DAVID BEN-GURION, THE STATE OF ISRAEL AND THE ARAB WORLD, 1949–1956

David Ben-Gurion, the State of Israel and the Arab World, 1949–1956

ZAKI SHALOM

sussex
ACADEMIC
PRESS
BRIGHTON • PORTLAND

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

First published 2002 in Great Britain by
SUSSEX ACADEMIC PRESS
PO Box 2950
Brighton BN2 5SP

and in the United States of America by
SUSSEX ACADEMIC PRESS
5824 N.E. Hassalo St.
Portland, Oregon 97213-3644

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Shalom, Zaki.
David Ben-Gurion, the state of Israel, and the Arab world, 1949–1956 / Zaki Shalom.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 1-902210-21 (hc : alk. paper)
1. Ben-Gurion, David, 1886–1973—Views on Arab–Israeli conflict—1948–1967.
2. Arab–Israeli conflict—1948–1967. 3. Prime ministers—Israel—Biography.
I. Title.

DS125,3.B37 453 2002
956.04—dc21 2002018726

Printed by Bookcraft, Midsomer Norton, Bath
This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Contents

Foreword by Avi Shlaim

No other Middle Eastern leader has written as much, or been written about so extensively, as David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the State of Israel. Yet, he remains a deeply controversial figure. Traditional Israeli historians have written about the man and his achievements in the most glowing terms. His Israeli biographers, Michael Bar-Zohar and Shabtai Teveth, have produced multi-volume hagiographies. Since the late 1980s, however, revisionist Israeli historians have subjected Ben-Gurion and especially his policy towards the Arab world, to a critical re-examination.

Zaki Shalom, a senior researcher at the Ben-Gurion Research Center, clearly belongs to the first group of scholars. But his aim in writing this book is not so much to defend or criticize Ben-Gurion as to give a detailed and accurate account of his attitude towards the Arab world in the period between the 1948 war and the Suez war of 1956. Shalom recognizes at the outset the distinction between policy and statements, between the operational and the declaratory levels of policy. He is concerned not with Ben-Gurion's practical policy towards the Arabs in the period under investigation, but with his views, his attitudes, and his statements.

The book is underpinned by careful and comprehensive archival research, and nearly every statement, whether it is controversial or not, is fully documented. Shalom uses to good effect the whole panoply of primary sources available at the Ben-Gurion Research Center. These include Ben-Gurion's *Diaries* from 1915 to 1964, his correspondence, his speeches, his publications and protocols of meetings of the countless policy-making bodies of which he was a member.

Although the book deals primarily with Ben-Gurion's worldview, it provides the essential background for understanding his policy towards the Arabs. In this worldview, the Arabs, and especially the Palestinian Arabs, posed a permanent threat to the Jewish community in Palestine, to its aspiration to statehood and to the survival of the fledgling Jewish state. As Ben-Gurion confided to his diary on 23 October 1950: "Before the establishment of the state, I lived for several years with the nightmare of the possibility of our extermination . . . the danger was actually made more

acute by the establishment of the state and by our military victory [in the 1948 war]."

For Ben-Gurion the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict was the cultural gulf that separated the two sides, the gulf in values, norms and aspirations: "We live in the twentieth century," he said on one occasion, "they – in the fifteenth." In every respect he saw Israel as the antithesis of the Arab world. Deep-rooted forces in the Arab world will not be satisfied, he believed, until Palestine's entire territory is recovered, and its Jewish population destroyed. Consequently, the campaign that Israel had to wage was not about land, or borders or spheres of influence, but about her survival, about her very right to exist in the Middle East.

Ben-Gurion's pessimistic appraisal of the chances of real peace between Israel and its neighbours followed logically from this analysis of the sources of Arab antagonism and the uncompromising character of Arab aims. The implicit conclusion was that Arab society would have to change beyond recognition for peace with Israel to become a realistic possibility. Israel, according to Ben-Gurion, had no way of changing the Arab position, because any map it offered as a basis for a settlement was bound to be rejected by the other side as inadequate. The only realistic option left for it in this uniquely harsh regional environment was to build up its military power in order to deter the Arab states from launching a second round, and in order to cope with the manifold challenges to its everyday security.

Some scholars view Moshe Sharett, Foreign Minister until June 1956 and Prime Minister between 1953 and 1955, as the antithesis to Ben-Gurion's distinctly deterministic view of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Shalom does not agree. He sees no significant difference between the two men on the terms of peace settlement: Both were opposed to territorial concessions and to the repatriation of the Palestinian refugees. The only real difference between Ben-Gurion and Sharett, argues Shalom, related to the policy of military reprisals as a means of preserving Israel's everyday security. Ben-Gurion favoured hard-hitting reprisals, whereas Sharett wanted to limit the scope, frequency and intensity of the resort to force.

The importance of the debate on reprisals should not be underestimated since reprisals were the crux of Israel's strategy in the conflict in the early 1950s. Another significant difference concerned the territorial status quo. Both Ben-Gurion and Sharett were willing to conclude peace with the Arab states on the basis of the territorial staus quo enshrined in the 1949 Armistice Agreements, and this was indeed the official policy of the Israeli government. The difference was that Sharett was consistent in his commitment to the Armistice Agreements whereas Ben-Gurion was not. Ben-Gurion made a distinction between the borders of the land of Israel and the borders of the State of Israel, and he harboured ambitions to push the latter to the limit of the former. Although Ben-Gurion did not advo-

cate going to war to expand Israel's territory, there was a persistent expansionist steak in his thinking. In a scarcely veiled reference to his senior colleague, at a meeting on October 1952, Sharett stated that the seeking of opportunities to extend Israel's borders is not a peace policy: "Maybe, it is the good and right policy, but it is not a peace policy." And maybe the real difference was that Sharett was averse to any action that diminished the prospects for peace, which he knew to be slim anyway, whereas Ben-Gurion felt that Israel was entitled to act as she pleased given the state of neither war nor peace imposed on her by her Arab neighbours.

One of the merits of Zaki Shalom's approach is that, for the most part, he allows the protagonists to speak for themselves. He illuminates every aspect of Ben-Gurion's thinking about the Arabs and about Israel's relations with them with a great wealth of material, much of which is used here for the first time. While basically sympathetic to Ben-Gurion's point of view, he makes a conscious effort to be objective and fair-minded. His scholarship is certainly of a high order. The result is an important contribution to the literature of one of the leading protagonists in the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The value of the book is not limited to the light it sheds on Israel's founding father during the first eight years of statehood. By focusing on David Ben-Gurion during this crucial period, the book highlights some of the central dilemmas with which the Zionist movement has had to grapple ever since its inception towards the end of the nineteenth century. These issues include the moral case for a Jewish state, the extent of its territorial claims, the nature of the conflict with its Arab neighbours, the use of force, and the possibility of peaceful coexistence. All these issues remain of burning interest and importance today, following the breakdown of the Oslo peace process and the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising.

Avi Shlaim
St Antony's College
Oxford
February 2002

Preface

This book examines David Ben-Gurion's views on politics and security, and the forces that shaped his positions with regard to the Arab world in the period between the War of Independence (1947–8) and the Sinai campaign (1956), the first two major military conflicts that dramatically changed Israel's basic relationship with the Arab world and the international community. The focus on BG's world-view highlights the fundamental difference between political theory and the praxis of application. The frequent gaps between the two reveal the truism that no policy can reflect in absolute terms a leader's "purity" of will and aspiration. Policy may be regarded, at best, as a trade-off between primary goals on the one hand, and conflicting interests, pressures, and constraints on the other.

The emphasis here is on BG's "intentions" rather than a depiction and analysis of his foreign policy in his capacity as Prime Minister and Defence Minister. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to delve into the characteristics, sources and implications of BG's foreign policy and security strategy in order to gain an understanding of his political world-view.

Chapter 1 illustrates the vast array of BG's imagery of the Arabs in his evaluation of the nature of Arab society – its yearnings, ethos, normative behaviour, and the character of its leadership. An analysis of BG's imagery leaves little doubt of his acute awareness of the huge chasm existing between the State of Israel and the Arab world. This gap appeared to him unbridgeable in the foreseeable future.

Chapter 2 describes how BG's deeply engrained views shaped his attitudes and decisions regarding Israel's relations with the Arab world, especially as regards a peace settlement. His basic premise, albeit restrained, that genuine peace could be achieved between countries only when similarities were found between their national, social and moral natures, led him to realize that for all practical purposes true peace between Israel and the Arab world would have to remain a distant goal. After examining the factors blocking an Arab–Israeli accord, BG concluded that the international community and its position on Arab–Israeli relations were key elements that Israel had to take into consideration.

Focusing on BG's political and security outlook has not diverted from discussing the perspectives of other statesmen in the national leadership, especially Moshe Sharett (Foreign Minister and intermittent Prime Minister). The lengthy deliberations between the two leaders sheds light on a complex, jagged relationship, rocked by personal rancour and clashes of opinion, together with mutual understanding and close cooperation that spanned decades of collegiality in the national leadership.

Two main issues dominated the conflicting relations between BG and Sharett: political settlement and defence policy. In this study, political settlement will be treated as a separate subject distinct from the general peace settlement. BG himself consistently distinguished between the two, with the political settlement being dealt with on a different level. For the most part it remained on the government's agenda as a realistic possibility, and was often discussed in terms of cost and gain, danger versus risk.

Chapter 3 questions the widely accepted belief that BG and Sharett held contradictory views as to which steps Israel should take to achieve an Arab–Israeli political settlement. Both men assumed that a peace would transpire only if Israel surrendered its gains from the War of Independence, especially its territorial acquisitions (by retreating to the armistice lines) and its demographic advantage (by allowing a fixed number of refugees to return to their homes). I find no basis for the claim that Sharett's view on these matters was essentially different from BG's.

Basic differences on defence policy did exist between the two men, as **Chapter 4** shows. Sharett, together with a group of senior politicians who had no qualms in principle over Israel's military retaliations, harboured deep reservations over the manner in which they were being carried out. Sharett proposed a list of alternatives to the retaliation policy being advocated by BG and Moshe Dayan. His proposals came under review and were rejected by the framers of state security, probably because they were considered inapplicable for staunching infiltration and incompatible with strategic national policy.

The question of the territorial status quo and its danger for Israel after the War of Independence form the pillar of BG's security–political concept and his attitude towards the Arab world. There is little doubt of his willingness, or for that matter the willingness of all of Israel's national leadership, to seek a peace settlement based on the 1948/49 armistice lines. Nevertheless, various factors contributed decisively to creating the national feeling that the present borders were an undesired result of dictates forced on Israel at the termination of the war. Among those factors were:

- The differentiation that BG made between "the borders of [historic] Eretz-Israel" and "the borders of the State of Israel".

- Ben-Gurion's ceaseless emphasis on the limitations of the armistice lines and their continued threat to Israel's existence.
- His bitter complaint over "the war's [War of Independence] lost opportunity" ("a lamentation for generations") for attaining secure borders for Israel.

Chapter 5 recounts how any change in the territorial status quo that was not a result of Israeli aggression would have been considered a positive development from BG's point of view.

Finally, by way of a conclusion, **Chapter 6** returns to a discussion of "the missed peace opportunity". This issue is usually considered the main theme in any study on Israel's relations with the Arab world. No attempt will be made here to reach a conclusive verdict or to point an accusing finger at one side as being to blame for obstructing, or squandering, the chance for a peace settlement. While historical judgements of this nature cannot be categorically rejected, they cannot be justified without a comprehensive and meticulous analysis of the views and positions of all the parties involved in the conflict. Such an endeavour is beyond the scope of the present volume.

To my sisters

Fawzia, Shula, Yudit

1

Israel and the Arab World – Strengths and Weaknesses

In the mass of written material bequeathed to us by Ben-Gurion dealing with the period following the War of Independence, his views on the Arab world and his insights into its strengths and weaknesses occupy a central position. This should not be surprising. Throughout the decades of his political activity, the Arabs, and the Arabs of Eretz Israel in particular, posed a constant threat, first to the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine) and its aspirations for sovereignty, and later to the State of Israel. BG's keen interest in and perception of the Arab world may be seen as related to the enormity of the threat he felt it posed for Israel's survival.

The United Nations Partition Plan of 29 November 1947 granted international legitimacy to the Jewish people's sovereign rights over areas of Eretz Israel. According to the standard Zionist historiography on the War of Independence, as reflected in BG's narrative, Palestinian Arabs launched a country-wide attack immediately after the United Nations vote, in order to derail the implementation of partition.

Sporadic at first, the Arab attacks signalled the first phase of the War of Independence. After the formal declaration of statehood on 15 May 1948, the armies of six Arab states joined forces with the Palestinian Arabs and invaded Israel. This was the start of the war's second phase, during which the Jewish population believed it faced imminent annihilation.

Even after the war, the state's leadership still regarded the threat to the nation's existence as critical. It soon became apparent, even to those who believed that the future presaged a new chapter in Israeli–Arab relations, that neither the undeniable victory of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and Israel's broad international recognition, nor the Arab states' own commitments to a cease-fire under the Armistice Agreements, had the power to stifle the Arabs' obsessive wish to destroy the fledgling state.[1]

Unlike many of his colleagues, BG did not succumb to the pipedream that the Armistice Agreements would quickly lead to genuine peace

treaties. His first speech in the Knesset (Israeli parliament) on the armistice issue advised the house to "lower its expectations". He felt that too many Knesset members had grown overly optimistic about the Arab–Israeli negotiations, and that it was his duty to make them aware that Armistice Agreements would not safeguard Israel against further belligerency. "This settlement," he asserted, "does not guarantee peace. [But] if you ask me if it is possible that in another six months war will break out, I would answer, No."[2]

Two years later, his diary reflected a similar view: "Before independence," he wrote, "I lived for years with the nightmare of our destruction. Our success in preventing this catastrophe [in the War of Independence] has not been able to comfort me. The danger has only increased since statehood and our army's victory."[3]

The Danger of the Second Round

A few months after the war, hope flickered briefly for an Arab–Israeli accord when the Syrian ruler, Husni Za'im, proposed the start of peace talks with Israel which would include, *inter alia*, the absorption of 300,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria. Za'im went so far as to suggest that the talks be held directly between himself and BG.[4]

It appears, though, that BG failed to comprehend the real intent behind this exceptional proposal. "Of all the Arab leaders," he noted in his diary, "only Za'im has announced . . . that he seeks peace with Israel. I believe there is something in this declaration worth looking into. The very fact that Za'im is calling for a cease-fire [and peace settlement] may be seen as proof that he is interested in [building] a sound relationship with us. Is this because of [Syria's] conflict with Iraq? The interests of France, Za'im's ally, also [lead him to think there is a need for] peace between Israel and Syria."[5]

In practice, BG did not pursue Za'im's initiative, and the thread of hope soon vanished. In the following months, hostile pronouncements by Arab leaders gradually increased and their theme, as BG interpreted it, focused on political, military and economic sanctions to deny Israel the fruits of the victory it had won in the War of Independence.

In turn, BG and his colleagues became hardened in their estimate of the true nature of the Arab position. Hostility towards Israel, they felt, was not a temporary policy based on fleeting circumstances, but had become entrenched throughout the Arab world. The Arabs' defeat in the war, they believed, would greatly enhance this hostility.

Ben-Gurion now calculated that Israel should regard the post-war period merely as a brief respite within the context of a ceaseless struggle between Israel and the Arab countries. After the signing of the Armistice

Agreements, he often expressed his view of developments in explicit terms. Later his assessment of future Arab–Israeli relations was to win further backing from high-level Israeli decision-makers called in as Arab experts.[6]

Ben-Gurion came to realize that the period of "no-war no-peace", which seemed to prevail following the War of Independence, would not last forever. Another Arab–Israeli military clash, he believed, could be expected in the near future. "Our neighbours are preparing for a second round," he wrote to the Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, in October 1949, "and we may assume that they will be more prepared and united [this time] . . . We must create a *fighting nation* by training every man and woman, youngster and retiree for defence [of the country] when the moment strikes."[7]

Perceiving the Arabs' certainty that the second round would end quite differently from the 1948 war, BG reasoned that this confidence was based on a new awareness that had taken root in Arab countries. In the Arab world's revised perception of events, their defeat in the war had not resulted from a quirk of fate, but stemmed primarily from the greed and corruption of their own leaders, colonialist remnants who had placed their own political and financial profit before national interests.

Ben-Gurion explained that the rise of new leaders in the Arab world, who asserted their commitment to their citizens' interests as their first priority, had implanted in the people a belief that a military débâcle would not happen again. He often observed that a popular wind was blowing in Arab countries:

> For many people in the Arab world it is difficult to accept their defeat against us in the War of Independence. They [know that they] are many and we are few, and they feel that [their defeat] was an accident, our victory a case of good luck, and in a second round – they would rectify the error.[8]

Ben-Gurion's estimate that another Arab–Israeli war was inevitable was also based on his awareness of the Arabs' thirst for revenge in the aftermath of the War of Independence. The self-respect of the Arabs, armed, as they were, with overwhelming resources and assured of a lightning victory over the Jewish Yishuv, had been shattered when the small Jewish population had trounced them on the battlefield. It seemed logical to BG that this ignominy would be reflected in their relations with Israel.

A society where a strict honour code and the cry for revenge over even slight injuries formed the normative ethos, could not, BG reckoned, restrain itself for long before exacting a price in blood for its sullied honour. He feared lest the humiliation and frustration that had filled the Arab states at the end of the war would eventually compel them to undertake belligerent acts against Israel, even if after a "rational analysis" they realized that this would be counter-productive for their national interests. He summed up his opinion in one sentence: "The Arab people will not be

reconciled to the fact that six hundred thousand Jews defeated them; and this will remain a critical issue for us for a long time."[9]

Several factors contributed to BG's assessment that the Arab countries were preparing for another round of fighting. He witnessed their merciless economic boycott on Israel; their naval blockade against Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran; their overt and covert support of infiltrators, sabotage and murder inside Israel; their adamant refusal to enter into direct negotiations; and their categorically uncompromising stand against resolving the conflict. In early 1956 BG stated:

> When the war [of Independence] was over, we knew that a second round of fighting was inevitable. We harboured no illusions throughout these seven years regarding [the likelihood of] peace after the war.[10]

The precise date of the future showdown was, of course, unknown. However, shortly before his departure to Sde-Boker (December 1953) BG predicted that the next outbreak of hostilities would not take place before 1956. In a speech delivered after the Sinai campaign, he claimed:

> Several months before my resignation from government [in 1953], I surveyed our security situation and needs. Some weeks later I presented the government with a three-year security plan. The time span, "three years" was not accidental. According to our reports . . . we could assume, with a great deal of accuracy, that prior to 1956 our enemies would not attack us. However, the Czech arms deal [which included a huge supply of Soviet arms to Egypt] hastened the day of reckoning.[11]

Ben-Gurion's Concept of the Arab world

Ben-Gurion's perception, in the aftermath of the War of Independence, that Israel's existence was still seriously threatened, was a major factor shaping his and other Israeli leaders' views of the conflict. Indeed, the Arab threat was the subject of endless debate in various Israeli forums and remained high on the national agenda. It was felt that understanding the Arab world's authentic motives, its cultural heritage, its immense social and economic problems, the level of stability of its various regimes and their political leanings – all boiled down to the ancient maxim: "Know thine enemy."

It should be emphasized that BG's incentive to comprehend the Arab world was not limited to mere information gathering, it comprised a much wider cognitive understanding of "the other side". It demanded, first of all, the formidable intellectual and psychological effort of detaching oneself from one's own ethical codes and thinking patterns. It meant, first of all, placing oneself in the Arabs' position and only then calculating the enor-

mity of the reversal that had taken place in the region. According to BG, "we must observe [regional changes] not with our own eyes, but with our enemies' eyes, even if their view of things is mistaken, for it is their view".[12]

Observing reality through Arab eyes, BG maintained, would enable one to realize, even if painfully, that the Arabs' values and priorities were totally different from those of their Israeli counterparts. A perspective of the chasm separating the two sides, he claimed, was vital for gaining an accurate understanding of the conflict.

This level of cognitive awareness may have led BG to conclude that the present conflict stemmed not from "a lapse in communication" with the Arab world or from a temporary "misunderstanding", as some people preferred to explain it, but from an unbridgeable gap between the national, social and moral values of Jews and Arabs.

One of the major differences between "us" and "them", BG felt, derived from the value the Jewish people placed on human life. He repeatedly emphasized – while seeking support, *inter alia*, in biblical passages – that for "us" peace is an eternal value, an expression of the Jews' universal and devoted commitment to the sanctity of life, and not merely a temporary observance in the interest of national and material needs:

> The Jewish people and all decent men have always marvelled, justifiably so, at the sanctity of human life. "Thou shalt not kill" is the holiest commandment given to us on Mt Sinai. No other nation regards life more dearly than the Jewish people.[13]

Assured that Israel's national leaders were fully committed to this ultimate ethical imperative, BG had no doubt of their moral obligation to proceed wholeheartedly towards an Arab–Israeli peace settlement.

But in the Arab world, BG believed, this ethical commitment to human life was conspicuously absent; the Arabs' attitude towards peace was diametrically opposite to that of the Jews; thus, evaluating their yearning for peace by the standard of "our" value system was doomed to failure. "Although [objectively] I can explain Arab interest . . . in making peace with us," he stated, in practice "they would not take such a course because leaders like . . . BG and Sharett are non-existent [in the Arab countries], nor is there [a political party like] Mapai [the Israeli Labour Party]." BG thus assumed that Israel's repeated call for an Arab–Israeli settlement would continue to fall on deaf ears.[14]

Ben-Gurion frequently discussed economic development when illustrating the gap between the two value-systems. He deemed the amelioration of living standards as among the most valuable aims; therefore it appeared to him logical that the Arab world would eagerly embrace the Zionists' return to the country because of their know-how and enthusiasm for development. Here, too, BG suffered a jarring setback, as it soon became clear

to him that the Arabs acted according to a set of standards that did not treat urgent social problems as important. In great detail he outlined his growing awareness of this difference of perspectives.

> Like all of the early Zionists, I too believed in the theory that our labour [to economically improve Eretz Israel] would convey a blessing to the Arab peoples . . . I was naive then to imagine . . . that the Arabs think like us. When I was elected to the Zionist Executive I stated, "now we must find a way to prove our theory". I participated in talks with local Arab leaders and those in the neighbouring countries . . . They taught me a simple rule that I should have realized long ago: . . . you cannot penetrate the minds of others. When I was conversing with an Arab intellectual, an honest man [the likely reference is to Musa Alami] . . . about the benefits our land settlement held for [his people], he replied, "That's true, but we don't want your blessing. We prefer the land to remain impoverished, barren and empty until we ourselves are capable of doing what you are doing. And if it takes another century, then we will wait a hundred years."[15]

Ben-Gurion was aware that understanding the Arabs would be a Herculean task, because from every angle he perceived the Arab countries as the antithesis of Israel. Some of the terms he employed to express the cultural alienation between the two regional and cultural entities were quite blunt. "We live in the twentieth century, they in the fifteenth." "We have created a modern society . . . in the midst of a medieval world." "Israel is not a Middle Eastern state, it is a Western state."[16]

Nevertheless, he stressed that despite the objective difficulty in comprehending the Arab world, Israel should not be deterred from the task of trying to understand it. On the contrary, he asserted, "we" should double "our" efforts at grasping their mentality, for this would have far-reaching consequences in shaping Israeli policy. He was convinced that only through a candid, determined study of the mind-set rooted in the region, could Israel's leaders perceive accurately, and without wishful thinking, the extreme danger facing the state, and decide on the wisest foreign policy and defence strategy to adopt.

