous resources and insight and wisdom to transform this destructive society into a constructive one.

I'm only deeply sorry that the Bush vision, the Bush speech of 2002, which was the most remarkably realistic statement about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict I've heard from anyone, was not translated into effective, ambitious policy, which would have given a chance to the region much more than a failed attempt in Iraq.

MR. CROMARTIE: Join me in thanking both of these gentlemen.

♦ END ♦

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