There were critics who accused BG of going too far in understanding the other side (in this case, Egypt) when he admitted that only an objective view would save Israel from misinterpreting Arab hostility. BG answered them self-defensively:

> Because I understand the basic motives of Nasser and other Egyptian officers, I have managed to organize, equip, and train our army [to meet their challenge] . . . Had I not fully appreciated [Nasser's basic hostile intent towards us] . . . I might have said . . . they [the Egyptians] won't attack us; be assured of that.[17]

"Misconceptions" of the Arab World

Ben-Gurion's perception of the Arab world should be seen in light of various other views that prevailed in Israel. Many senior Israeli politicians and political parties characterized the Arab–Israeli struggle as a transient conflict of limited proportions. They backed up their belief with the assumption that the source of the conflict should be sought in the Arabs' political and social circumstances and in events in the international arena. Once these temporary conditions improved, they argued, the Arab–Israeli conflict would surely be resolved.

In the same context, a number of Israeli politicians tended to emphasize the grave social problems rampant in the Arab world, where, they claimed, a Socialist–Marxist class struggle was transpiring, waged between the ruling *effendis* (landowners) and the workers. The *effendis* were presented as a powerful elite that had achieved financial dominance with the support of the colonialist regime. The working class, on the other hand, included the "ordinary Arab" whose main struggle was to improve his socio-economic position, and who had no interest whatsoever in prolonging the Arab–Israeli conflict. The Arab labourer, they concluded, harboured no hatred towards Israel but was being pushed against his will into a war.

This concept was very popular among the Israeli Left. An outstanding example can be seen in a letter written by Aharon Cohen of Mapam (the United Workers' Party) to Dr Khaldi, Secretary of the Higher Arab Committee:

> [We believe that] the real enemy of Israel is not the Arabs, but those who manipulate and encourage them from abroad . . . The real interests of Arab–Jewish cooperation are far stronger than the common cause between Arabs and British . . . The majority of Arabs in this region . . . intensely refuses to engage in active warfare against its Jewish neighbours. From the depths of their hearts many Arabs are pleased with the defeat of the [neighbouring] warmongers who invaded Israel.[18]

Proponents of this view claimed that Israel should cease regarding "ordinary Arabs" as the intractable enemy on the other side of the fence. Rather, they should be seen as an element pushed into fighting Israel against their will. In the future, after being liberated from the current leaders and their oppressive regimes, when new governments were founded on socialist principles, they might even become Israel's allies. This is why, the Israeli Marxists stressed, every path must be sought to the heart and mind of the "ordinary Arab", and ties of common interest with the Israeli working class must be forged.[19]

Simultaneously, almost the exact opposite view was being voiced at the

other extreme of the Israeli political spectrum, urging the exploitation of the Arab class war for Israel's own national interests. This view called on the Israeli leadership to seek a peace settlement with the Arab states based on the mutual interests of financiers and the power elite of the Arab world.

Proponents of this view suggested that Israel should offer compensation to "special groups," defined as "select refugees dwelling in neighbouring countries". Generous remuneration, it was believed, would spur this moneyed elite towards an Arab–Israeli settlement. Their proximity to government circles in the Arab countries, it was further claimed, would increase the possibility that Arab regimes might enter into peace talks with Israel.

Senior officials in the Foreign Ministry subscribed to this idea on the Israeli side. Abba Eban, the Israeli ambassador to the United States at the time, wrote to the Secretary of the Foreign Ministry in January 1951:

> I have the distinct impression that were we to find the means to compensate the Jordanian government and its elected representatives for their abandoned estates inside Israel, then we would receive from these circles an entirely different attitude from that which exists today. It is possible that our tendency to view political affairs according to general terms and [objective] concepts is leading us nowhere. People in Arab countries tend to see things from the personal angle, and they prefer the fate of the individual to that of the larger group.[20]

It appears, however, that BG had no inclination to build Israel's relations with the Arabs on such anachronistic lines. Referring to the social division in the Arab world and its split into classes of "exploiters" and "exploited", he refused to consider that class differences posed any significance for Arab relations with Israel.

Hatred of Israel was a shared feeling, he perceived, at all levels of Arab society; both "exploiters" and "exploited", he was convinced, were prepared to shove the Jewish state into the sea. In his opinion, it would be erroneous to imagine that social and economic contention would motivate one class of Arabs to cooperate with Israel in suppressing another class of Arabs. Proof of this "thesis", BG reminded his listeners, lay in the general mobilization of the Arab world that had cut across all class lines during the War of Independence.

At that time, in a debate with Yitzhak Tabenkin (one of the leaders of the socialist Achdut Ha'avoda [Unity of Labour] Party), he stated:

> I reject Tabenkin's premise [that the "exploited" classes in the Arab world might become our allies]. As charitable and comforting as it is, it has no grasp of reality in assuming that only the Arab *effendis* and not the Arab peasants and workers were aligned against us in this struggle [War of Independence]. I am sorry to say that the facts show the exact opposite is true.[21]

It seems, then, that BG would have also rejected the assessment that linkage with the wealthy classes in the Arab world could lead to a stable Arab–Israeli peace agreement, though we have not been able to ascertain if this idea, popular in the Foreign Ministry, was actually put to him. An estimate of his position on this specific issue can be based on his moral revulsion at the prospect of negotiating with greedy Arab leaders who could be bribed. "I realize," he said at one point, "there are two kinds of Arab leaders: those who can be bought, and those who cannot. I say, leaders who can be bought – are not worth talking to. Do you think we can buy off the whole Arab nation? I will speak only with Arabs who are true patriots."[22]

Another illustration of BG's view of the "inherent" nature of the Arab–Israeli conflict can be seen in his reluctance to pin the source of Arab enmity towards Israel on the Arabs' dependence on colonial powers. Suggestions had been made that the European powers held a keen interest in stoking the flames of conflict in order to prolong Arab dependence on them.

According to this argument, the Arabs' attention would be diverted from their national liberation struggle against the European powers to other directions less harmful to colonial interests. In other words, the Great Powers preferred to satisfy their narrow interests rather than deal responsibly with the pressing needs of nations in the region. The main accusation was made, naturally, against Great Britain.

This assessment of the Arab attitude implied that Israel should consider the possibility of an Arab–Israeli settlement at some stage in the future with guarded optimism. With the termination of their historical dependence on the colonial powers at the top of their list of priorities, the Arabs, many believed, would strive to maintain stability with a strong neighbour such as Israel. This view was strongly backed by Foreign Minister Sharett, and was reflected in his appraisal of the extent to which the Egyptians and Jordanians would be willing to conclude a comprehensive settlement.

Sharett estimated that the Egyptian leadership's decision to end the War of Independence and enter into armistice negotiations derived, *inter alia*, from their apprehension of British military intervention and heightened British influence in the region. If this were to happen, Sharett surmised, Egypt's opportunity for terminating its colonial dependence would be thwarted. At the end of the war, BG too had declared:

> It is not inconceivable to consider that the turning-point in Egypt's decision [to consummate hostilities and sign an Armistice Agreement] . . . has been the direct result of British intervention . . . against us . . . Supposedly it was for Egypt's benefit, [but it] placed a very difficult choice not only before us, but also before the Egyptians: . . . If the war continued, then it would lead Egypt to far greater dependency on the British Army, and Egypt would

> become even more subservient to British power . . . [If Egypt] preferred to shorten the war by trying to negotiate for peace . . . [it did so knowing that by taking this course] it would save itself from the trap set by British intervention.[23]

During Israel's negotiations with King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan, Sharett also depicted Jordan's desire to narrow its dependence on Britain.

> Each discussion between Jordan and us . . . diminishes [Jordan's] total dependence on Britain, and opens new possibilities [for] its liberation . . . There can be no doubt that the Jordanian rulers are studying this dilemma [of negotiating with Israel] in light of these considerations.[24]

Ben-Gurion, like Sharett, emphasized the link between the Arabs' struggle against colonial powers and their attitude towards Israel. Referring to Jordan's heavy dependence on Britain, and the implications this had for its ability to reach a peace settlement, he stated:

> For the future of our [survival] peace and friendship with the Arabs are necessary. Therefore I understand [the necessity of] talks with Abdullah. However, I have grave doubts if the British [leaders] will permit him to make peace.[25]

But BG disclaimed the tendency to present Arab policy as virtually helpless *vis-à-vis* the Great Powers, and he spared no effort in offering a different picture. In a Knesset debate over the Armistice Agreements, he announced:

> I cannot accept the assumption that all of the [Arab] countries, excluding two or three, are [colonial] "puppet states". It is obvious that total independence does not exist in this world, even among the Great Powers; [with them also] there is mutual dependency. Of course a small country, a small nation, is more dependent than others [on foreign powers]. But even people from poor nations, undeveloped ones . . . retain their own self-determination.[26]

Assuming that the Arab states were heavily dependent on the colonial powers, BG believed this still could not fully explain what had led them to launch an all-out war of fanaticism. After analysing their attitude towards the Jewish state, he concluded that their extreme hatred of Israel sprang from sources far more complicated and intrinsic than any single factor. Referring to Britain and the role it played in the Arabs' decision to go to war in 1948, BG declared:

> In order to arrive at a mutual understanding [with the Arab world] it is necessary to understand the Arabs, and not see them as pawns in the game of foreigners. All of us admit that England had a hand in the Arabs' war against us. The [Arab] League was the creation of the British Foreign Office, and many of the Arab leaders have survived thanks to England. But, let us not

> delude ourselves by thinking that the Arabs are merely tools in English hands. They are independent players . . . [and] they are fighting us of their own volition, and not only because someone has incited them.[27]

Immediately following the war, BG acknowledged that a reduction of Arab dependence on the Great Powers could serve Israel's national interests. Cautioning against maintaining illusions over the Arabs' readiness to reach a peace settlement, he asserted that Israel should strive, to the full extent of its modest resources, to limit Arab dependence on the Great Powers. In policy consultations on the Armistice Agreements at the end of the war, he candidly stated his views, and concerns, on this major issue:

> No flight of the imagination is necessary [to conclude that were it not for Arab dependence on the Great Powers, Arab–Israeli relations] would be different. It is possible that, after viewing Israel's existence and strength, the Arab states would [have wished to] reach an agreement with her and gain a windfall. [Therefore], one of our goals must be to intensify their independence by reducing foreign influence. I am aware that it is beyond our strength to compete with global giants such as Great Britain and the United States, but other ways exist to exert pressure and influence. Arab weakness is being exploited by these powers. Even if we fail in our effort [to reduce colonial influence], we must endeavour to our utmost to hasten [Arab] independence, and explain to them that through a bilateral accord with us they can be liberated from foreign dependency and enslavement.[28]

"Jewish Justice" versus "Arab Justice"

Many of BG's statements on Israel's relationship with the Arab world illustrate the degree to which he took pains to perceive the conflict with both "Israeli and Arab eyes". A study of the language he employed often reveals the neutral stand of a non-partisan observer. By his own admittance, he viewed the conflict not in terms of "black and white", but as an implacable, often exceedingly violent struggle between two nations each absolutely convinced that justice resided on their own side.

The complexity of the conflict demanded that BG take a sober look at the range of moral issues involved.

> The first thing required of us [he wrote] is to perceive things [also] from the other's view . . . The problem is that ethical judgements are essentially a subjective matter; and the tragedy [of the Arab–Israeli conflict] is that Eretz Israel means two entirely different things, one for the Arabs and one for the Jews, and both are morally justifiable.[29]

More than merely understanding the Arabs' moral allegations, BG

frequently asserted that one must literally stand in the others' place in order to gain insight into their positions. Furthermore, he readily admitted that he would behave as they did if he were in their shoes. For example, following Musa Alami's declaration that the Arabs preferred their country to lie fallow and impoverished for a hundred years rather than allow the Jews to control and develop it, BG stated, "I understood that from his viewpoint, he was right. If I were an Arab, I would say the same."[30]

In the same context, he would frequently exhibit acute sensitivity at the plight of the Arab refugees. One detects that he even understood their need to let off anger and frustration through violence against Israel. In a closed, party discussion, he audaciously acknowledged that "between six and eight hundred thousand refugees are festering on the borders; uprooted people whose fields, homes, villages, and cities have been expropriated from under them. They are hungry and bitterly angry, and it honestly amazes me that there are so few cases of infiltration, shooting and killing."[31]

Another astoundingly candid expression of his "understanding" of the plight of the Palestinian refugees was made in the Knesset at the height of an extremely sensitive debate on aid rendered to infiltrators by Israeli Arabs. Even here, BG had no reservations about saying what he felt, causing a minor uproar in the Israeli parliament.

> If an Arab transgresses the law, then from a judicial point of view, as a lawyer and judge, I would hand him over to the legal authorities for imprisonment. But as a human being, I understand him, and in his place, would probably act the same.[32]

It should be kept in mind that despite BG's empathy with Arab "suffering", he did not accord the same sympathy towards their position on the conflict. Furthermore, he was not inclined to present their moral claims in too bright a light for this might have had the effect of blinding the Jewish people to their own moral right to sovereignty in Eretz Israel. Eventually, in "a moment of truth", when forced to make "a final moral judgement" on the conflict, BG had no qualms about opting for the Israeli side.

> Absolute right is on our side [he thundered], the Jewish people has a right to exist, and only in Eretz Israel will we exist. That is the ultimate moral consideration. Nothing can override that.[33]

The Arab Threat

Physical–Geographical Data

The physical geography of the Arab world was prominently featured in BG's descriptions. "The entire Middle East, from southern Turkey and Russia's border with the Caucasus Mountains to western Persia and all of the North African coast from Egypt to the Atlantic, is one extended landmass, four million square miles of Arabic speaking, devout Muslims."[34]

The ominous implications of these dry facts were not lost on BG, and they forced him to acknowledge that the Arabs' view of Israel was at least as justified as Israel's view of them, if not more so:

> The Arabs see us as a minority, and this is actually a more accurate perspective than ours, because we are indeed a minority . . . Their [assessment] is based on the fact that Israel is a tiny island in the heart of a giant Arab sea stretching across four and a half million square miles and [containing] sixty-five million inhabitants . . . In other words, the Arab landmass is over 560 times the size of Israel, and their population is forty-four times larger than ours. Therefore, in the Arabs' eyes they are not the minority, we are.[35]

Ben-Gurion's geographical presentation of the differences between the Arab world and Israel held further grave consequences for Arab–Israeli relations. In the first place, Israel had to accept that it must struggle for survival not only against hostile states along the border or even against distant countries that had dispatched military contingents to Palestine in the War of Independence. The entire geographical and political mass of Arab–Muslim countries, he believed, was aimed at wiping Israel off the map.

This led BG to a sobering operational conclusion: Israel could never achieve a decisive victory ("a final victory" in his words) over the Arabs. Military victories over one or more Arab states would be temporary and limited at best. The enormous size of the Arab world and its endless resources endowed it with the ability to absorb consecutive military defeats without a total collapse.

In the absence of the possibility of a "final victory", BG stressed that Israel would have to realize its limitations in resolving the military conflict. The Arabs' boundless capability for recuperating their losses would always enable them to renew their threat. Shortly before the Sinai campaign, he cautioned:

> We cannot gain [in combat] a final victory guaranteeing that a second, third or fourth round of fighting would not ensue. It is only the Arab rulers who

> boast of their [ability to win] total victory against us. This is pure braggadocio, but it contains a basic logic in that they see themselves conquering [our] country and pushing [us] into the sea. We have no desire to win a victory of this sort, even if we are assured of victory in a second round . . . because it would not be a final victory . . . and another round would surely follow.[36]

For the Arabs, BG repeatedly explained, Israel's "smallness" was a perpetual enticement to try to defeat her on the battlefield. The map which was undoubtedly pinned on the walls of every Arab leader's office must have reinforced their faith that sooner or later they would overcome the bantam enemy in their midst. "Geographical, political and historical facts have turned Israel into an easy target for its neighbours . . . We are few, they are many. It is human nature that the majority wishes to rule the minority."[37]

The Arabs' view of the geopolitical reality in the region revealed, according to BG, their indifference towards reaching a peace settlement. BG was conspicuously aware that time held almost no importance for the Arabs in their stubborn hope of destroying Israel.

> It should not be assumed that the defeat [of the Arabs in the War of Independence] has restrained them from [wishing to] extirpate us from our land . . . They are certain, with some justification, that time is on their side . . . ten, fifty, a hundred or two hundred years. They have a classic example right here in the country – the eleventh-century Crusader conquest. A Christian state arose . . . [and] thrived for decades, [but] eventually the Muslim world overpowered and totally annihilated it.[38]

When he considered the vast territorial expanse of the Arab world, BG began to realize that the various options for delineating Israel's borders were of marginal importance. "One cannot ignore the geographical facts," he admitted, "our country is small, and it does not matter if it spans both sides of the [Jordan] river. Even if we had ideal borders, we would still be a small country in contrast to the immense stretches of [Arab] lands . . . This is an immutable historical fact."[39]

Pan-Arab Unity

Ben-Gurion observed that in addition to the geographical dimensions of the Arab countries, their immense power was vested in their similarity of character. A strong cohesion was deeply engrained in the Arabs' sense of identity where religion, tradition, language and culture had been common ground for generations. "From geopolitical data alone," he wrote in his diary on the eve of the Armistice Agreement ending the War of

Independence, "the situation is alarming . . . the Arab world presents a serious danger. It is a world united linguistically, religiously, and culturally. We are aliens in its midst."[40]

Ben-Gurion was aware, of course, of the existence of other national, religious, ethnic minorities (Christians, Kurds, Circassians, and Druze) within the Arab bloc. He often sympathized with their dilemma in light of Israel's "common fate" with them, stemming from Arab hostility and the threat to their survival. Naturally, BG wished to foster "mutual interests" in the struggle against a common enemy for it seemed to him that the existence of these persecuted minorities was bound to detract from the unity of the Arab world.

However, he harboured no illusions about the status and influence of those minorities or the likelihood of their becoming formidable allies of Israel. Their unpretentiousness, low standing, and near total dependence on the good will of the Arab Muslims crucially limited such outgrowths.

Furthermore, BG was convinced that despite the rivalry, jealousies, and bitter hatred often sundering the Arab world, its intrinsic solidarity would remain intact. Despite displays of violence among different sectors, it was united by a singularity of purpose – the annihilation of the Jewish people, the Zionist Movement, and the State of Israel.

According to BG, the source of Arab unity lay in the fanatic, inexorable negation of the "Zionist entity". As long as Israel survived, Arab unity would endure, at least superficially. "The Arab states," he stressed, "are divided and at odds with one another. There are dynasties, juntas, cliques, and myriad orientations. In one thing they are united: all of them hate Israel, and whoever strikes at Israel, wins their approval."[41]

Militant Leadership

Another element of the Arab threat involved the nature of Arab leadership, which BG generally portrayed as blatantly warlike, void of vision or inspiration, and extremely profligate. He regarded the Arab leaders as selfish men, devoted primarily to their own self-interests instead of to the obvious goal of improving the "real" needs of the nation. A few months before the Sinai campaign, he declared:

> All of the Arab leaders, without exception, are dedicated to either avarice, or advancing their own political ambitions, or both together. There is not one leader whose major interest is raising the standard of living of the people he rules. They have not the least concern about developing their countries, ameliorating living conditions of the *fellachim* [peasants] and workers, and eradicating ignorance and disease among the masses.[42]

Ben-Gurion's wrath targeted Egypt's leaders, especially Nasser, whose militant policy towards Israel was a classic example of an Arab leader ignoring the "real" needs of his people. "[Nasser] is concerned with only one thing – military victories which will make him the leader of Islam."[43]

In his criticism of the Egyptian leader, BG does not elaborate on Nasser's low moral standards, but dwells rather on Nasser's pursuit of an aggressive, reckless policy towards Israel at the expense of his people. Nasser should have realized, BG felt, that no basic conflict of interests existed between Israel and Egypt. Therefore, there was no need for Egypt to devote so great an expenditure of energy and resources against her Jewish neighbour to the north. In early 1956 BG detailed Nasser's erroneous path:

> There was a [Free Officers'] revolt in Egypt [against the rule of King Farouk] . . . a number of military officers seized power. At first it seemed they were intent on bringing about a change [for the better] for the Egyptian people. No country in the world has a level of poverty, disease, and ignorance as high as Egypt's . . . But this man [President Nasser] publicly proclaimed that his plans were to place Egypt at the forefront of the Arab people, at the head of the Muslim world, the ruler of the entire African continent. Therefore, he may choose one of two paths [to realize his ambitions]: the first – a long and arduous road in correcting Egypt's horrific internal situation . . . by turning it into a healthy, prosperous country . . . And there is a second path: foreign conquest and war against those people hated by the Arabs – war against Israel. The rulers of Egypt have chosen the second path.[44]

On another occasion, BG was equally vituperative on the negative character of Arab leaders who avoided establishing democracy in their countries and granting their people the right to vote. He claimed that only through force and violence have Arab leaders come to power and remained in government. For BG this implied that only a certain, negative type of person could rule in these countries. "No Arab state has a popularly-elected regime. In every Arab country, without exception, the leaders are reckless and tyrannical. None has an inkling of [public] responsibility."[45]

He rejected the claim that the absence of democracy in Arab countries should be considered as merely an "internal problem" of no import for Israel, for he believed that it held long-range implications for Arab foreign policy. Arab leaders, BG argued, had no need of a "national consensus" for their policies, and had no fear of public disapproval disrupting their hold on power. Thus, as far as BG was concerned, leaders in the Arab world were given carte blanche to incite the crowds and execute an irresponsible, aggressive foreign policy. Discerning between a government anchored to democratic principles and a dictatorial regime, BG professed:

> Democratic government is not only government [founded on free] elections

> but government whose main concern is to provide for the people's basic needs. In nearly every one of the neighbouring states a military dictatorship of juntas or federal government exists [rather than a democracy] . . . The Egyptian people are in need of development, health and education. But a dictatorship that rules by military force, lacking the support and consent of the nation, cannot deal with these matters, because they are long-term interests [whereas] dictatorship – is short-lived.[46]

Ben-Gurion perceived that Arab leaders would readily sacrifice thousands of their peoples' lives in pursuit of a belligerent, impulsive foreign policy. His statements are filled with painful descriptions of their flagrant disregard of human life in the attempt to realize their personal goals. He berated the Arab leaders' callousness towards the "sanctity of life", as well as their view of the "demographic explosion" threatening the Arab world. He believed that the Arab leadership viewed the "population surplus" as a curse. "The Arab leaders assume," BG announced, "that they have nothing to lose. And their computation is simple – they are 30–40 million. So, does it matter if fifty or a hundred thousand are killed?"[47]

Later he would significantly raise the "casualty threshold" that Arab leaders would expend in destroying Israel.

> The King of Saudi Arabia once declared his willingness to sacrifice ten million soldiers in the destruction of Israel. The Egyptian tyrant was somewhat more modest, he spoke of enlisting four million for this goal; for what are four million Egyptians in the eyes of this tyrant? He knows how to count, it is clear to him that even if four million are lost, forty-two million still remain.[48]

A Lust for Killing

From BG's depiction of the Arab world, one may discern an immense gap between the people and those in power. The people appear as victims of trigger-happy, morally bankrupt leaders who disgracefully refuse to assume any responsibility towards their people's interests. It would seem logical that the populace, bearing the brunt of its leadership's folly, would exhibit manifest hostility at the wrenching sacrifices asked of them, that had nothing in common with their "real" concerns.

But BG saw otherwise. He had no doubts that the belligerent policy of the Arab leaders, especially towards Israel, was more than an expression of personal whims. He believed it actually revealed a deep and latent passion among all Arabs. He often mentions the Arabs' inherent propensity for violence and their blood lust, which, he attests, stems from Islam, the

Arabs' ultimate source for their moral values and way of life. "This religion," he asserts, "was founded by the sword, and teaches the way of the sword. As an injunction of Islam . . . they are brought up in this spirit."[49]

The classic realizations of Islam's zeal for bloodshed, BG contended, have been the massive slaughter of the Christian Armenian minority, executed by Muslim Turks, and the wholesale massacre of the Christian Assyrian minority, carried out by Muslim Iraqis. BG discerns the obvious similarity between the Muslims' carnage inflicted on helpless minorities and the Nazis' attempt to exterminate the entire Jewish people. Summing up his evidence, BG fulminates:

> Our neighbours are already quite familiar with [genocide], it is their religion's creed. Whoever has seen the Arab flag [an apparent reference to the Saudi Arabian flag – Z.S.] recognizes its slogan, the basis of Islamic faith. There is something else on the flag – the sword. Here lies the essence of Islam's religious philosophy.[50]

Despite the alienation between the Arab people and their governments, BG realized that many Arab leaders, their apathy towards improving the country's social and economic conditions notwithstanding, have gained immense popularity among the masses.

Israel's Strength and Vulnerability

Importance of the Home Front

The scope and severity of the Arab threat depended not only on Islam's inherent strength but also on Israel's power to meet the challenge. An evaluation of any nation's strength is a complex issue comprising innumerable factors and staggering details whose relative importance complicates the picture exponentially. According to BG, numerous parameters, in addition to the military factor, were equally essential for determining a nation's capacity for resistance.

He substantiated this concept by referring to modern warfare where a nation's entire range of resources is put to the test.

> In pre-modern times wars were struggles between professional armies . . . [and] the people had little awareness of the fighting . . . but this is not the case today. Nowadays warfare between nations [is] total war. Not only is an army's strength the deciding factor, but the entire strength of the country – [which includes its] production, economic . . . scientific and organizational capability, and most important – its moral and spiritual strength.[51]

In this context BG repeatedly pointed out the importance of strengthening

Israel's home front. The main thing was internal security, on which, he strongly believed, Israel's survival depended. However, according to his view of national priorities and the military's status within the national framework, Israel could not remain indefinitely on full military alert.[52]

Despite severe external threats, Israel would make every effort to remain a civil society. Security arrangements, he contended, must rest on limited military preparedness, but in a way that would enable the country to switch immediately to full alert at an impending attack.

> There are those who are certain that we must remain perpetually ready for war. Those [of us] responsible for national security have repeatedly rejected this policy. Continual alert, to be perennially combat ready, would guarantee failure if war actually broke out. It would be an outrageous, unbearable burden crushing us; and at the moment of truth when war erupted, we would not have the strength to fight.[53]

Ben-Gurion felt that determining national priorities and the allocation of resources for military purposes must be carried out on the assumption that Israel's ability to face the challenges was not dependent on military power alone. Therefore, the military budget must tend to the general needs of the state and not be directed exclusively to military requirements.

Aware of the fledgling state's urgent social–economic needs, BG was determined to make far-reaching cuts in the IDF following the War of Independence, despite the warning of the Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, that it would signal his resignation. In a letter to Yadin, BG explained:

> Israel's highest goals, the ingathering of exiles and the development of the country, do not coincide with an exorbitant security budget. The true security of the state cannot be conceived without mass immigration and expanded agricultural settlement.[54]

The highest importance that BG bestowed on the home front was enshrined in his unshakeable faith in the state's ability to meet all challenges and threats, if the policy he prescribed was adopted. It was his belief that Israel's collective strength would soon be put to the test, and that a wide range of factors, not only Israel's relative military superiority, would determine the outcome. Shortly after the Sinai campaign, he reminded his listeners of the military's limitations in the Arab–Israeli conflict. Israel's dazzling battlefield victory aside, the state remained politically isolated and had to face unprecedented pressure from the Great Powers to withdraw from Sinai and the Gaza Strip. These developments reinforced BG's view that the home front was the single most important element in the conflict:

> It is very likely that in our political struggle, we will stand alone in the General Assembly. We will doubtlessly need the strength to do so without flinching or surrendering to the combined forces prepared to alienate the rights of a

> small nation whose strength lies only in the justice of her cause. However, this political struggle will not be decided exclusively in the General Assembly and other United Nations organizations. Like most of our struggle, it will not be determined in foreign lands but on the home front, by what we do inside the country. [It will be decided by] building up Eilat, establishing a large port in the Red Sea Gulf, laying a pipeline from Eilat to Beer Sheva, constructing roads and railway lines, and creating a series of settlements along the pipeline and the road.[55]

Elsewhere, replying to a citizen who had expressed fear of Israel's inability to prevent acts of killing and sabotage by Arab infiltrators, BG clarified his position. "Our fate is in our hands, [and even if] occasionally we make mistakes, do not be overly alarmed. The [real] danger lies in our own lack of will, our indifference, our exaggerated internal divisions, [and] in our lack of pioneering spirit."[56]

Components of Strength

Ben-Gurion's view of Israeli society in this period reflects a two-fold approach. On the one hand, he emphasized the "high points" that granted it an outstanding advantage over the Arab world. Occasionally, he even sketched it in "glowing" terms as if he were visualizing the ideal rather than the imperfect reality. On the other hand, he repeatedly employed blunt, unflattering language, depicting its weakness, which placed it in an inferior position *vis-à-vis* the Arab world.

Among the distinctive features in Israeli society, BG pointed to the political, social and economic principles that he believed it to be founded on. In contrast to the endemic feudalism, corruption and backwardness of Arab society, he portrayed Israel as progressing towards "an advanced, multi-faceted, consumer-directed economy, based on Hebrew labour, a high social and cultural level . . . freedom and mutual assistance . . . democracy, the rights of man, and civil and political equality".[57]

He saw an abyss separating the diametrically opposite Jewish and Arab cultures. The fact that Israel dwelt juxtaposed with Arab society put it in grave danger. Israel was a showcase of modern Western society, according to BG, enticingly placed before the eyes of the Arab people and jeopardizing the Arab leaders' hold on power.

> We live in the twentieth century, they – in the fifteenth. The Arab world is still given to patriarchal or feudalistic rule where all power is concentrated in the hands of a dynasty or wealthy elite. Ours is a progressive society, a democratic one, [founded] on the values of labour, equality and freedom; [the Arab leaders perceive us as] endangering the enslavement and exploitation on which their society is built.[58]

Ben-Gurion had no doubts that the nature of Israel's government and the high level of its responsible, elected leadership blessed it with advantages over the Arab countries where forced rule was the foundation of government. Bound to the principles of democracy, Israel's leadership reflected, in BG's eyes, not only the will of the people and its "genuine" needs, but also an absence of the deep alienation Arab citizens felt towards their leaders.

Furthermore, BG claimed that Jewish leadership in Israel based its activity and decision-making, first and foremost, on the national and universal morality inherent in the Jewish people for generations. Attachment to these principles ensured that Israeli political leaders would abide by the highest standard of personal morality, acting solely in the people's interest.

> The State of Israel is part of the geography of the Middle East, but morally and culturally it is singular in this part of the world, completely removed from its neighbours . . . Israel was established and built by a nation of culture, possessing a tradition of high moral standards . . . it is not [governed by] warlords and ruling families profiteering in political appointments.[59]

The major difference as BG saw it between Israeli and Arab political morality lay in each side's attitude to the sanctity of life. For Israeli leaders, the sanctity of individual life was the supreme ethical injunction, the basis of Jewish moral tradition. Sensitivity to human life compelled Israel's leaders to act with extreme caution in decision-making that might endanger life. But, as already stated, BG believed that human life was not a major concern for Arab leaders. In a closed political forum, he bluntly expressed his views on this.

> I would not wish to be in the position of sending [soldiers] on a [risky combat] mission [where] the sender is not certain they will return alive, unless he is an Egyptian commander who scorns human life . . . For us [responsible Jewish leaders] the life of every person is precious, especially the lives of our sons.[60]

Shortcomings in Israeli Society

The Jewish Population

In his writings, BG frequently underscored the crisis Israeli society faced in dealing with the enormous security threat of an all-out Arab–Israeli war and the ongoing murderous infiltration along the borders. In repeated statements, he warned of the serious dangers confronting the civilian population, whom he compared to Londoners during the Blitz (BG was himself

present in the British capital during the bombing). Recalling the shelling of Tel Aviv by Egyptian aircraft in 1948, he said:

> Today's war is total. It involves everyone . . . and does not differentiate between soldier and civilian . . . It would be mistaken and dangerous if in addition to preparing for war . . . we did not utilize all means for defending the civilian population . . . From our bitter experience in the War of Independence, beginning on the first night of hostilities, we learned the cruel truth of modern warfare. At the same time as the enemy invaded [the country], [Tel Aviv] was bombed from the air by [Egyptian] planes. However, [our] defence has another goal of utmost importance. In the case of war, we will [have to] send our young men to the battlefield. This demands that the soldier in the field be as assured as possible, that his parents, family, and children are safe, so that he will not [be burdened by] a double anxiety.[61]

The question of Israeli society's ability to face the peril of a second round of fighting assumes critical importance for BG in light of the mass immigration flooding the country in the early fifties. While seen as a potential blessing, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Jews, especially from Muslim states, also contained negative influences that he could not ignore. He was especially concerned over their influence on the social cohesion and psychological strength crucially needed for facing the challenges of the Arab world.

As he discussed the effect of mass immigration on the fabric of Israeli society, he was keenly mindful of the "veteran Yishuv" that had so impressively withstood decades of Arab attacks and violence. With danger increasing, it was inevitable that BG would compare the "veteran community" with the "newcomers" and assess the ability of the two to withstand Arab pressure. One of his many comparisons on this subject was made in early 1956, when war clouds were already forming on the horizon.

> In what way is the present situation different from [what prevailed during] the War of Independence? . . . A change has taken place, and it is a positive one. Then we were six hundred and fifty thousand; today we are twice as many . . . But a negative change [too] has resulted . . . [In 1948] the nation was united. The nation was hardened – tempered by the pioneering enterprise of three generations . . . Today our Yishuv is different. Not all of its elements are equally hardened . . . [and] herein lies the great change.[62]

In this context, BG focused his attention on the new arrivals sent to border settlements and their ability to "hold the fort". Directing them to border areas, occasionally against their will, had increased their feelings of alienation and segregation, both geographically and psychologically. The tension that already existed between the "heart" of the country and the periphery now intensified.

Furthermore, in addition to the disintegrating security situation along the borders, another factor could be added to the immigrants' sense of estrangement and isolation. This was the glaring difference between urban concentrations brimming with life and far-removed from daily security concerns, and the rural villages surrounded by desert and barren soil, exposed round-the-clock to the perils of sabotage, murder and shelling by both infiltrators and Arab regular armies.

Ben-Gurion was well aware of the sharp division between these two segments of Israeli society and its ominous implications for the nation's ability to endure a prolonged, tension-ridden conflict.

> During our independence war [he admitted] when we stood alone against six enemy states, our nation was one, unified and united. Our enemies were divided and we defeated them. Every person who is concerned over the nation's fate realizes that we are no longer one nation, but two different people, both Jewish, living in Israel . . . Our situation will become alarming . . . if we do not unite the two, and create one country out of them . . . [otherwise] who can say what will befall both country and nation.[63]

Ben-Gurion's apprehensions over the border settlements' ability to hold out under war conditions were based on a sober assessment of their composition. He envisioned the reaction of immigrants eking out a living in barely developed border settlements after a murderous attack by infiltrators. Especially appalling to BG was the very real likelihood of abandoned villages. He pointed out the propensity of immigrant farmers in Patish, a farming village in the northern Negev, to desert their homes after a murderous act by Arab infiltrators who had crossed the border from Egypt on 25 March 1955. Desertion of the village was prevented, in BG's opinion, by the presence of young people from the veteran farming village Kfar Vitkin who had volunteered to work there (one of the youngsters, Varda Friedman, was killed by the infiltrators).[64]

Repercussions of this nature, BG believed, would not have occurred during the War of Independence:

> Not a single Jewish settlement in the Galilee or the Negev, north of Jerusalem or in the Hebron area abandoned its location. It happened that a few places fell one or two days before the declaration of independence, and those that did fall, such as Gush Etzion [in the Hebron area] and Atarot [north of Jerusalem] had exhibited extreme bravery in holding onto their positions.[65]

Today, BG perceived, the country's social–demographic circumstances had completely changed. This was proving to be Israel's gravest strategic threat at a time when border tensions were rising, and the storm clouds of another all-out war were approaching.

Internal Rifts

Ben-Gurion was fully cognizant that the acute schism in Israeli society merely reflected the general divided condition of the Jewish people. In fact, he grew pessimistic even at the prospect of defining the Jews as a "nation", and he expressed his doubts in a letter written in 1952:

> Perhaps the question "How will the Jewish nation be created?" sounds strange to many listeners. [After all] the existence of the Jewish nation should be a given fact and the question should be how to concentrate as many Jews as possible in Eretz Israel. I think this is a mistake. The Jewish nation's existence is not a fact but a goal, an ideal. No Jewish nation exists yet . . . there is no common language or natural ties to a homeland, nor do we have a collective consciousness or common roots. Creating the Jewish nation requires a continuous, labourious effort – [in the] social, cultural, organizational, bureaucratic, and economic [spheres].[66]

The deep cleavages in Israeli society were seen by BG as stemming primarily from the "objective" fact that for generations Jews had dwelled outside of a common, territorial body politic. As a result, Jewish communities had developed without a natural, or organic, link to their own homeland. "Jews," explained BG, "have been living for two thousand years in Exile . . . they are tribes without a common language – not only a language of words. The distance of centuries separates them."[67]

Furthermore Jews lacked the civic culture and behaviour patterns of civilized nations whose inhabitants have been dwelling for centuries within a single territorial framework. One of the major consequences of this historical condition, BG felt, was the tendency of Israeli society to opt for extremist positions and regard compromise as a show of weakness rather than a reconfirmation of national strength:

> We have no sense of civic responsibility, [our style of] argument is not a rational debate among "normal" people, but [a crude shouting match] among fanatics . . . decorum is absent in our discourse. When two political parties agree on 95 per cent of an issue, but disagree on five percent, then the 95 per cent are meaningless [to them] . . . and they continue bickering and passionately denouncing each other.[68]

In many of his statements on the characteristics of Israeli society, BG expressed his somber apprehension that Israel's social schism could soon lead to a breakdown of democratic government. He insisted that there were a number of political groupings that sought to gain positions of power and might stray from the "rules of the game", using violence to achieve their goals.

Days after the ratification of the United Nations Partition Plan, BG

stated, "From an internal point of view, I see great difficulty in realizing statehood [within the State of Israel], because who can say if we Jews are capable of self-rule. I fear that instead of the start of a great [national] endeavour, fratricidal war might commence."[69]

Following independence, BG repeatedly warned of the dire consequences that the lack of respectable civic behaviour could have for Israeli society. He went so far as to criticize his own efforts at introducing social–political norms during and after the War of Independence, calling them only partially successful. At the war's conclusion he indicated four factors that had contributed to the intensification of Israel's internal division: religious issues, social schisms, controversies over the desired type of government, and Israel's international orientation.[70]

Nevertheless, it was BG's belief that these "fault lines" – as dangerous as they were for Israeli society – would not deteriorate into internecine bloodshed. "In my opinion, there is no danger of a civil war," he told the Minister of the Interior, Moshe Shapira.[71]

Ben-Gurion did feel, however, that immediately after independence, attempts were likely to be made by political parties and groups to seize power by strong-arm methods. "There is a definite tendency in Mapam [United Workers' Party] to usurp government by force."[72]

He expanded on this theme in September 1949, pointing the finger at three parties that might employ violence in order to usurp the government. *Inter alia*, he stated:

> We must take a cold hard look at our reality. We have a Knesset, but outside of it are Communists, Herut [free-enterprise, fiercely nationalistic party], and Mapam – three parties whose programmes, ideals, theories and praxes are to forcefully seize the government that they claim is presently only a formal democracy.
>
> Do you think their talk is merely theoretical? As for Herut, we have witnessed that they tried once [to seize political power by force] and failed. However, for Mapam too, [such talk] is more than mere theory.[73]

Indifference and Weakness

Deeply concerned over the external threat and Israel's lack of internal cohesion, BG repeatedly admonished that all segments of society had to participate wholeheartedly in the national struggle, and defer their narrower interests. In scores of speeches during the War of Independence, he warned: "If we do not 'shackle ourselves' (and I have chosen this pejorative term intentionally) [to the national cause] all life in the Yishuv, its economy, manpower . . . financial resources, and moral strength . . . it is difficult to believe we will survive."[74]

Ben-Gurion lashed out with his bitterest criticism during the war when it became clear to him that civic behaviour was "light years" away from what was expected in a wartime situation and that not all segments of society were contributing equally to the nation's war effort. He sensed that the burden of the fighting and suffering was falling, naturally, on select groups.

1. In January 1948 he stated: "I am aware [of] . . . excluding the boys . . . who have been at the front for months . . . 180,000 Jews in Tel Aviv are living regular lives . . . Many people in the Yishuv believe that [the war is being fought] in border settlements . . . while the great majority of the Yishuv lives [safely] in Jewish cities, in crowded Jewish areas not affected by the fighting. This is a mistake, and it is dangerous to think this way."[75]
2. In February 1948 he stated: "[National] security now affects every man and woman, every young person, every toddler . . . Our soldiers are now . . . fulfilling their duty to the people . . . [by fighting] at the front. Other than them, almost no one in the Yishuv is contributing as he should."[76]
3. In June 1948 he stated: "A huge gap exists between what is taking place at the front, the super-human effort demanded of our young men and women stationed there, and what is happening in other places. The country is small, and when a soldier who hasn't received a pair of shoes or a blanket, comes to Tel Aviv on leave and witnesses the material abundance and the manner in which people dine in restaurants, it is impossible for demoralization not to set in."[77]

Ben-Gurion realized that the troops' demoralization and the public's indifference to the war effort were grave dangers to his society's ability to face the serious threats emanating from the Arab world. Already in the final phases of the war, BG expressed his profound dismay at people's intoxication with victory and their exaggerated sense of security because of the military gains. "There is no public tension," he wrote in his diary; "they cannot begin to fathom, not even in government circles, that the war is still not over. None of my exhortations during the [campaign], have been absorbed. The public derives satisfaction from our victories, and assumes that our [national] security, survival, and triumph can be stored in a box. A way must be found to re-ignite tension among the people."[78]

Indeed, following Israel's decisive victory in the 1948 war, there was a lull in tension over security. Deep fears for their survival naturally dissipated. Personal and political needs and interests quickly dominated national priorities in what BG called the newly arrived "normal times".[79]

Illustrative of the relaxation in tension was the phenomenon of high-

ranking IDF officers resigning from the army. "Somebody wrote that Tabenkin issued an order to Mapam people to quit the army." There were endless cases of diminished willingness on the part of the public or the security services to enlist for the general good of society. Two years after the war, BG graphically described the pervading atmosphere:

> It is because our security problem is so crucial, tragic, and complicated, that there is a desire to avoid it, and the predilection among the public towards dissociation persists . . . One of the ugliest and most dangerous manifestations of this . . . is the public's placing the state on trial and viewing itself . . . as the judge. The state is being accused by everyone for everything . . . from irrelevant and banal matters . . . to even unscrupulous dealings. They [the public] not only ignore the simple truth, but they increasingly forget that in this period every man and woman in Israel must see themselves on trial . . . for the sake of national security and the survival of the state.[80]

One of the chief reasons for the laxness and indifference taking hold of Israeli society could be found, according to BG, in the general feeling that the next war with the Arabs would be similar to the last one, in which case an Israeli victory would be guaranteed. BG regarded this train of thinking as grievously mistaken and exceedingly dangerous. "We must remember the simple, basic truth: if we fight, we will be fighting in the future and not in the past. There can be no certainty that the enemy who faced us yesterday [in the War of Independence] will act the same in the future."[81]

Perceiving that his advice and exhortations were falling on deaf ears, BG turned to blunter language that gave vent to his frustration. "I see in the psychological and moral aloofness engulfing our citizens," he roared in the Knesset, "Israel's public enemy number one. Apathy of this nature compromises our security more than enemy armies do. It is as though we are living in a fool's paradise. A frenzy is running amok through all sectors of our older established society and is filtering down to the recently arrived immigrants."[82]

An Estimate of Present Relative Strengths

Despite his grim portrayal of the potential dangers, BG did not believe that Israel was in an inferior position. On the contrary, he let it be known that Israel held an unquestionable advantage over her enemies. Even in March 1953, when the IDF was in one of its lowest slumps, he made the following statement:

> A great difference exists between our military and political strength and that of the Arabs. Militarily the Arabs have almost been reduced to paupers, but

politically they are mighty. Our military strength in the region is enormous, but politically we are mendicants.[83]

The main factor that gave Israel its superiority, according to BG, stemmed from the Arabs' inability to unite in order to realize their full potential. The combination of historical circumstances, including fervid hatred among various ethnic and religious groups, and conflicting interests among several countries, revealed the Arab world's inability to translate its vast territory and demographic monopoly into a powerful, united military force that could obliterate Israel.

Ben-Gurion viewed this phenomenon as the Arabs' major failing and one that enabled Israel to remain relatively calm *vis-à-vis* the balance of power in the region. Addressing high-ranking IDF staff officers, two years after the War of Independence, BG admitted:

I cannot predict the future, but I may caution against over-anxiety. Despite all the hatred and hostility [towards us] shared by the Arab countries, they are far from being unified, either internally or externally. There are rifts among blocs of countries and sharp internal divisions, and [their] impaired capability of attack will not be restored in the near future.[84]

Ben-Gurion realized that hatred of a common adversary was not sufficient to unify the Arabs in a war against Israel. This was evident in the War of Independence when they failed to join forces under a united command. BG believed this was one of the main reasons for their defeat. "It is easy to face a divided enemy. This was proven in our War of Independence, when we confronted six hostile countries. Our nation was one – united and unified. Our enemies were divided, and we triumphed over them."[85]

The very nature of Arab society embodied another factor that dulled the edge of the Arabs' sword. BG regarded Arab society as insular and regressive, worlds away from basic moralities and norms embedded in enlightened Western societies. They were lacking values that BG regarded as paramount ethical principles: individual liberty, freedom of expression, universal equality, social justice and a policy for the common good. This gap proved to him that the Arab world was "a backward society, rife with poverty and disease, ignorance and the exploitation of cheap labour, wretched living conditions, feudal relations and slave conditions".[86]

These characteristics, BG believed, were engraved deep in the Arab soul as a result of a long historical process that would hinder Arab society from overcoming them in the foreseeable future. "Although changes will occur in the Arab countries, the generations-old social, economic and political traditions will not be uprooted at once; not even after many years."[87]

To prove his case BG related the meagre social and economic achievements in the Soviet Union decades after the Bolshevik Revolution, which

he labelled "the most radical revolution in the history of man, a revolution that dared tread where no other had gone before".[88]

Nevertheless, he added, not even the Bolsheviks succeeded in realizing their main goal: to create a profound, all-encompassing improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the masses of Soviet workers. After comparing the gaping divide separating the living conditions of Soviet workers from those of their Western counterparts, he noted that the Arab world was even less developed because a workers' revolution had not even taken place there.

Future Dangers

Despite his obvious confidence in Israel's supremacy over the Arabs, BG continually cautioned against "resting on one's laurels". The Arab world was not fated to remain "permanently" divided. In contrast to the victory euphoria that had overtaken both the public and a considerable proportion of the national leadership, BG kept reminding them of the likelihood of a pan-Arab military alliance that would challenge Israel to a second round of fighting. He believed this could come about if a charismatic Arab leader appeared, sophisticated enough to unite the Arab world under a single slogan. Such a phenomenon had occurred among the Arabs in the remote past when their prophet Muhammad suddenly appeared – an entrancing personality proclaiming a new religious faith. "He converted nameless Arab tribes, weak and divided, almost overnight into a united army of conquerors that permanently changed the face of huge areas of the world. The victories they gained for Arab culture had no parallel in human history."[89]

Ben-Gurion gave another illustrative example from more recent history in the sudden appearance of the Turkish leader Kemal Ataturk at the beginning of the twentieth century. (BG had actually witnessed his ascent to power.) Ataturk's meteoric rise had swept up the Turkish masses in its wake, and under his leadership Turkey went through a seminal internal reform, with its international status being transformed beyond recognition. In emotional tones BG described the sudden change in Turkey with the appearance of this leader.

> As a student in Turkey I was familiar with the wretched Turkish regime . . . I believed it to be decayed and hopeless . . . when suddenly . . . a new spirit arose from the people. A man appeared whose name was unknown . . . who breathed new life into the Turkish people . . . [He led them] to revolt against enslavement . . . defeat the Greeks . . . and expel the Greek population from Asia Minor where it had been residing for thousands of years. The Turks, who had been crushed by oppression, [now] gathered courage and became an independent nation, proud and respected.[90]

Ben-Gurion estimated that if a leader of Ataturk's stature appeared in the Arab world, it would put Israel's survival in jeopardy. Under Ataturk, Turkey had succeeded in expelling the Greeks from Anatolia despite their deep historical links to it, and despite Allied support. BG used this example to warn of the grave dangers Israel could expect if a similarly charismatic Arab leader were to attain power.

Shortly after Nasser's ascent to government in Egypt, BG came to regard him as Ataturk's equal, a national leader with the talent to lead the Arab world and channel its potential strength into a unified power to be wielded against Israel. "I was very apprehensive," BG admitted a year after the Sinai campaign, "about this man who [like Ataturk] had risen from the Arab people . . . and focused on their natural aspirations . . . This was Gammel Abdul Nasser . . . He has become the hope, the bearer of expectation for unifying and strengthening the Arab people, and one of his goals, although not the exclusive one – is the annihilation of Israel."[91]

2

The Vision and Reality of an Arab–Israeli Peace Agreement

Choosing a Partner for Negotiations

In the previous chapter it was shown that Ben-Gurion held a polar attitude towards the Arab world, viewing the Arab mentality as the antithesis of Jewish and Zionist culture. He also perceived diametrically different abstract features between Arabs and Jews – such as the two peoples' ethical systems, types of nationalism, leadership responsibilities, and attitudes towards the sanctity of individual life.

In contrast to the lofty idealization of Jewish values, ethical norms and national aspirations, BG portrayed the Arab world in extremely negative terms. The differences between the two worlds appeared to him unbridgeable in the foreseeable future, leading him to the pessimistic conclusion that the immediate prospects for an Arab–Israeli peace settlement were practically non-existent. Peace treaties between countries that had been struggling for years under the "unbearable weight" of continual hatred could only be signed when a reasonable degree of commonality existed between their value systems, lifestyles, and national goals. According to BG, Israel and the Arabs were light years apart.

If this seems to imply that BG regarded negotiations as a waste of time, this was not the case. On the contrary, he firmly believed that Israel should be willing to sit down with Arab leaders anytime, anywhere, and seek every opportunity for hammering out a peace settlement. Israeli criticism of Arab society, he stressed, was aimed at the corrupt nature and backwardness of their leaders, but this should not be viewed as an obstacle to peace talks. "The Arabs are not pariahs in our eyes just because they are not like us . . . We desire peace with this Arab world."[1]

Ben-Gurion repeatedly stressed this point during the policy debate, at the end of the war, over the extent to which Israel should employ its military power to transform the region's political system and set up friendlier regimes. He strictly "forbade" this type of activity. He jibed:

> The supporters of a bi-national solution are not prepared to make peace with the present Arab governments. Their reasoning is that they do not like these regimes. We too have grave reservations about the present leaders. However, we think we should strive to attain peace with our neighbours regardless of their type of government . . . We prefer peace to war . . . and we believe the question of who rules the Arab countries should be decided by the Arab people alone.[2]

Ben-Gurion's belief that a settlement with the Arab world was in Israel's vital interests led him to realize that his country could not afford the luxury of letting moral scruples stand in the way of negotiations. Despite his abhorrence of the Arabs' type of government, he was willing to conduct peace talks with any neighbouring country. Israel, he emphasized, could not wait until Arab society and its political system had reformed according to Israel's taste. The only partners for peace negotiations at the present were "the current Arab leaders – not imaginary ones".[3]

His refusal to slap a moratorium on peace talks pending the establishment of "proper" Arab regimes coincided with the distinction he made between "authentic" Arab leaders and "bogus" ones. The main criterion distinguishing the two types related to the degree to which they were receptive to the "popular will".

For BG this was an issue only in non-democratic regimes where no serious apparatus existed for evaluating popular support for the national leadership. In states with free elections, on the other hand, representatives followed the "will of the people" so that there was no need to raise the "authenticity" issue regarding national leaders.

The Arab world's utter lack of democratic regimes made it all the more imperative for Israel to negotiate only with "authentic" leaders, those who aspired to the best interests of their people rather than their own private advancement. BG was well aware that with the present type of leaders, the chances of successfully concluding the peace talks were exceedingly slim. He thought, however, that "true patriots" among the Arab autocrats were preferable to pseudo-leaders who were either puppets of the colonial powers or figureheads dangling on the ends of Israeli bayonets. Even if the negotiations were crowned with success, BG realized that the achievement would be meaningless since the Arab leaders who signed the treaties lacked popular support and would probably not remain in power for long.

The Meaning of Peace

Ben-Gurion's conviction that the present Arab regimes were legitimate partners for peace talks did not reflect his belief in the likelihood that nego-

tiations would materialize. He was fully aware of the tortuous and thorny path that lay ahead, even if both sides were desirous of reaching an accord.

The central question in this chapter is the extent to which BG perceived the chances for an Arab–Israeli peace agreement. We will begin with a methodical account of BG's concept of the term "peace" and similar expressions. His liberal use of related terms hinders an accurate semantic definition of his intention. In addition to the term "peace" BG also referred to: "Jewish–Arab cooperation", "a Jewish–Arab settlement", "Hebrew–Arab cooperation", "continuous and reliable cooperation", "a peace pact", "a covenant", "mutual cooperation", "a Jewish–Arab pact", etc. According to one researcher:

> A look at the variety of expressions used by Ben-Gurion for "peace", especially in his writings, clearly reveals that he was not always aware of the unique cultural significance of the term in Hebrew. In addition to "peace", a large quantity of alternative expressions were employed to convey the same idea.[4]

To cut through this smokescreen, one can find two categories of references. The first relates to a comprehensive peace accord, which he termed "a permanent peace settlement"; the second category deals with a limited political settlement, which he called a "political arrangement". Pinpointing the exact differences between the two categories is an extremely daunting task, but detecting two basic criteria that seem to be his reference points is considerably easier. According to BG, the concept of a "permanent peace settlement" implies that one side, the Arabs, should genuinely reconcile itself to the existence of the other side, Israel, as a politically sovereign entity and enter into official negotiations on this basis. A "political arrangement", on the other hand, means that tactical considerations and temporary needs dominate the motivation for settling the conflict.

A "permanent peace settlement" means that both parties accept that the danger of another military confrontation is negligible, if not completely outdated. This type of settlement would allow Israel to significantly reduce its security expenditures and channel them to civilian needs. "A political arrangement", on the other hand, although reducing the threat of military confrontation would not decisively terminate it. Security expenses would continue to drain away valuable civilian funding.

Ben-Gurion frequently used this two-fold categorization in Israel's Arab policy. As the end of the War of Independence drew near, he expressed scepticism at the durability of peace agreements signed between Israel and the Arab countries. "One should not look at [official] decisions and [signed] papers," he stressed, "but at the historical reality."[5]

In a Knesset speech a few years later, he gave stronger vent to this distinction. "I believe," he stated, "that if the present conditions are maintained,

a definite chance exists not only for a formal peace, but [also] for stable, long-lasting cooperation between the Jewish people and our Arab neighbours."[6]

Assessing the Prospects for a Peace Agreement

Prior to the declaration of statehood, BG frequently made optimistic statements about the likelihood of an Arab–Israeli settlement. The source of his optimism apparently lay in his belief that with the rise of Israel as a powerful sovereign state, the Arabs would come to view their struggle against Zionism as futile and counter-productive.

He also estimated that Israel's determination, tenacity and readiness for sacrifice would force the Arab world to realize that violent struggle would not yield the desired results. It was his fervent hope that the Arabs would soon enter into serious negotiations to resolve the conflict. Shortly before the November 1947 United Nations partition vote, BG stated:

> Following [the establishment] of the state, a settlement will be reached with the Arabs . . . The establishment of the state will prepare the ground for Arab–Hebrew cooperation on the basis of equality and independence . . . This is not a distant dream, but practical policy . . . for the coming years. More specifically, I would say, for the near future.[7]

A year later, in April 1948, at the height of the War of Independence, and perhaps under the influence of Israel's first victories, BG again expressed his hope that with the establishment of the state, peace with the Arab world would soon follow. To substantiate this view, he looked over the horizon towards Greece and Turkey where a peace settlement had been forged despite generations of enmity.

> There is no reason to despair of the possibility of mutual understanding once the Jewish State is established. When our strength has proven . . . that we will not be destroyed or subdued . . . a change will also occur in the Arab world's attitude to us. Greece and Turkey fought each other for years, their conflict continued even until the present . . . After the Turks realized that the [Greeks] were undefeatable, the two countries became friends and good neighbours. When the Jewish people have demonstrated their power to establish and defend their state, the Arabs [too] will come to realize the benefit of Jewish–Arab cooperation . . . [and] that they need us no less than we need them.[8]

But the nature of the Arab reaction to Israel's statehood dashed all hopes for peace. According to the official Israeli narrative, local Arabs joined forces with the Arab armies of neighbouring countries in an all-out war

against the fledgling Jewish state. This soon escalated from a "local", limited conflict into an intractable international struggle.

It should come as little surprise that BG's declarations on the prospect of a settlement grew increasingly pessimistic. He began to emphasize the "operational" factors that would keep the dispute simmering, at varying levels of intensity, indefinitely.

This assessment was a major factor in his repeated demand, before political colleagues and the general public, that they should not be deluded with false hopes based on Israel's decisive military victory in the recent war, and the Armistice Agreements. BG began to perceive the War of Independence as only one stage in the Arabs' ongoing struggle to destroy the Jewish community in Eretz Israel:

> Even if the Arab countries end their belligerency, and a peace [settlement] follows, this will not change the nature of the danger before us today; it is an historical danger, and will remain so for many years even if a [formal] peace [treaty is signed].[9]

On another occasion he repeated this pessimistic view:

> If peace efforts succeed and the majority of Arab countries sign treaties of peace and friendship with us, even then we must remain wary of [harbouring] dangerous illusions that [formal] peace [treaties] will guarantee our security.[10]

Ben-Gurion understood that Israel would have to accustom itself to the idea of facing protracted military threats, and would be forced to devote the greater part of its resources to strengthening its internal solidarity and military defence. Moshe Dayan, BG's Chief-of-Staff, graphically described his commander's concept of Israel's relations with the Arab world:

> Ben-Gurion did not believe in mutual co-operation with the Arabs. He likened Israel to a ship at sea, with the Arabs as the ocean. Neither harmony nor integration existed between the two. Instead, the ship had to be sturdy enough to resist every maritime crisis and every storm.[11]

Ben-Gurion also used the image of a sailing vessel in turbulent waters to illustrate relations between Israel, the Arab world, and the international community.

> We are in a stormy sea surrounded by enemies. We must grasp the wheel of state with our own strong hands and not be dragged along by others. We must strive single-mindedly to reach our port of call and withstand the pull of heavy waves to divert us from our historical direction.[12]

While a comprehensive peace settlement seemed to him illusory, BG still believed that even without a comprehensive solution, Israel could attain a limited political arrangement in the foreseeable future. He thought Israel

should examine this type of agreement in terms of costs and benefits, while being aware that "in the best of circumstances, it would not be a [genuine] peace but an armed peace".[13]

He was not alone in his estimate. A similar assessment had been expressed on several occasions by the Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett, who headed the moderate faction inside the Israeli leadership. As he emphasized Israel's unceasing efforts to reach a settlement, Sharett also recalled the trauma that had shattered the foundations of the Arab world, with its military defeat and the creation of the State of Israel. The Arabs' hostility and their rejection of the peace option stemmed from their recent débâcle, and, according to Sharett, a misreading of the Jewish community's ties to Eretz Israel.

> The shock that the establishment of the State of Israel caused to the Arab world was far greater and deeper than we had imagined . . . We are dealing with a people of a particular nature, at a particular level of development, and we must accept it as it is. [The Arabs] have not fathomed the seriousness of our movement and its readiness for sacrifice. They tended to minimize and disparage [our] enterprise. They perceived it as the outlandish dream of an irrelevant fanatical cult, a kind of passing imperialist irritation . . . [Proportional to] the degree of their disregard and denial was the magnitude of their shock when we transformed into a powerful political reality forcing ourselves on them. Today they cannot forgive their own lack of foresight . . . [and] they still feel under no compulsion to reach a compromise. As long as the Arab personality is filled with self-anger, the more it will stoke the flames of hatred, and the more its soul's intransigence [will stifle] compromise.[14]

In his almost psychological analysis of the crisis, Sharett came to the conclusion that the prospect for a peace settlement was slight. On several occasions he reiterated this assessment. In January 1949 he stated:

> We are a new factor that has produced shock waves by our entrance into this corner of the world . . . and has angered and incited many against us. [A period of] readjustment must pass until the Arab world reconciles itself to our presence. We have set a revolutionary process in motion through our creation of a new political entity.[15]

In August 1952 Sharett spoke in even grimmer tones regarding the outlook for a peace settlement, saying "It would certainly be [more realistic] to assume that peace will not be forthcoming, and that we are at the start of a long period, who can say for how many years . . . of territorial isolation."[16]

In April 1953, he warned against presuming that the United States could force the Arabs to reach a settlement. "We must not delude ourselves", he stressed, "that the peace issue depends on US pressure on the Arabs. Arab

opposition to peace is so entrenched that no degree of American pressure will avail."[17]

He repeated this view in May 1954 while serving as both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. "Arab hatred," he asserted, "has not only continued over the years, but has hardened and grown shriller. We must get used to the idea that peace will remain a distant [goal] . . . I do not hesitate to predict, and I request that this passage not be published, that we must be prepared to endure [the conflict] for another generation."[18]

Sharett and BG thus shared a common view on the chances for an Arab–Israeli settlement. Sharett assumed, albeit less arbitrarily than BG, that a settlement would not necessarily signal the Arab world's final reconciliation to Israel's existence. "We are aware that an official peace agreement does not necessarily herald true peace."[19]

Neither Sharett nor BG believed that an Arab–Israeli settlement would ensure a lasting guarantee against another round of fighting. Even a signed treaty, Sharett felt, would not enable Israel to reduce its security expenditure. In a speech before the IDF high command, he stated:

> Peace is a basic necessity . . . for the security of the State of Israel. This does not mean that if a comprehensive peace treaty with the neighbouring states was officially signed tomorrow, I would hasten to recommend a reduction in the military budget . . . We would [first have to] study how things develop and how stable this peace was.[20]

Like BG, Sharett made it perfectly clear to his listeners that his reservation and suspicion of a political arrangement stemmed not only from the special circumstances and characteristics of the Arab–Israeli conflict, but also from an historical perspective.

> It is not my intent to say that signing a peace treaty . . . will ensure absolute security, I am aware that wars have broken out in the past even among states that have signed peace treaties. [In fact] it is quite likely that the majority of wars have been started by violating signed peace treaties and [friendship] pacts.[21]

Factors in the Arab World Inhibiting a Settlement

Arab Military Goals

A key factor in correctly estimating the prospects for a peace settlement between mutually hostile nations is to assess each side's goals. Even while the cannon shells are falling, the opportunity exists for an eventual settlement. Frequently, the use of military force is instrumental in achieving limited political, strategic or economic goals.

Paradoxically, the resort to weaponry is often intended to promote bilateral accords. This, however, was not how the Arab–Israeli conflict appeared to BG. He sensed that the Arabs had absolute objectives, and he repeatedly defined their main goal as the total destruction of Jewish independence in Eretz Israel.

It seems that even prior to the War of Independence this was BG's basic perception of the Arabs. Several months before the November 1947 Partition Resolution, he announced:

> The security question now appears in an entirely different light... Today we are no longer facing acts of robbery, terror, or attempts at thwarting our [national] enterprise, but [we are confronted by] the willpower to annihilate the Yishuv and destroy [what the Arabs term] the Zionist threat, in one clean swoop by massacring the Jews in Eretz Israel.[22]

From his oft-repeated statements, one gets the impression that BG perceived that, for the Arabs, war against Israel was an end in itself and not an instrument for achieving other goals. Indeed, it seems that he regarded violent conflict as an inherent part of the Arab world's nationalistic craving and religious–cultural ethic.

In other words, BG seemed to believe that the Arabs were warring against Israel because it was in the nature of their tradition and religion "to fight". Warfare *per se*, and especially against the State of Israel, according to BG, originated in an atavistic drive that boiled like lava in the Arabs' blood, and could not be overcome even if they themselves wished it.

Furthermore, it seems that BG rejected the assumption that there was a distinction between the Arab world's need for a belligerent ideology and anti-Israel rhetoric, on the one hand, and its militant "practical" policy, on the other. This assumption claimed that the Arabs were acting according to the religious–cultural dictates of their ideological heritage, while, on a practical level, strengthening their political position and consolidating their *modus operandi*.

More concretely, this assumption perceived the Arab world's exhaustive declarations that Israel must be subjugated as either primal urgings, akin to "hastening Judgement Day", or tendentious lip-service answering two fundamental needs. The first need was internal: to divert the attention of Arab citizenry from acute political, economic and social crises. The second need called for a pan-Arab display of fanatical devotion to national aspirations.

Foreign Minister Sharett often made statements bolstering this assumption. Sometimes he even seemed to be minimizing the Arab threat's grounding in extremism and aggression. In a closed party debate on security policy in April 1954, he rationalized his views:

> I am absolutely convinced that the Arab countries are not seeking war . . . today. The fact they thirst for spoliation and are burning with a passion for revenge does not necessarily reflect a pre-planned intention to wage war. First of all, they have not forgotten their [1948] débâcle. Secondly, they are still not militarily prepared. Thirdly, countries like Egypt and Syria have been going through intense internal upheavals. In both countries the army is the most active element involved in this shake-up.[23]

Ben-Gurion, however, refused even to consider these assumptions. From his point of view, there was no boundary line in the Arab world between ideology and rhetoric, on the one hand, and practical policy, on the other. Instead, "vision" and "action" were inextricably intertwined. His statements on the Arabs' military objectives reflect their national goal, which was to wipe out Israel.

According to BG, Arab war aims tended to limit Israel's choices regarding the Arab world. It was blindingly clear that Arab aspirations would be satisfied only with the recapture of all of Eretz Israel and the annihilation of the Jewish populace. Under these circumstances it was legitimate to question the value of Israel's internal debate over territorial concessions.

Ben-Gurion believed that if the Arab world was asking for "the whole pot", then it was Israel's duty to wake up to the reality of the conflict and recognize that it was not about territorial disagreements, border feuds, or unfriendly relations with neighbours, but about Israel's very existence – its basic right to dwell in Eretz Israel.[24] Israel had to face the fact that the Arabs would reject any map that was offered to them, even one with magnanimously redrawn borders, for it would not serve their national needs. "The entire Jewish State," he claimed, "is considered by the Arabs to be the core of the dispute. For them there is no Eretz Israel, it is merely a tract of Arab territory."[25]

Arab Revenge

Trying to understand the conflict from the other's side, BG generally stressed the Arab people's thirst for revenge as a key motif blocking regional peace. His starting point was an awareness of the cultural norms inherent in Arab society, where uncompromising revenge was demanded for the slightest injury. Therefore, it could be assumed that when Arab national pride was humiliated, as it had been in 1948, the cry would be a thousand times louder.

The passion for revenge among nations suffering ignominious defeat is not an exceptional phenomenon; it occurs among "hot" and "cold

tempered" nations. However, in the Arab world as perceived by BG, vengeance unremittingly gluts the national experience until an outlet is found. The uniqueness of Arab vengeance, he felt, lay not only in its depth and intensity, but also in its subjugation of rational thinking such as when national interests demanded a peace settlement with Israel.

The source of the Arab world's bloodlust, BG claimed, was from their stinging defeat by an enemy regarded as ten times their inferior. The tragic outcome of the war entailed a loss of territory considered intrinsically part of the Arab homeland, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs from their homes, to become refugees in neighbouring Arab countries. All this exacerbated the pain of military defeat.

The Arab world's sense of perdition after the war took on increasingly severe proportions according to BG, because of their traditional stereotype of the Jews as inferior citizens whose safety depended on the benefice of Arab rulers. Suddenly the tables had been turned. The Jews had shed their generations-old image as a persecuted and obsequious minority, and before the world had metamorphosed into powerful, victorious figures.

Ben-Gurion was certain that the sudden change in the Jews' image had influenced the Arab world and ignited a passion to revenge its sullied honour. In the following passage, BG seems to be asking for confirmation of his psychological insights into the historical source of Arabs' revenge on the Jews who had been dwelling among them.

> My colleagues, you must comprehend this . . . you know the Arabs. They were accustomed to look down upon the Jews. They were the masters, the rulers [for many generations]. Now forty million Arabs have suffered defeat at the hands of six hundred thousand Jews . . . Do you believe they will forget this ignominy? . . . Could Nasser himself, as an officer taken prisoner at Faluja . . . ever forget this shame? . . . They are unable to forget it, and they are planning our annihilation.[26]

More than their armies' defeat, it was the refugee problem that kindled the flames of Arab hatred. In BG's opinion, this issue, far more than their loss of pride over the defeat in 1948, held long-term implications for future Arab–Israeli relations. He based his appraisal on the following considerations:

1. Although the Arab states lost the war, it was the residents of Palestine who "paid the full price". Palestinian Arabs saw their whole world cave in, and within a brief space of time had lost their dwellings, property, homeland and self-respect. Their hostility to Israel and lust for revenge would be graver than that of the Arab countries.
2. The Arab states could foster the belief that at some future time, in another round of fighting, they would finally subdue Israel, totally

destroy her, and retrieve, even if only partially, their lost honour. Thus, the revolutionaries who seized power in a number of Arab states after the War of Independence repeatedly explained their country's defeat as the fault of the national leadership – those corrupt rulers who had failed to realize the Arabs' tremendous potential and had botched the effort to set up a united Arab army. With the departure of these rulers, the argument went, the Arab world would prove again that it had the strength and energy to decisively eradicate Israel.

3. The Arab refugees, however, lived with the feeling that the war's outcome was irreversible. BG asserted that they perceived their status realistically. Despite the martial rhetoric of Arab leaders, they understood that their chances of returning to their homes and fields were exceedingly slim – in fact non-existent.

It should also be recalled that the Arabs' defeat, although tragic from their point of view, was merely the end of the attempt to forestall the establishment of the Jewish state. So, it would be natural to conceive that eventually the pain, failure and insult would also fade in the Arab world.

Yet this would not be the case with the Palestinian refugees. Their wretched status in the Arab countries would continue to bear witness to the terrible tragedy that befell them with the establishment of Israel. As the years passed the pain would continue to fester, and would intensify. Children and grandchildren of those who were forced to leave their homes in 1948 would grow up nurtured on the belief that "the evil Zionists" were to blame for their present calamity.

It appears, then, that these ruminations led BG to the conclusion that the refugee problem had an independent life of its own within the context of the Arab–Israeli conflict, and would create endless tension in the region. This would be the case no matter what the relations between Israel and the neighbouring Arab countries were.

> The refugee issue will assuredly cause rioting and instability in the region . . . There are over six hundred thousand desperate, disappointed people who have lost everything . . . Their anger and bitterness are directed not at those who should be held responsible for their catastrophe, the followers of the Mufti and rulers of Arab countries, but against the Jews . . . They [the refugees] are capable of carrying out any kind of desperate and insane act.[27]

It is interesting to observe that despite BG's awareness of the Arabs' need for revenge, there is no hint of condemnation of this. Between the lines one senses his empathy with the legitimacy of these emotions, and his understanding that in a culture where honour and prestige were so highly valued, then anger, insult and frustration would naturally follow capitulation to an inferior enemy.

He often reiterated the theme of the Arab world's passion for revenge. Surveying the Egyptians' defeat in the War of Independence, he reminded his listeners that the current Egyptian leader, Gammel Abdul Nasser, had himself been taken prisoner by the IDF.

> Here, a nation, its military force, and the head of the army, have been thrashed by the army of a tiny country like Israel . . . There are all the human, political, and geopolitical reasons for this country [Egypt], its government and army, to seek revenge against Israel . . . According to the nature of things, defeated nations do not easily forget their downfall, and they look for the opportunity for retribution.[28]

In light of this emotional reality, it was necessary, BG felt, to construct Israel's policy on two central pillars. The first, a willingness to persevere in a bitter, drawn-out struggle against Arab attempts at realizing revenge. The second, a willingness to display as great an understanding as possible for the sensitivities of the Arab world while ceaselessly striving towards a peace settlement. In this context, BG highlighted the following themes:

1. Israel should be continuously cognizant of the fact that self-respect and prestige were dominant factors in the Arabs' decision-making process.
2. Israel would not harm its vital interests by showing consideration for the honour of Arab states.
3. Israel's goal had never been the mortification of the Arab nations, but the opposite, the preservation of Arab political independence within the framework of peace arrangements.
4. Therefore, in matters of respect and prestige, it was crucial for Israel to act generously with its neighbours. "For our part," he stressed, "we will not spare any effort to reach an honourable peace; it is not our desire to humiliate the Arab nations. We have fought them and struck at them as they have at us . . . but we do not wish to humiliate them. We desire peace and security with the Arab world through our own self-respect, and respect for them; because only on the basis of mutual respect will peace be won."[29]

Factors Inhibiting Peace

The International Arena

The international arena was also regarded by BG as an inhibiting factor, perhaps a deterrent, for a possible Arab–Israeli peace arrangement. Following the War of Independence, BG's declarations on Israel's relations

with the international community, especially with the Great Powers, take utmost precedence over all other facets of policy-making. He constantly reviewed the nature of the international community, its attitude towards the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and the role it played in the creation of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The multitude of attitudes on this issue stemmed primarily from his view of the decisive part that the international community played in the Middle East and its increased involvement in shaping Arab–Israeli relations. He did not perceive this intervention as a unique phenomenon in the Middle East, but as a clear sign of the changes that had occurred in the international community's status since World War II.

At the heart of this change, he believed, was the demise of the Superpowers' option for isolationism, and their involvement, to various degrees, in world events and developments. "We live at a time," he stated, "when the world is one. It is impossible [for countries] to act today as they did in the nineteenth century when things were localized . . . Today every political issue has international repercussions."[30]

The Concept of Circles

Ben-Gurion's concept of relations between Israel and the international community may be termed "the concept of circles", in that Israel's relations with the international community and the Arab world are conceived within the framework of two spheres: the first containing two inner circles, political and military; the second also composed of two inner circles, a small one consisting of Israel's relations with the surrounding Arab world, and a second, larger one, containing Israel's relations with the international community, the Superpowers, and the United Nations.

Despite the differences between the two spheres, both were closely linked, and influenced by similar circumstances. In a speech delivered after the Sinai campaign, BG outlined the basic assumptions that had guided him in shaping Israel's foreign and defence policy.

> First we should assume that we are facing an integrated, inter-dependent military and political system . . . We should not presume that only one element, the political or military, will determine the issue. Secondly, we should view ourselves within two circles: a small circle consisting of us and the Arab states; and the larger one – containing the world. In both circles there is constant movement – the small circle revolves around the Arabs, and the larger circle – around the Superpowers, which also influences the affairs in the small circle.[31]

Ben-Gurion believed that this spherical structure had far-reaching impli-

cations in shaping Israel's foreign and defence policy. The key point, he maintained, was its impact on Israel's ability to win a decisive victory over the Arabs in a military confrontation. He seemed to be saying that the spheres were integrated in a way that would prevent Israel from ever achieving a decisive victory.

This awareness was undoubtedly reinforced by his view of the military's "inherent" limitations in international relations, whereby every act of belligerence contained an element of uncertainty over its outcome. However, BG saw beyond this. When a state such as Israel successfully employed military force, then it must reconcile itself to the fact that the international community was likely to enforce significant restrictions on it, even negating its achievements.

> History teaches us that only in rare instances does military victory solve the issue for which war was waged. In most cases . . . military victory is but minor recompense for the victors, if not worse.[32]

It would seem, then, that the military sphere actually comprised the greatest danger for Israel. The Arabs' absolute superiority over Israel was manifest on paper, with their obvious advantages in manpower and natural resources. But throughout this period, BG repeatedly emphasized that the greatest threat to Israel came from the political sphere. He claimed that Israel's relations with the Arab world, as they appeared "on paper", did not express the real balance of power. In his estimate, Israel enjoyed a clear military advantage over the Arab states.

The implications of this assessment were, naturally, far-reaching. With the Arab world, Israel found itself in the relatively comfortable position of having proved its military superiority. In the larger circle, on the other hand, Israel's basic inferiority was tangible in the context of the international community and its lightweight political status in the region.

> If we remained only inside the small circle . . . and the large circle was not involved in nor paid any interest in [the small circle], then the military factor alone would be decisive . . . Currently, our military advantage is greater than our political [influence] because the balance of power in the world is on the Arabs' side.[33]

The impression one gets is that BG regarded Israel's inferiority in the international sphere as resulting from a slate of objective conditions that could not be altered in the foreseeable future – the main factor being Israel's lopsided dependence on the international community in numerous areas. After suffering a bloody, hard-fought war, Israel had won its independence by proving its incontestable military superiority.

Nevertheless, BG was fully aware that independent statehood had been the result of an essentially political process, starting with the Partition Plan,

and culminating in an extraordinary moment of political grace, with Superpower consensus granting political, military and economic support for the fledgling state.

Even Israel's survival and its integration into the international community seemed to BG to depend largely on the good will of the Superpowers, especially the United States. BG pointed out that this was due to the American belief in Israel's justification, and American readiness to grant the Jewish state political, military and economic aid, albeit limited. "Our fate is in our hands," BG declared tersely, "if we do not stand up for ourselves, no one will stand up for us. But we [still] need the world's assistance, sympathy and good will."[34]

International readiness to aid Israel seemed far from certain to BG. In fact, during and after the War of Independence he noticed the change for the worse in the Superpowers' attitude to Israel. "No countries were prepared to fight our political battle at that time." He explained that this "change of heart" was due to the Superpowers' desire to ensure their "vital political, economic, and strategic interests in the Arab world".[35]

Characteristics of Superpower Intervention

Under ordinary conditions, Israel might have considered Superpower involvement in the Middle East to be temporary and of limited importance, had it not injected an ominous tone to the Arab–Israeli conflict and formed an obstacle to its peaceful conclusion. The main features of international intervention in the Middle East were its continuous presence and exceptional intensity in a manner uncharacteristic of its involvement in other "hot spots".

Superpower presence in the region, and the enormous complications that accompanied it, could only be understood, according to BG, in light of key economic, strategic and political interests. But the origin of this involvement, he repeatedly pointed out, lay beyond rational estimates of loss and gain, and had to be sought in the realm of religious sentiment.

Ben-Gurion expressed this view on several occasions. In one of his speeches during the War of Independence he outlined the sources of Israel's "unique status" in the eyes of the international community. It seems that two major events highlighted the hostile attitude towards Israel, and reinforced BG's distrust of international involvement in the Arab–Israeli conflict during the War of Independence:

1. The Security Council Resolution calling for a cease-fire (the second truce) was passed at the moment the IDF was conducting a massive attack and chalking up impressive battlefield gains. Powerful pressure

was put on Israel, in the form of severe international sanctions, to abide by the resolution for a cease-fire and prevent the total demise of the Arab armies. The newly created Jewish government had no choice but to comply with the United Nations Resolution, and the cease-fire came into effect on 21 July 1948.

2. On 24 July 1948, Count Folke Bernadotte, the United Nations mediator, arrived in Israel to submit recommendations for solving the conflict. Reports of his proposals, leaked from various sources, carried ill portent for Israel. Vast areas, regarded as integral parts of the country, were to be handed over to the Arabs. In late September 1948 (following Bernadotte's assassination by members of an extremist right-wing Jewish group, Lehi), his report was published, justifying Israel's apprehensions.[36]

The "fresh" memory of the Holocaust and the two cases mentioned above from the War of Independence illustrate the physical threat felt by the Yishuv. BG believed that the international community's relations with Israel stemmed from sources far murkier than rational accounts of profit and loss. Other, deeper motives were apparently at play that touched on the historical and religious nerves of Jewish life, and the centuries-old contact between the Jewish people and the nations of the world.

> These days there are still local wars that have no impact on the entire world ... and no one intervenes in them. In this war [on the other hand], being waged in Eretz Israel, and involving Jews, almost the entire world has taken sides. [Suddenly] the whole world has become sensitive about the Jews and Eretz Israel. The conflict between the Arabs and us ... has transformed our local struggle into an international event ... The country's geographical position, at the centre of three continents ... at the crossroads between East and West; and the country's historical setting in mankind's religious heritage; ... and the historical differences between Jews and Christians, between Islam, Christianity and Judaism; and the intractable stubbornness of the Jews in retaining their separate distinction among the nations – all these factors, and others, have turned the [local] conflict into an emotionally-ridden world event.[37]

In this light, BG realized that the international community's involvement in the region was more than "a passing episode". He was convinced that it would remain a permanent feature and generate a high profile in local affairs. "More than once," he stated in one of his speeches, "the whole world has opposed us ... [History records] many wars that pitted the whole world against the Jews. It seems likely we will again face a similar chapter in our history."[38]

Ben-Gurion drew the conclusion that the orientation of the world's

nations, and their tendency to support the Arabs on almost every issue, derived from factors beyond the Middle East and the desire to promote peace between Jew and Arab. I venture to suggest that BG believed it reflected ancient feelings of hostility held by the international community towards the Jewish people and all that it symbolized. In 1952, he returned to the historical roots of this antagonism (especially in the Christian world), and proffered a "psychological" explanation to substantiate his view:

> Not only has the Arab world refused to come to terms with us. [But] due to the historical uniqueness of the Jewish people, that it is to be counted among the three religions that have left their stamp on a large part of mankind . . . and due to the role [Eretz Israel] has played in world history and culture, forces exist, external to the Arab world, that will not readily reconcile themselves to our existence. Leading the list is the Catholic world. The return of Israel to its native land and Israel's very essence undermine one of Catholicism's basic dogmas . . . [The Catholics believe that] by the Jews' rejection of Jesus and his preaching, they were doomed to severance from the Land and dispersal among the nations, and to [wander as] the eternal Jew. The rebirth of Israel, has in fact subverted this dogma.[39]

According to BG, the recognition granted to Israel by the majority of the world's countries in the early stages of its establishment did not necessarily prove their wholehearted supported for a Jewish state. He preferred to interpret this display of support as a stratagem reflecting clearly defined political interests at a particular time. The fact that the international community quickly reverted to its "old ways", averse to Israel, was seen by BG as solid evidence to confirm his scepticism. Towards the close of the War of Independence he declared:

> We are not only facing the Arab armies, but the entire world. This is a historical battle between the Jewish people and its malefactors, adversaries, and detractors among all the nations and countries from time immemorial. This is not a local struggle, and its roots have not been planted only today. Israel now demands [recompense for] generations of insult and injury, and is calling the nations of the world to account.[40]

Implications of Intervention

For BG, the entrance of the international community into the regional conflict as a third party had potentially negative implications for Israel. In the first place, he contended, it decreased the chances of reaching a peace arrangement. A new player had introduced itself into the "field", one with whom Israel had developed a distinctly one-sided, almost absolute relation of dependency, and over whom it had practically no leverage. Under these

circumstances, Israel's freedom of activity towards its neighbours would be extremely limited.

Regardless of the world's views on specific issues in the Arab–Israeli conflict, he felt that its involvement would limit Israel's freedom to manoeuvre, restricting Israel's use of its chief asset in the conflict: military superiority. It was obvious that in the event of another Arab–Israeli war, if Israel began reaping decisive battlefield gains, the Great Powers would rush to end the fighting in order to forestall Arab defeat and safeguard their own interests in the region. BG concluded that the impact of the military factor in shaping Israel's relations with the Arab world would become more limited. Speaking during the War of Independence, he said:

> In our political context, not only regional forces are at play but so are the relative strengths, mutual interests, and conflicting interests of the world's nations – large, medium-sized and small ones. We can win the war and crush all of our enemies . . . and still lose the political fight . . . There are world powers far greater than us, and their influence extends to Eretz Israel, for this is a land in the forefront of world interest, and we must take heed lest our military victory be squandered in the political struggle.[41]

Ben-Gurion repeated the same theme on many occasions. Prior to the Sinai campaign, it became the main rationale behind his apprehension about a preventative war that many officers in the military establishment, especially Moshe Dayan, were urging. Shortly before the Sinai campaign, BG declared:

> There is no assurance that a war initiated by us would culminate in [our] victory, since there are powerful forces outside the Arab world, both in the East and the West, that would assuredly rise up against us with their military might. The IDF is not designed to meet the challenge of international powers.[42]

A more concrete expression of BG's view is revealed in the exchange of memos between him and Israel Galili, one of the heads of Achdut Ha'avoda, a few months before the Sinai campaign. On the agenda was the proposal of party activists that Israel should embark upon a preventative war against Jordan and/or Egypt. Galili wrote, "After Yigal Allon's speech in the Knesset, BG asked me if he [Allon] is 'for' initiating war. I replied to you that in our opinion we should strike first at Nasser."[43]

Ben-Gurion was not opposed to Allon's view, but he did have reservations over its contribution to Israel's security. BG's reply was: "His [Allon's] opinion should not be rejected, neither in theory nor in practice. Its shortcoming lies in only one area – England's entrance into the fray [if we should attack Jordan]."[44]

Ben-Gurion recognized that the passive nature of the international

community's involvement also belied an active element. This was chiefly revealed in the support it gave to the Arabs on specific issues, such as territorial demarcation, the Palestinian refugees' right to return, Jerusalem's status as an international city, and the meaning of the term "peace".

On all of these issues, BG believed, the international community was advocating policies flagrantly detrimental to Israel's basic interests. He also felt that this would have long-term implications for the Arab–Israeli conflict and its solution. In the first place there was the fear that the Great Powers wished to retain maximum control over the peace process in order to prevent the sides from reaching a solution on their own. Evidence of this could be found in the multiplicity of plans bandied about for solving the conflict. The detailed nature of these plans (to be discussed below) left little room for serious dialogue between Israel and the Arab world.

A concrete example may be seen in the American demand at the Lausanne Conference that Arab–Israeli negotiations be limited to the framework of the conference, as opposed to face-to-face bilateral talks. One of the issues on the agenda was a possible meeting between BG and the Syrian president, Husni Za'im. The Director of the Foreign Ministry reported to BG and Sharett:

> Mr MacDonald [the American ambassador to Israel] visited me in order to hand over a message from the American Government. Its main point was the following: The United States Government desires that the greater part of the effort in Arab–Israeli negotiations be held in Lausanne . . . The United States Government is convinced that direct talks between Israeli and Arab officials would be considered "subversive" to the peace conference. The United States Government is certain that Ben-Gurion's aspiration to meet Husni Za'im face to face is as important as the Lausanne negotiations.[45]

In the absence of Israel's readiness to accept "willingly" the Great Powers' demands regarding the terms of an arrangement, it appeared likely they would coordinate their actions to force a solution on the two sides. "We must be prepared," BG thundered a few months before the Sinai campaign, "for attempts to be made by the Superpowers to dictate undesirable and unjustified arrangements . . . We will have to gird ourselves vigorously to be able to say to the world's strongmen: 'No!' and remain steadfast in this 'No!'"[46]

If the Great Powers realized that a settlement would have to be forced on Israel, then undoubtedly they would level various types of economic and political pressure against her. Threats, direct and subtle, were brought to the Israeli government's attention, especially by the United States. On 23 October 1953 the American government announced it was withholding financial aid because of Israel's decision to persist in its Jordan River water diversion project in the Israeli–Syrian demilitarized zone. The moratorium

was lifted after only a few weeks, but a precedent had been set that could no longer be ignored.[47]

It should be remembered, BG recalled, that in attempting to forcibly install a peace settlement, the Great Powers might not be satisfied with merely exerting economic and political pressure on Israel. The possibility existed that they would employ concrete military measures. In a memorandum to the Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett, a ministry official, M. Kidron, presented the following evaluation:

> The western powers, the United States and Britain, have apparently arrived at the conclusion that an Arab–Israeli accord would be impossible unless Israel made the following concessions, the chief among them being: surrender of the Negev, and the return of 50,000–100,000 refugees. I fear that the western powers have reached an additional conclusion: that they have not the faintest chance of winning Israeli approval for these concessions without their intervention. This intervention can come in the form of economic and political sanctions, or in a cruder form, i.e., the use of armed force, or both together.[48]

Ben-Gurion was convinced that the extremist policies of the international powers, as Israel regarded them, left no recourse for the Arab states but to retain their own radical positions. It would be difficult to imagine, he argued, any Arab state involved directly in the conflict adopting a policy more conciliatory than that of the Great Powers, who were only indirectly involved in the conflict.

A salient expression of the realism in this estimate can be found in the candid statement made to Eliyahu Sasson by the head of the Egyptian delegation at the Lausanne talks. Trying to explain to Sasson the circumstances leading to Egypt's waffling on a peace agreement with Israel, he admitted:

> Why should we sign for peace now? The United States supports us at all costs, and will obtain better conditions for us than could be gained through direct [talks with you for] peace.[49]

Israel considered this phenomenon a major factor contributing to the Arab world's inflexibility on the conditions for a peace settlement. At the very least it was seen as a major obstacle to reconciliation. During talks with the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, Sharett was questioned about this issue. Sharett recalled Eden's speech at the Guildhall where a plan calling for Israeli territorial withdrawal had been raised. Relating to the grave implications that such a pull-back had in reinforcing Egyptian opposition to a peace settlement, Sharett stated:

> This plan is a catastrophe, and must lead to greater Arab adamancy. If

> Nasser realizes that Great Britain supports his demands, why should he settle for less?[50]

On the basis of these assessments, BG crystallized his perception of the negative role that the international community was taking in the Arab–Israeli conflict. He concluded that it was playing a decisive part in stifling the chances for attaining a peace settlement. Were it not for the international community's presence and intensive involvement in the region, he felt, then relations with the Arabs would almost certainly be far more accommodating. "It is quite possible," BG declared at the end of the armistice talks, "that the Arab countries [had they not received international backing] facing Israel's presence and its [military] might, would have come to terms with [us], and have won for themselves tremendous benefit."[51]

Despite this, BG was not willing to succumb to wishful thinking and deduce that the Arab–Israeli conflict was merely the result of international intervention in the region. "There should be no illusion, that without [Great Power intervention] the situation would be different."[52]

Sharett, on the other hand, gave the impression that he believed that the international community exerted a great influence on the Arab world's relations with Israel:

> Our greatest difficulties are not really the result of our relations with the Arab world, or the Middle East conflict, but the result of the great struggle in the world and its reflection in the Middle East context . . . With all its problems, the Jewish–Arab conflict could have been frozen . . . but the dynamic factor that has reshuffled [local] affairs, created crises, and perhaps even graver dangers, has been the influence of the world conflict in [our] region.[53]

In either case, BG was convinced that Israel's interest lay in reducing this involvement as far as possible. "We are interested," he stressed, "[in creating a situation in which] external powers will be as remotely involved in this region as possible. [But] foreign intervention is one of the dangers we can anticipate for a long time to come."[54]

Sharett, on the other hand, tended to have a more vacillating stand. In March 1953, on the assumption that only Washington could broker a deal with the Arabs, he revealed his uncertainty whether Israel should follow the United States' lead in seeking a political solution to the conflict. Nevertheless he was apprehensive over America's attempts to force an undesired agreement on Israel.

> Although we are interested in peace and compelled to seek assistance from a partner in advancing peace, we cannot ignore the influence and pressure that the United States might exert in this area . . . Therefore, we should take a very

open-eyed look at how this partner could actually deal with the issue. Here a number of very serious caveats enter the mind. Without doubt, the United States can launch a Middle East peace campaign today aimed at both Israel and the Arab countries. However, it would be aimed at preparing the Arab countries psychologically for peace . . . We may assume, on the other hand, that regarding terms for peace . . . we must not overly rely on America's ability to influence the Arabs . . . The United States is also influenced by them . . . thus, there is no guarantee that an American peace offensive would not add to the [Arabs'] bargaining position . . . I have serious doubts whether we should wholeheartedly pressure the United States right now to push the Arabs into making peace. This might miss the mark – by increasing the Arabs' bargaining power and turning the brunt of American pressure against us. [55]

Israel Versus the International Community

Options and Limitations

Those statements and others like them clearly show that Israel's leaders were worried over the implications of Great Power intervention in Middle East affairs. They harboured no doubts that massive involvement of the international community would drastically limit Israel's freedom of action in the international arena in general and the Arab world in particular.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that from BG's point of view, the imbalance of power between Israel and the international community did not necessarily render Israel a "weakling" state, totally dependent on foreign powers and lacking political manoeuvrability.

The starting point for understanding BG's perception of Israel's relative strength and flexibility *vis-à-vis* the international community focuses first of all on his intrinsic belief that any state's strength, and especially Israel's, is neither predetermined nor dependent primarily on concrete, precisely measured attributes. According to BG, state power is a variable factor, dependent on a wide range of circumstances, most crucially, those that affect the survival of the state.

Therefore, BG rejected the claim that strength could be judged in "quantitative" terms, remaining aloof to opinions of "experts", especially military people who were prone to calculate the results of military confrontation solely on the amount of observable firepower. During the War of Independence, he criticized the experts' dire warnings questioning Israel's ability to withstand an enemy attack. In a speech in February 1948, he asserted:

It has been said that experts are needed to determine [our] war needs; of

> course all of our projects require experts . . . but no expert can determine what we will fight for and what not. Furthermore, I claim that no expert can define beforehand our fighting capacity. It is not a previously proven capability. Without doubt, [it] has its limitations, but its quality depends greatly on the goals of the war. What we are fighting for will determine our ability: a limited goal – [means] our [fighting] capacity is limited; an expanded goal – will increase [our ability] . . . The goal itself is our Zionist will-power; the measure of our will-power – [will determine] the measure of our strength.[56]

Ben-Gurion further expatiated on Israel's relative strength in opposing several attempts by the international community to obstruct its basic interests. For the international community, BG explained, the Middle East was a region brimming with vital interests. However, for Israel alone the Middle East was a question of survival.

From this perspective, and on the basis of a comparison between Israel's regional interests and those of the Great Powers, BG concluded that only in the Middle East did Israel have freedom of manoeuvrability and action equal to that of the Great Powers. An unequivocal expression of this is revealed in one of his letters:

> I believe no greater illusion exists than viewing the Jewish people as a political factor in the world, deciding its political destiny as England does. We were never such a factor, nor, it seems, will we ever be. However, there is an area where our strength surpasses even that of several larger countries. If it is not a question of the survival of England, or of any other nation, but the fate of our own lives, then our strength in this enterprise is superior to that of others, and our willpower and capability will be decisive . . . This, in my opinion, is the basis of Zionist policy, and the only view towards which we must direct our Zionist activity.[57]

Referring to relations with the international community, BG outlined a number of principles intended to guide Israel in its ties with the West, especially the United States and Great Britain. In the first place he asserted his conviction that Israel had to be aware that unlike other nations, it had no room for manoeuvring between the two Superpowers, the USSR and the United States. In its early steps as an independent state, Israel took care not to identify with either of the blocs. According to BG, "We cannot allow ourselves to identify with either Russia or America; our unconditional ideological neutrality must be made clear to our youth, workers, and nation."[58]

However, it quickly became obvious that Israel's needs, values, style of government, and other factors were inexorably leading it to identification with the Western world. This orientation was fraught with restrictions for Israel's manoeuvrability in the international arena. At the same time, the

advantages in this shift vastly outweighed its drawbacks. BG's fear of a Soviet takeover in the Middle East during a Superpower confrontation took precedence over all other considerations in connection with Israel's orientation to the West.

> Our neutrality would be inconceivable during a world conflagration: (1) Neither side would take such neutrality into consideration if it got in the way. (2) Russian domination [of the Middle East] would mean the end of the state of Israel and Zionism. (3) Even a temporary occupation of Israel by Russia would signal the destruction of the state: Arab refugees would immediately return, and the Jews would probably be expelled.[59]

Despite its deep dependence on and identification with the West in countless areas, BG believed that Israel had to demonstrate, as far as it could, its independence in determining its own policy. In a Knesset speech countering the bewilderment at Israel's voting in the United Nations against an American-sponsored issue, BG attempted to elucidate the special relation existing (or at least that he would like to see) between the two countries.

> I was surprised and saddened to hear the bafflement over the question: How could we let ourselves vote differently from America? . . . I am aware that we are deeply and closely committed to American Jewry and the American people . . . however, we are not America's vassals. And this is not just for our moral benefit, but for America's [too]. Not once has the United States demanded of us to bow to their dictates for this would contradict their commitment and international position on democratic freedom. But even if they were to ask this of us, we would reply: "No . . . we shall retain the right to be independent." The tiny Israeli nation, under siege and blockade, surrounded by enemies wishing to devour us, burdened with formidable and urgent tasks that have no parallel in the world – [our] tiny nation will defend its sovereignty and freedom . . . and will remain the final judge for determining its international orientation . . .[60]

It has already been shown that BG was convinced that the Superpowers' attitude towards Israel was influenced to no small degree by religious, ethical and historical considerations. However, at the same time, he stressed that in the final analysis their concrete interests, in terms of cost and gain *vis-à-vis* the Arab world, remained the determining factors in their relations with the Jewish state.

> America [responds] to the objective situation; it is not acting out of hatred towards Israel and love of the Arabs. We have to free ourselves once and for all from our Israel-centred view of a world divided between friends and enemies . . . America loves America, but wants to be the world's friend, and the world contains seventy million Arabs, and America wants them on her side.[61]

In its desire to create a "balance" between the Superpowers' attitude towards Israel and the Arab world, Israel found it necessary to demonstrate to the Western powers the utility they could derive from its impressive regional strength. A powerful Israel, BG asserted, could assist the Western powers in safeguarding their vital economic and strategic interests in the region. The manpower at Israel's disposal, and its technological expertise, could turn Israel's friendship into a highly valuable asset.

> If war breaks out, the free nations will need us almost as much as we will need them. Neither America nor England will send here a million and a quarter troops in place of our soldiers. [These countries] would have need of our industrial and scientific potential.[62]

On the other hand, Israel could make use of its tremendous potential and motivation to assist the West, as a springboard for winning massive military and economic aid. On several occasions BG proposed a deal of this nature in which the United States would help Israel set up a powerful military apparatus. In return, Israel would offer its army to the West in the event of a confrontation with the Communist bloc. In answer to the American ambassador's inquiry regarding the influence of Israel's left-wing parties, who were ideologically opposed to this idea, BG replied confidently:

> The citizens of Israel would support any move to suppress Communist aggression in a world conflict. Only a negligible number of members in Mapam would react obstructively . . . [63]

This convoluted arrangement with the West leads one to conclude that from BG's point of view, ongoing Superpower tension worked in Israel's interest since it would enable Israel to persist in stressing its importance to the Western powers. BG, however, was reluctant to speak openly about these commitments, and in order to "cover his tracks" he frequently spoke of Israel's interest in a Cold War thaw.[64]

In spite of this, it is hard to avoid the impression that his high-sounding, moralistic rhetoric lay in the realm of the prophets' "end of days scenario", rather than expressing Israel's interest in the continuation, if not escalation, of Superpower rivalry. In a closed meeting, BG broadly hinted at his true feelings:

> Military value is revealed only in time of war. As long as there is no war, or serious danger of it, [then] political considerations are the determining factor. Herein lies our political threat. Arab power is at its zenith prior to war, and only the genuine fear of war [erupting] would push the Free World towards Israel. Whoever recognizes this fear understands our value.[65]

Notwithstanding its willingness to support Western powers against the Communist bloc, BG was certain that the international community's assistance could not be relied on for Israel's survival, being convinced that the assumption that the Superpowers would not permit the annihilation of Israel was groundless. In times of peril, Israel would have to fall back on its own strength. In BG's words: "Our fate is in our hands, if we do not protect ourselves, no one will."[66]

The silence of the Great Powers during the Turkish massacre of the Armenian minority, the Iraqi slaughter of Assyrians, and the genocide of the Jewish people in the Holocaust are constantly referred to by BG as historical lessons of enormous importance to Israel. In a speech delivered at the Jewish Agency shortly before the adoption of the Partition Resolution by the United Nations, he said:

> We must remember that Hitler was not original. In World War I, the [Armenian] people were wiped out by the Turks. This took place when Turkey was not only tied to, but subservient to the German Empire . . . England [signed] a treaty with Iraq . . . guaranteeing the rights of minorities, individual and national rights, [yet] a small Christian nation, one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, the Assyrians, were massacred [by the Iraqis], and no one lifted a finger.[67]

Despite the enormous gap between Israel and the Superpowers, BG repeatedly made it clear that Israel was permitted, nay obligated, to demand relations on an equal footing with the Superpowers. In the final analysis, Israel had no reason to feel herself an "inferior" player in the region. Referring specifically to Great Britain, its regional strength, and the role it filled in the Middle East, BG stated:

> England cannot be a decisive factor in the Middle East, neither in peacetime nor in war. In this region, our strength is greater than theirs, [therefore] cooperation between us is possible only on the basis of equality, as between England and Dominion countries.[68]

Ben-Gurion admitted that Israel had an interest in initiating formal military relations with the West, especially with the United States. Such a military pact, he believed, would not impinge upon national sovereignty, as certain voices were claiming. The opposite was true, "denying the sovereign state the right to sign treaties that it regards necessary is a denial of the state's sovereignty . . . a military pact with another country, when this is a vital matter, does not impair our independence".[69]

At the same time, Ben-Gurion was aware of the dangers the Western powers would face in a military alliance with Israel. He found himself at a loss to make unequivocal, definitive statements on the subject, and it appears that he was burdened by a complexity of scenarios concerning

Israel's interests, deliberating carefully over the following possibilities:

1. A security pact would harm the Western powers' stature in the Arab world and jeopardize their strategic interests. In reaction to a pact with Israel, the Arab countries could easily realign with the Eastern bloc, especially the Soviet Union.
2. A security pact with Israel could cripple the Western powers' position as an intermediary in the Arab–Israeli conflict. The Arab states would instinctively refuse to see them as "honest brokers".
3. A security pact would give Israel the upper hand, but would almost certainly diminish its willingness, already tenuous at best, to make significant compromises needed for an Arab–Israeli settlement.
4. The Western powers were aware that a security pact would be of vital interest to Israel. Therefore, they would play this "winning card" only after attaining serious Israeli guarantees of major concessions, in the framework of an Arab–Israeli peace accord.[70]
5. A security pact with Israel could place the Western powers in an extremely difficult and embarrassing position. Military tensions between Israel and the Arab countries could deteriorate into an all-out war. A military pact would obligate the Western powers to come to Israel's defence. Given the volatile, convoluted nature of the Middle East, identifying the aggressor was not always possible.
6. Moreover, arms supplies to Israel during hostilities would embroil the Western powers in a ferocious and complex "hot war" in which it was doubtful that they would emerge victorious.
7. Even if a defence pact was signed with Israel, no one could guarantee that the Western powers would rush to Israel's aid in a crisis. "We are involved in negotiations with the American government on a bilateral security pact," BG related, " . . . but there is no guarantee that if we're attacked, America would send assistance."[71]
8. A defence pact between Israel and the Western powers would limit Israel's flexibility in dealing with the Arab world; and considering Israel's military superiority, such a pact would go against her interests. It seems that the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, expressed views that were acceptable to BG in this regard: "We", he stressed, "have no need for a defence pact with the United States. On the contrary, it would be to our disadvantage. We will not be facing a threat from the Arabs for another eight to ten years. Even if they receive Western military aid, we would still have the better of them since we can handle the weapons infinitely more capably. A security pact [with the United States] would only bind our hands and remove from us all freedom of action, and this [manoeuvrability] is what we will need in the coming years."[72]
9. A security pact could freeze the present territorial status, created as a

result of the War of Independence, into a state of permanency. From the Israeli point of view, the "permanent" armistice lines were not necessarily a welcome development. In talks with Abba Eban, BG expressed his reservations at the idea of a defence pact with the Americans. "Regarding a defence pact," he told Eban, "for the defence of our borders, and of course for the Arabs' borders [too], I have said that it was not our desire. Nevertheless, I am opposed to a war of expansion, unless it is thrust upon us."[73]

10. A defence pact with the Western powers could require Israel to submit to their presence inside the country, and this would include the establishment of military bases. BG expressed profound reluctance at this possibility and had grave doubts of its benefit to Israel. He was particularly opposed to British troop presence, but was more circumspect in his aversion to American bases.

Since he regarded Britain as blatantly pro-Arab and hostile to Israel, he was fearful lest a British presence in the region might limit Israel's freedom to deal with its neighbours, especially Jordan (with whom Britain had signed a defence treaty). A blunt expression of his views was given in a conversation with Eliyahu Eilat, Israel's ambassador to Great Britain. Eilat had returned to Israel with a message regarding a bilateral or regional pact and BG reacted vehemently to this overture.

From the documents it appears that he instructed Eilat to reject it categorically. For Israel's ambassador to arrive with such an offer suggested that Britain thought Israel willing to consider the proposal positively, despite its detriment to Israeli interests. BG wrote in his diary:

> I told Eilat that he erred in coming here with this proposal . . . There is nothing to consider . . . It is the [British] desire to return to the country. Why should we let them in? Their policy in the Middle East hasn't changed . . . It is [still] hostile [to us], supporting the [Arab] League whose only activity is war against Israel, sending weapons to Egypt, even though the Egyptians intend to employ them against Israel, not against Russia . . . If the English return to the country – we won't be able [to move against the Jordanian army] – they will remain in control. This proposal is an insult . . . [the British] have no desire for peace between the Arabs and us.[74]

On the other hand, regarding the United States, BG suggested a different, more accommodating approach. This Western power's attitude to Israel seemed less hostile than Britain's, so its presence in the region also appeared less threatening.

> With the United States, we are ready to discuss everything. We receive American aid, and we ask for additional assistance . . . We would like to see

> America defending the Middle East, i.e. – [defending] Israel. America has never harmed us. The opposite is true.[75]

Nevertheless, even towards the United States, BG's view was often: "show respect but take heed", and he had deep reservations over the prospect of American military bases on Israeli soil. This attitude probably stemmed from Israel's outright dependence on the United States in many areas, and BG's feeling that this considerably reduced Israel's freedom of manoeuvre with the Superpower. An American presence in the region could have implications far beyond Israel's interests.

> There is a question that we have to examine with a fine-toothed comb . . . If the third side [who desires intense involvement in the region] is the United States, [then] the danger of even the slightest intervention becomes extremely perilous for two reasons. (1) We will need American support in various spheres for a long time . . . We will not be able to retain friendly relations with American Jewry, our lifeblood, should a serious altercation develop between us and America. (2) [On the other hand], America is the greatest Superpower in the world. If it gains the slightest hegemony over our sovereignty, we cannot know what it would lead to . . . other than our increased dependency.[76]

This was the background for BG's unshakeable stance that America's relations with Israel must be linked to American willingness to aid and strengthen Israel's military deterrence. This implied a willingness to supply arms in the quantity and quality that would ensure the IDF's undeniable superiority in the region. BG did not think there was any compelling reason to acquiesce to an American demand for bases, as it had in Europe. At a closed party forum he declared:

> America must realize that the military bases it would require in case of a world war are the State of Israel and its combined strength. We are not offering the United States a base in a particular area, what [we are saying is that] Israel's integrated forces would be [America's] base.[77]

Despite his qualms over the idea of a military pact with the Western powers, BG did not ignore the positive aspects in such a treaty. This lay in his apprehension over major changes in the Arab world that could alter Israel's present superiority.

> Regarding [a military pact], it could have great advantages for Israel . . . Presently we are militarily stronger than the Arabs, and can remain so for a long time . . . But who can guarantee that there won't be a major revolutionary change in the Arab states . . . and everything would change? A defence pact would guarantee [long-term] security to Israel.[78]

Another possible outgrowth from a defence pact with the United States,

BG claimed, could be the increased chances for an Arab–Israeli peace agreement. Israel's partnership with the United States might jolt the Arab states into shedding their illusion of annihilating the Zionist state. BG believed this realization on the part of the Arabs could lead to a reconciliation of the conflict.

> Such a security pact brings the chance for peace with Arab countries closer . . . Once they realize that the State of Israel is a permanent fact . . . then it will be possible for a country like Egypt, that has no special interests antagonistic to ours, and that found itself dragged into [a war] against its will, to consider the advantages of making peace with us.[79]

Faced with these conflicting considerations and gnawing doubts, it remains difficult to reach a definite conclusion about BG's views on a military pact with a Western power, first and foremost the United States. Nevertheless, BG's statements on this issue seem to refute the widely-held claim that Israel's policy in its first years of statehood was characterized by a tireless drive for a formal defence pact with the United States.[80]

The Use of Force – Needs and Limitations

In the first years of Israel's independence, building up the state's security and power were seen by BG as more important than political and media-oriented matters. He believed that Israel had to understand that if it wished to stabilize its position and realize Zionist goals, it could do so only from a position of strength, together with the accompanying risk of condemnation and confrontation with the international community.

This view was well reflected in BG's statement following Operation "Sea of Galilee" in December 1955. This was an IDF operation directed against Syrian forces on the Golan Heights, severely criticized both within Israel and by the international community. It was argued that no Syrian provocation had preceded the attack and that the raid's magnitude was completely unjustified.

> One of the first things that the world will learn is that we are [now] a political and military factor that knows how to respond, and in times of danger we will respond. If they [the Syrians] attack us, we will respond; if they try to kill us, we will respond; if they try to seize any part of our land or maritime territory, we will respond; and whoever aids our enemies and tangles with us, will taste our response.[81]

Trying to pinpoint the ideological sources of the world's apparent miscomprehension, BG came to the conclusion that with respect to Israel's survival and vital interests, there were grey areas that the international

community, through unwillingness or inability, simply did not comprehend. He did not believe this was inevitable, and in one of his speeches he even proposed making an effort "to enlighten" the world's nations on Israel's unique position and problems.[82]

Nevertheless, it appears that during this period he acted on the assumption that the international community's lack of understanding would accompany its relations with Israel for many years to come.

> There are some things that cannot be explained to others. Can we explain that the survival of the Jewish people is necessary and demands independence and a homeland? The world can exist without this . . . The Jewish people can be exterminated, as Hitler tried, and the world would go on as usual . . . Our independent existence can be explained to others only when it is seen as a solid fact . . . When the state of Israel was established, three major issues confronted us: borders, refugees, and Jerusalem. None of them have been solved, nor will they be solved through public relations efforts. I believe we should be wary of doing anything that might provoke an unfavourable reaction in the international community; however, at the same time, we should be ready to carry out military operations if they serve our interests. If they [the international community] get angry with us – so what! . . . We are in the midst of creating a state and that takes precedence over everything else.[83]

Ben-Gurion's perspective of Israel's relations with the international community is best illustrated by his view of the United Nations' refusal to recognize what he considered Israel's legitimate rights. He felt that the international organization had not acted on the basis of just and moral considerations, but on a "cold" appraisal of what best served its interests in the region.

Thus, Israel was obliged to tread its way gingerly and soberly in international affairs, without any expectation of world support. Speaking before his party in 1955, BG described his concern over the idea, raised in the defence establishment, of sending an Israeli vessel through the Suez Canal to test the right of free passage.

> The United Nations [General Assembly] and the Security Council, are honoured assemblies where the Soviet Union, America, England, France, and other great nations of the world have sat and . . . voted that we are permitted passage through the Suez Canal. But Egypt has replied with a 'No' [preventing the passage of Israeli shipping]. Nevertheless, I am opposed to dispatching one of our ships [to force its way through the Canal] only to have it captured and be helpless . . . Nor will I issue a complaint before the Security Council, because I know they will not deal with it seriously. They will do nothing to interfere with Egypt. The United Nations is not a tribunal of higher justice; it is a political institution, with political considerations. And the United States and Soviet Union are not interested in disputing [with Egypt] over Jewish [Israeli] cargo passage through the Suez Canal.[84]

Since BG realized that Israel could not look to the international community for support in its struggle against the Arab world, he considered that Israel had a right to initiate war against the Arab states if necessary. In scores of references he recalled Clausewitz's dictum that "war is a continuation of politics by other means". According to BG, "War is only an instrument of the political establishment."[85]

While reviewing the political and military events during the last stages of the War of Independence, BG specifically referred to an Israeli-initiated war for the purpose of attaining political, strategic and territorial goals. He observed that the two periods of fighting (29 November 1947 to 13 May 1948; 14 May 1948 to March 1949) were useful for differentiating between a defensive and an Israeli-initiated war.

> It has been said that war is a continuation of politics by other means, but this is not always the case. At the outset our war was a defensive struggle against the attempt to liquidate us. Essentially, it remains the same today. However, from the first cease-fire [11 June 1948 to 9 July 1948] our military activity became a political effort . . . The General Assembly was about to discuss [the fate of] the Negev, and we had to change *the facts on the ground* [emphasis in the original – Z.S.] so that the future of the Negev and the Galilee would not depend solely on these debates.[86]

Later, BG had occasion to point out the differences between the two phases of the war. "Until the second cease-fire," he wrote in his diary, "we fought a purely defensive war, although in an offensive manner. After the second cease-fire, our entire military operation was a political act by other means." That year, in a meeting of the Mapai's Central Committee, he spoke in the same vein: "As you know, the Arabs initiated the fighting only up until the second cease-fire, after that, we initiated all of the fighting."[87]

Parallel to his belief that the use of force to attain essential national goals could be justified under certain circumstances, BG was aware that there were limitations to power and to the use of force in relations between states. In practical terms this meant that Israel always had to pay close attention to the opinions and demands of the international community so that they would not run counter to Israel's vital interests.

In this context, BG attacked incidents during the War of Independence that, in his opinion, deviated from moral standards that he thought the IDF should follow. He rejected this behaviour not only on ethical grounds, but also because of the implications for Israel's status in the international arena. At the height of the hostilities (February 1948), he admonished a policy of undiscerning collective punishment of Arab villages. He reiterated the importance of gaining world recognition for the justice of Israel's struggle.

> I know that at this hour [in the midst of bitter fighting], moral standards and the moral perspective are being disregarded. This too is an outcome of the war. To those who do not believe in [ethical values] I say: "morality has a value in our war". We will be victorious not only by our strength, but also through the sympathy and understanding of the world . . . Moral values also have a political value.[88]

After the war, BG continued to warn against disregarding the negative implications that Israel's use of force produced in the international arena. In the attempt to dispel the international community's consternation surrounding his decision in December 1949 to move government offices to Jerusalem, he countered:

> There are people among us who exaggerate the value of force and see it as the only answer to all our problems . . . We cannot rely on strength alone, for the simple reason that there are those who are greater and more powerful than us. Let us not swagger and strut. Let us recognize the limitations of our strength and ability.[89]

In this context, it should be pointed out that BG paid close attention to the need for Israel to avoid military confrontation with a non-Arab army at all costs. During the War of Independence, he warned against taking precarious steps that could be detrimental to Britain's strategic interests in the region and precipitate an armed clash.

> I am not counted among those who belittle Jewish strength, but I am absolutely convinced . . . that there is a limit to our strength . . . and that is why we have been prudent . . . not to get dragged into a military conflict with England . . . A struggle with Arab kings is sufficient.[90]

Ben-Gurion thought that when in danger of a confrontation between the IDF and a non-Arab army, Israel should assess its freedom of action according to the threat to a Great Power's interests. A few months before the start of the Sinai campaign, with increasing danger of British intervention due to the heightened tension between Israel and Jordan, BG made it clear that the risk of a clash with a foreign power could be justified only when Israel's survival was at stake.

> I know the IDF's strength, and I rely on it. But I would not take the responsibility of sending the IDF to fight a European, American, Russian, British, or French army . . . If I believed that the British army would land here against our wishes, I would not hesitate for a moment to challenge it, even though I know we would lose. A nation unwilling to defend itself when attacked . . . has no [chance for] revival.[91]

The principle of avoiding confrontation with a non-Arab army, BG

perceived, was not intended to paralyse Israel or compel it to accept every proposal a Great Power tried to impose, but he felt that to back off from a potential collision was relevant when there was a likelihood that it would lead to a massive military intervention by a Great Power.

Thus BG did not hesitate to reject the American proposals during the War of Independence, for a United Nations Trusteeship, or for a limitation or complete cessation of immigration into Israel. His brave and somewhat provocative statements against the US position in this regard may be explained in light of his seeming certain that there was no danger of an American military intervention.

> The American armies could defeat us, but we would not rush to announce our acceptance of trusteeship, disarmament, or a halt to immigration; if they try to suppress us they will not have an easy time of it. If this is their intention, we would say to America: "No! Send your armies to destroy us, we will fight, though we do not desire this."[92]

Against a background of growing border tension and the insistent urging of the Israeli high command, the right-wing parties, and Achdut Ha'avoda that they should embark upon a preventative war against Egypt and/or Jordan, BG repeatedly warned of the acute danger of a military confrontation with a non-Arab army. During a debate with the head of Achdut Ha'avoda over Yigal Allon's call for a *blitzkrieg* against Egypt, he made it absolutely clear that his opposition to Allon's plans stemmed from fear of Superpower intervention, especially on the part of the British.[93]

Ben-Gurion regarded the principle of avoiding war with a Superpower at all costs to be one of the basic guarantees of Israel's survival. In a speech delivered after the Sinai campaign, in the wake of heavy Superpower pressure on Israel to withdraw from Sinai and Gaza, he reiterated the importance of maintaining this principle then and in the future:

> All these years our military planning has been based on the assumption that we would be facing the challenge of an Arab army . . . It was clear to me that we could not allow the IDF to fight against a non-Arab force . . . The day will come when someone else will be Defence Minister, and if there were a testament I could bequeath him, it would be the principle that the IDF should never get entangled in a conflict with a non-Arab army. Heaven help us.[94]

Ben-Gurion's famous expression in this context, "It is not important what the Gentiles say, important is what the Jews do," had already become a canonized principle in Israel's political culture – BG chose his words judiciously, differentiating between "doing" and "saying". At one point he clarified:

> We must discern between what the representatives of foreign countries say

and what they are willing to do. A state can hold to a certain position . . . [but this is] not identical with its willingness to execute it . . . There is no need to become unduly agitated by what a foreign official says, even if he is the representative from the greatest Superpower, as long as we believe that he lacks the will to act on his words.[95]

The United Nations Resolution on the Internationalization of Jerusalem

Background and Response

Of all the issues that the Zionist leaders had to deal with, the struggle over Jerusalem's status seems to exemplify Israel's relations with the Arab world and illustrate its *modus operandi* in the international arena. More than any other issue the question of Jerusalem, the Holy City for three of the world's major religions, was a hornets' nest of political, regional, and international designs, with powerful religious and emotional motifs thrown in for good measure.

The United Nations Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947 had decided, *inter alia*, that the city would be a separate entity (*corpus separatum*) with a special international government administered by the United Nations through the apparatus of the Trusteeship Council. As will be recalled, the Arab states rejected this decision outright and worked to nullify it by military means.[96]

The fighting that erupted immediately after the ratification of the partition vote created a geopolitical reality utterly different from what the resolution had intended. The new reality received official backing in the Israeli–Jordanian Armistice Agreement, which determined the sovereign division of Jerusalem between the two countries rather than consigning it to international jurisdiction. Ben-Gurion, and other Israeli political leaders, hastened to make clear that the new geopolitical reality no longer allowed a return to the previous status quo – either to the partition borders or to the agreement for internationalizing the city. In a speech before his Mapai colleagues, BG fulminated:

When we agreed to the November 29th [Resolution] we were serious about it. We accepted it not because it was good or just, [but because we had no other choice]. In fact we were willing to settle even for less, for the sake of peace . . . [But now, after the war] the 29 November [Resolution] no longer exists, and no idiot in the world can revive it . . . The international reality and the local reality have changed, and the hands on the clock will not be pushed back.[97]

However, the international community, for the most part, rejected the Israeli position redefining the borders according to the armies' deployment at the end of the war, and refused to recognize Israel's sovereignty over certain parts of Jerusalem. In its endeavour to bring about a change in mid-August 1949, the Conciliation Commission handed the United Nations Secretariat a proposal for internationalizing the city in an attempt to link the "old" Partition Plan with the new *fait accompli* on the ground.

When talks opened in the United Nations, in mid-September 1949, the Conciliation Commission's proposal became a basis for discussing the status of Jerusalem. Yet the delegations from both Israel and the Arab states were almost unanimously opposed to the proposal. "The report did not win full support from any side," Sharett later relayed.[98]

As a result of intensive contacts between Israeli officials and various United Nations delegations, a cautiously optimistic assessment began to crystallize among the Israelis, led by the Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett, of the chances of blocking a renewed attempt at internationalizing the city. "It was obvious," Sharett related, "that the focus of the debate would be the Conciliation Committee's reports. The general feeling was that the majority on the committee would try to soften it, but a minority would act to make it even more stringent. The general direction would be to formulate the proposal as closely as possible to the present administration of the city so that the gap between the majority's position and ours would be reduced."[99]

From the start BG was far more pessimistic than Sharett regarding the General Assembly's attitude towards Jerusalem, becoming increasingly nervous that the Conciliation Committee would adopt decisions deleterious to Israel's interests. It also seems likely that he was greatly concerned over his Foreign Minister's position on the question of Jerusalem, probably fearing that Sharett would buckle under pressure from the United Nations demanding that Israel accept compromise proposals on Jerusalem's status.[100]

These fears may also explain the blunt, uncompromising wording in BG's telegram to Sharett at the United Nations on 4 December 1949. The language leaves little doubt over BG's views on the Jerusalem question and what he expected from the United Nations:

> The government is meeting tomorrow. I will suggest a Knesset declaration that Israel rejects any form of foreign administration in Jewish Jerusalem, and [objects to] its separation from the state. If we are faced with a choice between quitting Jerusalem or the United Nations, we will choose to leave the United Nations.[101]

It soon became apparent that BG's fears were about to be realized. In a

surprise move, the Australian delegation's proposal that Jerusalem be placed under an international administration in perpetuity was ratified in a rare show of United Nations unity among the Soviet bloc, Catholic states, and the Arab countries. "The proposal seemed so far removed from reality," Sharett admitted in an attempt to justify his earlier misguided optimism, "that many refused to take it seriously."[102]

Ratification of the Australian overture was received with astonishment in Israel. BG urgently summoned experts from the foreign office and simultaneously called a special session of parliament (11 December 1949). He asked the Knesset to grant immediate approval for a swift transfer of government offices, including the Knesset itself, from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The motion was passed though some senior ministers were opposed.[103]

Before the Knesset convened, Mapai representatives had met *in camera* to discuss BG's radical proposal. A heated debate erupted over the idea of moving the state's official seat to Jerusalem, as a number of influential Knesset members expressed grave reservations over BG's decision. They were undoubtedly influenced by the negative reactions of the Foreign Minister, and the private apprehensions of President Weizmann. Other than these dissenting voices, Mapai adopted the proposal almost unanimously.[104]

The Nature of the Government's Decision and Criticism of It

For the most part, the decision to transfer the seat of government to Jerusalem won wide popular support. In Knesset debates, the majority supported the decision, while criticizing the political failure that had led to the General Assembly's decision in the first place. The brunt of the criticism against the Prime Minister's decision came mainly from within his own party, especially from the Foreign Minister.

Criticism was not directed against Israel's need to reject the United Nations Resolution, and thus guarantee its sovereignty over half of Jerusalem, and transform the city into Israel's capital, but against the provocative and brash way in which the government had decided to transfer its offices. According to these critics, Israel's interests could have been retained by other means more in line with the moderate and pragmatic side of Zionism.

At first glance BG's knee-jerk reaction to the United Nations' decision could be interpreted as an unintentional, highly emotional reflex against international interests and prestige that endangered Israel beyond what it could "allow itself" in this period. Its economy was close to collapse, waves of immigration were inundating the country, and it was almost entirely

dependent on the international community for political, economic, and military assistance.

Ben-Gurion knew this, so how can his provocative, contumacious and seemingly irrational response against the United Nations decision be explained? The alternatives that Sharett and other high officials posed, based on gradual, low-keyed activity until Israel's status in Jerusalem stabilized, seem much more suitable under the prevailing circumstances. These options reflected, to a great extent, not only a more realistic view of Israel's borders, but also the traditional policy of "practical Zionism" that had been endorsed over the years by the Labour Movement itself.

In retrospect, we can observe that BG's response to the General Assembly Resolution on the Jerusalem issue illustrated the basic principles of his political strategy for national security. It was a combination of long-range political daring, premeditated use of force, and carefully thought-out pragmatism.

In my estimate, BG based his decision to move the government offices to Jerusalem on his assessment that the United Nations Resolution to internationalize the city stemmed not only from a fortuitous unity of forces, as Sharett and others in the Foreign Ministry claimed, but also from two key elements in the international community's attitude towards Israel:

1. The objective–rational factor, which led many states in the international community to realize that the benefits to be gained from relations with the Arab world were much higher than what could be expected from Israel.
2. The historical–religious factor that derived from the commonality of the Judeo-Christian heritage. This factor was enshrined, according to Ben-Gurion, in the Christian countries and prevented them from relating to Israel in an ordinary manner. Israel's very existence, its success and development stood in high-relief as a contradiction of Christianity's basic principles.

"There are powerful forces in the world hostile to us, not only our neighbours," BG stated in a Knesset speech.

> There is a great religion in the world that has an historical account [with us] over what happened in the City of Cities 2000 years ago . . . Believers of this religion will not forget that we rejected their Messiah, and because of this we have been destined to wander forever among the nations. They have not easily reconciled themselves to the fact that after hundreds of years of wandering we have returned to our homeland, renewed our independence, and Jerusalem has once again become the capital of Israel.[105]

Ben-Gurion's perspective of the roots of the world's aversion to Israel in general, and its sovereignty over Jerusalem in particular, led him to conclude that conflict with the international community would not end

with the latest United Nations decision. Religious–historical considerations and pragmatic factors of profit and loss would continue to give the international community's positions a bias against Israel's basic interests.

According to BG, since this was an "eternal" phenomenon, Israel could not expect, despite wishful thinking on the part of Sharett and his staff, that the international community's attitude on the Jerusalem question would "just fade away" if Israel simply ceased its precipitate disregard of United Nations decisions. He believed not only that acquiescence or restraint on the Jerusalem issue would be injurious to Israel's interests, but that Israel must prove irrefutably, by its actions, that it was determined to safeguard its sovereignty in Jerusalem. Only a demonstrative and symbolic move such as the transfer of the state's governing apparatus to Jerusalem could convey the seriousness of Israel's intent.

The decision to transfer the government offices, BG stressed, was made with great apprehension and in full awareness of the inherent risks. He referred to this as his most agonizing decision in the past three years (during which the partition of Palestine had been accepted and statehood declared in the knowledge that it would launch an all-out war with the Arab countries). Speaking to his party colleagues, BG confessed his fear of the consequences of the Jerusalem move.

> I have made this decision with great trepidation. In my opinion, Sprinzak [an opponent of the decision] has not understood all of the dangers. They are far graver than he imagines.[106]

Ben-Gurion was concerned first of all over the United Nations' response to the blow to its prestige that Israel had inflicted, "after a majority of two-thirds in the United Nations voted [in favour of the decision]". "There is a problem with the United Nations whose prestige has been blemished by a small, young state, itself practically a United Nations creation, that is now rebelling," BG wrote in his diary.[107]

Ben-Gurion was also fearful of American economic sanctions as a reaction to the manifest violation of the United Nations decision:

> Perhaps we should not assume military sanctions will be applied against us. It is obvious we would not stand a chance against the American or Russian armies. But economic sanctions would be sufficient [to debilitate us]. America may choose to strangle us, because it is almost the only country where capital flows freely, and in which five million Jews live. If the United States should decide on economic sanctions against us, with United Nations consent, who knows if we can hold out?[108]

Despite Israel's apparent vulnerability, BG noted, it could not allow itself to slip into a state of paralysis and wallow in its own sense of frailty. Lack of response could be catastrophic. He called on opponents of his

Jerusalem decision to wake up and realize that it was a mistake to withhold a response or make only a symbolic gesture of rejection.[109]

Israel, he declared, must recognize its limitations in the international sphere, and act with caution and restraint. At the same time it had to be aware that its vital interests, such as the need to ensure Jerusalem's sovereignty, were now at risk. The awareness that a vital interest might be jeopardized necessarily enhanced Israel's power and resourcefulness. As BG put it, "We are stronger than the thirty-nine states that have voted for internationalization, simply because we are here."[110]

The question of Jerusalem, he believed, could not be considered as just another issue that Israel was contesting. Jerusalem was Israel's highest national concern and its loss endangered the state's very existence. If Jerusalem were to be handed over to the Gentiles, he was convinced that the State of Israel would no longer exist. Elsewhere he portrayed a worst-case scenario of an internationalized Jerusalem:

> The internationalization of Jerusalem cuts off one hundred thousand Jews from Israel. It will take more than a day for us to build up a community like this. This would be a serious setback to our construction of the city as a large Jewish capital. But Jerusalem is not only one hundred thousand Jews – it is the City of King David. If Eretz Israel is the heart of the Hebrew nation, then Jerusalem is the heart of hearts. International rule over Jerusalem would mean international intrigues and a reign of intrigues inside Israel. Every [contending] "side" in Jerusalem would also be a [contending] "side" in Israel. This would lead to the destruction of the nation. The growth of Jewish Jerusalem would slow down, and then grind to a halt. Maybe it would also spell its destruction. This would be the first victory of the Arab states over Israel.[111]

If Israel complied with the United Nations decision on Jerusalem, BG pointed out, it would mark a fatal precedent for other crucial issues on the international agenda: Israel's withdrawal from the 1949 armistice lines, and the return of the refugees.

> This would be only the beginning. Russia's interests lie not only in Jerusalem. It insists on [a return to] the borders of 29 November 1947. This means that large areas would be taken from us . . . There are other holy sites in Israel and [the Church] would demand their own supervision over all the buildings and religious places in the country. If the United Nations decision manages to evict us from Jerusalem, then this would signal the destruction of the state. Internal anarchy would reign.[112]

In his effort to explain the political rationale behind his decision, BG stressed that Israel was not alone in its opposition to the United Nations decision to internationalize Jerusalem. Its eastern neighbour, the Kingdom

of Jordan, had identical feelings on the Jerusalem issue. The Jordanians administered the eastern half of the city where the majority of Christian holy spots were located. Therefore, BG asserted, the Jordanians' position on Jerusalem was of crucial importance in the formulation of Israel's stand. In the first place, the Jordanian position divided the Arab world. Jordan was keenly aware that if it lost its sovereignty over the Holy City, then its stature would suffer irreparably in the eyes of fellow Arabs. Simultaneously, Jordan's bitter rival, Egypt, would gain in prestige.

Under these circumstances, BG believed that Jordan would try to obstruct the United Nations decision, and even join hands with Israel over this issue. "We have allies," BG wrote, "and our actions will determine their positions. Abdullah, of course, is a vassal of England, but in the eyes of the rest of the Arab states, he is often a key player. He is destroying Arab unity, and our most implacable enemy, Iraq, may be drawn under his sway."[113]

Ben-Gurion was certain that the Jordanians' status in Jerusalem and their interest in foiling internationalization guaranteed that their closest ally, Great Britain, would adopt a similar stand, and thus, unwillingly, become Israel's ally too. "This may be an historical irony, but it is a fact . . . England has been pulled into the conflict with the United Nations, on our side, without any overtures on our part . . . It will back Abdullah, and in a word, us too."[114]

Since most of Christianity's holy sites were in the Jordanian section of the city, BG argued that the United Nations was obligated to internationalize control over the entire city, not just the Israeli half. Jordan's unyielding opposition, BG figured, would not precipitate the international community to act with force, so that the plan for internationalizing the city would die stillborn. At a later date, he acknowledged:

> Why did I think that we could [foil the United Nations decision]? First of all, I knew we had an ally in Jordan. If they were allowed to keep Jerusalem, would we be forbidden? Jordan would never consent to having Jerusalem expropriated, so too no one would dare take it from us. I would have acted the same even without [Jordanian backing], but it provided tremendous support. I knew that nothing bad would befall us.[115]

Wisely, BG understood that the United States held the key to any action initiated by the international community or the United Nations. The American government, however, had still not come up with a definitive position on the Jerusalem question, though it was apparent that it did not support the internationalization of the city in the present United Nations format. Without solid American support, BG realized, it was difficult to imagine how the United Nations could carry out its decision.[116]

> If America is not going to harm us, then there is no need to have any fear

> *whatsoever* of the United Nations, or elements [hostile to us] inside it: the Arab states, the Soviet bloc, and not even the Vatican . . . If we wait, official support of the United Nations [by the Americans] will increase, because their concern over us is not as obligating. If we make a move that puts America to the test and forces it to decide on a *punitive act against us*, [it] will be in no hurry to do this. It seems likely that it would seek ways to change the United Nations decision as it has often done in the past.[117]

Ben-Gurion's position on Jerusalem also stemmed from his conviction that if Israel failed to demonstrate staunch determination in defending her vital interests, she would lose credibility on other crucial issues, and her few allies would eventually desert her.

> As of now, our situation has improved, and the struggle has become a political one. We have two strong allies in England and Abdullah. If we lose the battle for Jerusalem, and enter a second round of fighting over our borders, then there is a greater danger that England and Abdullah will no longer be [our] allies. They would not be willing to fight over the question of Israel's borders. And [our] struggle will be much more difficult.[118]

Ben-Gurion believed, therefore, that Israel could not allow itself to undertake a restrained, gradual reaction to the United Nations, as Sharett and his colleagues were suggesting. The time factor, BG emphasized, was of supreme importance. If Israel failed to respond immediately, the international community and the United Nations would probably infer that Israel was indecisive and reconciled to the internationalization of Jerusalem, and this mistaken assessment could influence them to take vigorous steps in realizing the United Nations' Jerusalem scheme. Thus BG gave top priority to making a daring Israeli response. "I decided that we had to take the risk instantly before the Trusteeship Council commenced operating . . . I ordered [our] infraction of the United Nations decision directly and at once."[119]

This line of reasoning is instructive for comprehending BG's decision to move the government offices and Knesset to Jerusalem. It was not an explosive, ill-conceived "gut response". On the contrary, it should be seen as a cautious step that combined political audacity, pragmatism, and a profound understanding of the "sources" of the United Nations decision. BG was cognizant of the risk he was taking and the counter-actions it could produce.

From this angle, one sees the agonizing deliberation over his decision. In contrast to the self-confident, obstinate, unflinching leader, BG appears as a vulnerable human being unafraid of revealing his anxieties to his colleagues. "I know [your] fears, and I know myself," he confided, "and I can say, that there are none among you whose fears come even close to mine. I am the greatest of alarmists."[120] Further proof of these gnawing doubts may

be seen in the rush of meetings he held with experts from the Foreign Ministry, the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, Mapai, the Cabinet, and the Knesset plenary. It appears that in addition to safeguarding the proper running of state machinery, BG was seeking backing for his decisions from as many sides as possible. Nehemia Argov, BG's long-time personal assistant, revealed:

> This was one of the toughest and most serious decisions he ever made. I witnessed the "old man" deal with other crucial decisions in the past, but I always felt a sense of security in the justness of the decision. The feeling of justice electrified those in his presence, and was relayed to people further distant. This time I could not observe the fire of certainty in the "old man's" eyes.[121]

Ben-Gurion's cautious, balanced perspective of his Jerusalem decision was expressed on 13 December 1949 in a Knesset speech describing the endeavour to bolster Jerusalem's status.

> In the heat of the war, when Jerusalem was under siege, we were forced to decide on a temporary seat for the government in Tel Aviv . . . Immediately after the fighting, we chose to transfer the government offices to Jerusalem, legalize the necessary conditions for a capital city, [construct] a viable road network, and [set up] economic and technical arrangements. We are still engaged in transferring government [offices] to Jerusalem, and hope that it will be concluded as soon as possible.[122]

The Implications of the Decision to Strengthen Jerusalem's Status

Undoubtedly BG's decision to move the government to Jerusalem accelerated the city's status as the country's capital. A new reality set in that could not be easily ignored. Western diplomats frequently had to overlook the United Nations decisions and grant *de facto*, semi-official recognition to the city's status as Israel's capital. Increasingly, meetings with foreign heads of state took place in Jerusalem, and the inauguration ceremony in Jerusalem of Israel's second president, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, in December 1952, was highlighted by the attendance of Western ambassadors.[123]

The success of BG's handling of the Jerusalem question may be measured by the muted reaction of the international community. This stood in stark contrast to the pessimistic estimates of those who opposed the decision, and even to BG's own all-consuming fears. World reaction, or rather the lack of it, strengthened his view, and that of many of his colleagues, that Israel had the power to face down an unsympathetic world on other vital issues. A precedent of momentous import had set in motion the shaping of BG's policies for the coming years.

In this light, BG's relentless efforts at creating further *faits accomplis* "on the ground" to bolster Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem become clear. Following the 1949 precedent, even Sharett, one of BG's most outspoken critics, exhibited a more aggressive attitude on the Jerusalem issue in his contacts with Western representatives.[124]

The transfer of the Foreign Ministry's offices created an ambiguous situation for Western diplomats regarding Jerusalem's status as a meeting ground for heads of state, official ceremonies, etc. The British ambassador described the embassy's location in Tel Aviv as a "nuisance" that hindered informal contact with Israelis.[125] This predicament forced diplomats to compromise United Nations principles and grant *de facto* recognition to Israeli sovereignty over parts of Jerusalem. In this context, a number of major incidents should be related:

1. When Ben-Zvi became president in Jerusalem, the custom began for the diplomatic corps to make an official visit to the President's House at least twice a year: at the Jewish New Year and on Independence Day.
2. In mid-1953 John Foster Dulles, the American Secretary of State, arrived in Israel. On the first day of his sojourn he met with the Israeli Foreign Minister in Tel Aviv, but the following day he came to Jerusalem to meet with the Prime Minister, BG, the Foreign Minister, and the president.
3. In January 1956 the United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld visited Israel. Before his arrival, he was pressured not to hold official talks in Jerusalem. He did conduct negotiations there, but rejected the Foreign Minister's invitation to attend a reception in his honour.[126]
4. In mid-March 1956 the British Foreign Minister, Selwyn Lloyd, visited Israel. His itinerary, arranged by the Foreign Ministry, did not include a visit to Jerusalem. This "oversight" incurred BG's wrath and he dashed off an acidly worded letter to Sharett:

> I see that according to Lloyd's schedule you will be accompanying him to Tel Aviv for dinner at the embassy. This looks like a mistake. It would announce our formal recognition of Tel Aviv as Israel's capital, particularly since he made it conditional that his visit to Jerusalem would not be of an official nature. I am astonished that [our Foreign Ministry people] did not explain to Lloyd and his aides in unambiguous terms that he could meet with Israeli representatives only in Jerusalem. If he wishes to meet with me, he can come to the Prime Minister's office [in Jerusalem].[127]

Although the British Foreign Minister did meet with Sharett in Tel Aviv, afterwards he went up to Jerusalem to speak with the Prime Minster and

the Foreign Minister. These and other incidents went far in solidifying international recognition of Israel's sovereignty over Jerusalem. Celebrations of Israel's tenth anniversary in 1958 included a military parade in Jerusalem and laying of the cornerstone for the new Knesset building. Heads of the foreign diplomatic corps were invited, but Western representatives preferred to shun the festivities, claiming that the military parade violated not only the General Assembly's resolutions, but also the Armistice Agreement with Jordan.[128]

But this attempt, like others by the foreign ministries of Western countries, to impede Israel's efforts at elevating Jerusalem's status failed to reverse the reality that was being cemented on the ground. As a senior diplomat in Israel defined it: by the late fifties, Jerusalem had become "the main focus of diplomatic activity of all foreign representatives". Another senior diplomat admitted that "Israel is growing firmly entrenched in the New Jerusalem; and the idea of international rule over the city has been tarnished."[129]

3

The Limitations of a Political Arrangement

If a final peace agreement between Israel and the Arab states appeared unattainable to Ben-Gurion and his colleagues, then a limited one did seem possible. BG was aware that even if a bilateral agreement were signed, Israel would still have to maintain its present level of security and refrain from diverting greater resources to domestic needs. He believed, however, that even a limited agreement could allay to some degree the inherent suspicion that a second round of fighting was inevitable. This chapter will examine the complexity of choices confronting Israel's leaders in their attempt to assess the value of a partial arrangement.

Egypt – The First Option

Israel's leaders fully understood that despite the Arab states' hatred of Zionism and their fanatical dream of annihilating the Jewish population, a number of countries were beginning to look at the conflict in pragmatic terms. Israeli leaders, it should be emphasized, were convinced that Arab readiness for negotiating did not stem from a moral obligation towards peace, but from practical needs and a sober evaluation of their own inability, at this point, to destroy Israel by force. Nevertheless, it was hoped that this change in attitude would induce them to approach the bargaining table with the intent of reaching a limited agreement.

Even in the early phases of the War of Independence, Israel's leaders had recognized that not all of the Arab states involved in the fighting were cut from the same cloth. Differences in outlook and motivation could be detected in the war aims and fighting spirit of the different armies. BG distinguished the Arab countries by their degree of hatred and aggression. In his view, the most hostile states were Syria, Iraq, and surprisingly, Lebanon; Egypt and Saudi Arabia could be counted among the moderates. A third, indefinable type at this stage was Trans-Jordan.[1]

By the end of the war, Israel's leaders came to realize that they too had a long list of often-contradictory interests relating to each of the Arab states, and that "individual considerations" would determine the value of separate political arrangements. A strictly tactical rationale influenced the Zionist leaders' attitude in insisting on separate negotiations with each Arab state. Simultaneous round-table negotiations with all of the Arab countries would probably have led to competition in the extremism of their hostility towards Israel. Compromise might have branded any state as a "traitor to the Arab cause". At the armistice talks in Lausanne, the Director-General of the Foreign Office, Walter Eytan wrote:

> The appearance of the Arabs as a single bloc inevitably converted them, both as individual states and as a group, into uncompromising [partners] . . . Naturally the result of this has been that any Arab delegate who revealed an inkling of moderation on any subject, would find himself threatened. He dared not express opinions that could be interpreted as acquiescing or back-stabbing by the other delegates.[2]

Furthermore, *en bloc* negotiations, Israeli officials assessed, would have compelled Israel to discuss basic issues such as borders and the status of Jerusalem. (The refugee issue was regarded as a general Arab problem that could have dangerous implications for Israel and the cause of peace.) At the Lausanne armistice talks, Sharett declared:

> It is not our intention to discuss Jerusalem with Egypt, Lebanon, or Syria. Our position on Jerusalem has nothing to do with them, unless they act as any other member of the United Nations . . . We are not aware that Egypt, as an Arab state at war with us, has won a special privilege for negotiating Jerusalem's status.[3]

Nevertheless, when a practical decision was in the offing, Sharett proposed exhibiting greater flexibility on the issue of multilateral negotiations, which he considered to be of a tactical–procedural nature. He felt that talks with all of the Arab delegations should be seen in practical terms, as reaching the ultimate goal: advancing the peace process. This may explain how he came to the conclusion that the refugee problem should be resolved within a general Arab–Israeli framework. In a brief to the Israeli delegation, he clarified his position:

> The willingness to begin negotiations on the refugee problem, within the framework of the peace talks, does not mean Israel is abandoning its official stand [to insist on bilateral discussions with each Arab state] . . . [But] there must be a modicum of flexibility on this principle. The refugee problem, by its very nature, demands negotiations within a wider forum . . . On the other hand, under no circumstances should we consent to opening the Jerusalem issue to negotiations with all of the Arab states seated together. The same is

> true for Israel's borders . . . It should be kept in mind that the Arab states jointly went to war, and [now] they have been invited to the Lausanne Conference . . . There is no need to be chained to the principle of separate negotiations if it becomes clear that this is an obstacle to peace. Things should be viewed wisely and realistically . . . If it is obvious that a general discussion benefits the negotiations, then the principle [of separate talks] should be sacrificed for the sake of peace, and not the opposite.[4]

Ben-Gurion's declarations, in contrast to Sharett's, almost never referred to tactical–procedural matters. It seems that he preferred to place Israel's basic relations with the Arab world at the top of the state's priorities. Occasionally he expressed his awareness of Israel's need for flexibility. In talks with the United Nations mediator Ralph Bunche, BG revealed:

> I told [Bunche] I would render all the assistance necessary for advancing peace . . . We would not stand on procedural formalities. If [for example] Egypt wished to express its opinion on the Galilee [a territory with which it has no connection whatsoever], this would not stop us from discussing peace.[5]

The Israeli leadership estimated that it had to choose between a peace agreement with Egypt or with Jordan. When the time came to decide, the country's leaders, first and foremost BG, quickly perceived the advantages in playing the "Egyptian card" since it involved no controversial territorial issues. According to BG, "There has never been a rational basis for the dispute between Egypt and Israel."[6]

Furthermore, it seemed to BG that Egypt's domestic problems would force it to relegate the Arab–Israeli conflict and Egyptian–Israeli relations to the backburner. "We must bear in mind," admonished the Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, in 1949, "[that Egypt regards] Israel as a matter of secondary or tertiary importance. The Egyptians wrote to Reilly [head of the United Nations observers] that they wished to maintain correct relations with Great Britain, Trans-Jordan, and Israel. Egypt's main problem is how to liberate itself from [external] dependency, and how to solve the Sudanese problem."[7]

On the basis of these and other considerations, BG and his advisors consolidated their view that Egypt's level of hostility towards Israel was low and that an Egyptian–Israeli accord was more realistic than arrangements with other Arab states. Shortly after the War of Independence, BG explicitly stated:

> We should not assume that Egypt is still violently hostile towards us. [Taking into account] its Armistice Agreement with us, its anger towards England and other Arab countries, and its own [domestic] problems . . . we can assume

> that Egypt will not launch a war against us. On the other hand, it will remain a potential enemy even if full peace is attained.[8]

While this half-solution to the conflict was frequently discussed by BG and his colleagues, it seems doubtful that it reflected their true appraisal of Egyptian sentiment. It may only have been wishful thinking on the part of Israel's leaders. "Objectively" no territorial controversy existed with a country as vast as Egypt whose enormous stretches of land were arid and unpopulated, but in the political reality of the Middle East a radically different picture emerged.[9]

Israel had no territorial claims against Egypt. In fact it viewed the armistice line between the two countries as perfectly suited to its own security needs and settlement aspirations. Egypt, on the other hand, did have territorial demands, especially regarding Israeli sovereignty over the Negev – the geographical wedge between Egypt and Jordan. BG's repeated assertion that no territorial dispute existed with Egypt obviously did not echo Egypt's vociferous rejection of the demarcation lines that had been formulated following the war. It seems that Israel's declarations were intended to convey the following messages:

1. From Israel's point of view, the armistice line with Egypt was "final". No serious political group inside Israel would refute this.
2. Egypt was wasting its time by intensifying the conflict over the territorial issue, especially since it possessed a vast unpopulated desert of which Sinai was only a fraction of the area.
3. Egypt was not a main issue in the Arab–Israeli conflict. Accordingly, it had no reason "to shed blood" for the interests of other Arab states.

At the same time, local border disputes between Egypt and Israel had to be dealt with. Several incidents, such as the Nitzana affair (November 1955), exacerbated the military tension between the two countries. However, these incidents were never thought as serious as those that frequently erupted on the Jordanian front. Surveying the severity of security breaches, the Chief-of-Staff stated:

> The security problem with Jordan will always be serious. On the other hand, with Egypt, border disputes and their differences of view need not clash [with ours].[10]

At a General Staff meeting shortly after the war, BG discussed Israel's acute concern over Jordan:

> Our most problematic neighbour is Trans-Jordan . . . where contiguity and disputes are greatest . . . Only in the Negev [the Egyptian border] have we gained an international boundary in accordance with the Mandate and the

> United Nations . . . With Jordan the problems are much more complicated. And then there is the perplexing question of Jerusalem . . . and the road to Jerusalem . . . Every inch of soil there is politically contested. Great Britain's [intense] involvement [in Jordan] complicates the issue . . . and there is a heavy suspicion of provocation [by Britain] . . . It is impossible to know where the Arab Legion's authority ends and the British Army's begins. The British Army has the power to deal us a devastating blow.[11]

Another view of Israel's relations with Egypt took into account the advantages that could be reaped, as compared with other Arab states, especially Jordan. Egypt, after all, was the largest and most powerful Arab country, geographically, demographically and militarily. According to Ben-Gurion:

> Without Egypt it is hard to conceive that the 1948 war would have broken out. Then too it was the largest Arab state. Jordan we know was not as enthusiastic [as Egypt] about going to war. Syria did not [even] have an army. Lebanon's strength was negligible . . . Without Egypt, it is doubtful whether war would have occurred.[12]

Israeli leaders were certain that it was in their supreme interest to remove Egypt from the circle of hostile states. Moreover, an Egyptian–Israeli agreement was likely to have repercussions throughout the Arab world. It was assumed that the majority of Arab countries harboured deep fears that a political agreement with Israel would censure them as turncoats. However, if Egypt led the way with an agreement with the Zionists, it seemed most likely that other Arab states would follow suit.

Furthermore, it was estimated that in the wake of an Egyptian–Israeli settlement, the Arab economic embargo would probably be lifted. A bilateral agreement with Egypt, under Nasser's tutelage, would also have a powerful impact on Israel's geopolitical status, especially in the Third World and among the non-aligned countries.[13]

An Egyptian–Israeli agreement was also looked on most favourably because of its chances of "survival" over a long period of time. Of all the Arab states, Egypt appeared to be the most stable, its population the most moderate, void of the fanaticism and bloodlust that BG and other Israeli leaders considered characteristic of other Arab peoples.

Egypt's geographic distance from the centre of a political dispute strewn with historical and religious potholes, such as the Jerusalem question, also contributed to the absence of the psychological aberrations of blind fanaticism that BG considered characteristic of Arab mentality. As the Armistice Agreements were being signed in 1949, Chief-of-Staff Yigal Yadin echoed BG's view of the Egyptians:

> It is obvious that Egypt has no interest whatsoever in Israel, and would will-

> ingly and unhesitatingly drop the whole matter [of the conflict] . . . Egypt is the country closest and most ready [for an agreement with Israel].[14]

In this light, Israel often presented Egypt's active involvement in the War of Independence as a case of "unwanted entanglement" resulting from false estimates and the corrupt nature of its monarchy. According to BG:

> Egypt's invasion of our country was without doubt one of the rashest, most foolish and irresponsible mistakes ever made by its leaders . . . One has only to look at the testimony of Muhammad Naguib, head of the military revolt at the time, and several of his colleagues who opposed the Egyptian invasion, and then look at the chief personality responsible for war against us – King Farouk.[15]

Perhaps more than any other Arab state, Egypt was desperately trying to solve its own immense social and economic problems by channelling the bulk of its resources towards remedying its domestic shortages. At the same time it was also involved in a bitter struggle to liberate itself from the shackles of British colonialism. Liberation was a primary goal if Egypt wished to assume the role of leader of the Arab world. This anti-colonial struggle, too, would require enormous resources and further reduce Egypt's presence in the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Sharett, like BG, also preferred a settlement with Egypt to one with other Arab countries. Nevertheless, he advised employing what he termed "cognitive flexibility" and avoiding a fixation on the "Egyptian option", especially when it became clear that it was no longer feasible. In the absence of conditions for an Egyptian agreement, Sharett proposed a positive examination of the Jordanian option. He also pointed out the advantages of a Jordanian agreement for solving the Jerusalem issue and the refugee problem. In a 1950 speech, he said:

> We realize it is not in our interest to make peace simultaneously with all of the Arab countries. We are convinced that it will be easier to reach a compromise with each individual state. It would be best to begin with Egypt, because no basic differences of interests exist between us, and Egypt is the leading country in the Arab world. However, this has proved unfeasible, and Jordan has advanced to the number one spot on our list. A Jordanian agreement is important not only in itself, but because it would provide us with a workable position on the refugee issue, and a peace agreement with Jordan that excludes the return of refugees would be a preferable precedent [*vis-à-vis* future settlements with other Arab countries]. Furthermore, peace with Jordan is linked to the Jerusalem question.[16]

"What is so Remarkable?"

In Israel, both the open discourse and the one couched in subtler terms over the value of a signed agreement were examined in the light of previous treaties between the two sides. Section 1 in the Armistice Agreement stated that its goal was "to bring permanent peace to Palestine". This lent the treaties a higher status than mere military arrangements terminating hostilities.[17]

The Armistice Agreements were seen by Israel's leaders as only an intermediate stage towards the soon-to-be-attained final settlement. The explicit wording in the agreements, that they would serve as "an additional temporary means . . . to facilitate the transition from the existing Armistice Agreements to a permanent peace in Palestine", supplied the basis for this evaluation. Discussing Israel's overly optimistic view, Sharett later admitted:

> All of us believed that peace was just over the next hill; that a decision had been made by the Arabs [to end the warfare against Israel]; that it was only a matter of time, a few years [until permanent peace would be reached]. This feeling [among us] was universal. We all thought that psychological conditions were ripe for peace in the Arab world.[18]

Undoubtedly, the perspective of the Armistice Agreements as a "way station" between an armistice and a permanent settlement left its imprint on the Israeli delegation. Believing that a permanent peace settlement would soon be concluded, the Israelis were encouraged to display flexibility regarding border demarcations and Arab demands to include "limitation" sections in the treaties. According to an Israeli delegate:

> It was absolutely clear from our point of view that with the signing of the Armistice treaties, talks on a final peace settlement would get under way with all the neighboring countries. We had no inkling [at the time] that we were dealing with a permanent condition with our neighbors. This explains why we agreed to the inclusion of the limitation sections and incorrect markings of the Armistice lines. We were convinced that the Armistice Agreements were only a temporary means to facilitate the passage from truce to permanent peace as stated in the introduction to the agreements.[19]

It appears that this assessment convinced BG to present the Armistice Agreements as limited military arrangements that would soon be exchanged for legitimate political treaties. In a Knesset speech delivered during the debate over the agreements, he stated his view unequivocally:

> This agreement has neither political nor territorial meaning; it is merely a

> military arrangement. It determines the point to which each side's army can deploy. However, this agreement contains nothing concerning the rights, claims, or interests of the sides. These matters will be discussed during special negotiations – the peace talks.[20]

Sharett perceived the Armistice Agreements in a different light. Like other top officials in the Foreign Ministry, he believed that the agreements should be regarded as political arrangements that provided the basic elements for a final peace treaty. This would be founded on recognition of the territorial status quo and a bilateral commitment to refrain from belligerency. In a briefing to the Israeli delegation before its departure for Lausanne, Sharett told them:

> The series of Armistice treaties has established our territorial status . . . Previously our control of areas was based on a fragile balance of armed force. Today our sovereignty is backed by signed commitments and safeguarded under the aegis of the United Nations. This insures us against attack on any of the borders in their present dimensions.[21]

As military tension and political hostility escalated, Israel's leaders came to realize that the road to peace would be much thornier than previously recognized and the Armistice Agreements might be the extent of Arab–Israeli relations for years to come. Without a final treaty, the piecemeal, internationally backed Armistice Agreements were all that Israel had gained. "Our daily security," claimed BG, "is based on temporary armistice treaties. But as Russian Jews have learned [from their experience], 'temporary' regulations tend to remain in effect for ages."[22]

In this way Israel's leadership gradually resigned itself to the new political–diplomatic reality. It was dawning on them that the Armistice Agreements were not harbingers of the longed-for peace. According to one Israeli official, "The Armistice Agreements had transmogrified from bridges for peace . . . into substitutes for peace."[23]

The political implications of this metamorphosis were painfully dawning on the Israelis. The key question concerned the agreements' marginal benefit. The majority in Israel's leadership assumed that the Armistice Agreements contained, at least theoretically, the semblance of a political treaty, which seemed to guarantee a vague, general, *de facto* recognition of Israel's hard-won borders. For Israeli leaders this in itself was of great importance because the additional territory increased the state's area to more than had been allotted in the United Nations Partition Plan. Sharett reminded his listeners:

> We have come full circle with the Armistice Agreements . . . Thanks to them our present status rests on . . . a mutual commitment to maintaining the

armistice lines which prevents any possibility of attack unless one side decides to renege on international agreements . . . not just with us but with the United Nations and the Security Council. For all practical purposes these lines are [international] borders, and they affirm not only military control but genuine sovereignty.[24]

This "upbeat" evaluation of the Armistice Agreements ignored their unpleasant sections regarding the legitimacy of additional territorial claims by the parties. For example, the Egyptian–Israeli agreement stated:

1. Section IV (3)

   It is further recognized that rights, claims or interests of a non-military character in the area of Palestine covered by this Agreement may be asserted by either Party, and that these . . . shall be, at the discretion of the Parties, the subject of later settlement . . . The provisions of this Agreement are dictated exclusively by military considerations and are valid only for the period of the Armistice.[25]

2. Section V (2)

   The Armistice Demarcation Line is not to be construed in any sense as a political or territorial boundary, and is delineated without prejudice to rights, claims and positions of either Party to the Armistice as regards ultimate settlement of the Palestine question.[26]

3. Section V (3)

   The basic purpose of the Armistice Demarcation Line is to delineate the line beyond which the armed forces of the respective Parties shall not move.[27]

Alongside these provisions, the Armistice Agreements included explicit prohibitions against forcibly altering the territorial status quo, as in the Egyptian–Israel agreement:

4. Section XII (3)

   The Parties to this Agreement may, by mutual consent, revise this Agreement or any of its provisions . . . at any time. In the absence of mutual agreement and after this Agreement has been in effect for one year from the date of its signing, either of the Parties may call upon the Secretary-General of the United Nations to convoke a conference of representatives of the two Parties for the purpose of reviewing, revising or suspending any of the provisions of this Agreement other than Articles I and II. Participation in such conference shall be obligatory upon the Parties.[28]

Despite the formal, legalistic discussion over wording, Israel felt that its security remained intact because the agreements had been signed under the aegis of the United Nations and at the request of both parties for assistance from the Security Council to end the fighting. Since the United Nations Charter strictly forbade the use of force by member states, Israel was certain that the agreements would be honoured. It also viewed them as building blocks for a fresh start to Arab–Israeli relations. Shabtai Rosenne, the Foreign Ministry's legal advisor, claimed that the agreements should be regarded as "a new legal and political creation, a kind of introduction to peace".[29]

In weighing the benefits of a political agreement with the Arab states, Israel was left with two questions: What could be expected from a political treaty beyond what was contained in the Armistice Agreements? And, would the marginal benefits of a political agreement justify its heavy price? These and similar questions were asked by various people in the political establishment. One of the most vociferous was Knesset Member (MK) Yitzhak Ben-Aharon:

> What is so remarkable about exchanging an armistice agreement for a peace treaty that contains the same amount, if not more, of unresolved issues and ambiguous sections? . . . What is so special about these agreements that Israel should stick its head into a hornet's nest and stir up the whole hive again?[30]

Sharett too was gravely suspicious about the value of an Arab–Israeli political agreement:

> It appears that they [the Armistice Agreements] have freed us from an absolute dependence on a signed political treaty with [our] Arab neighbours. From a territorial point of view . . . the Armistice Agreements act as an efficient substitute for peace for two reasons: one, the borders are stabilized; two, they guarantee against a renewed [Arab] invasion. For these reasons, we need not worry about the absence of an official peace or its postponement.[31]

Sharett was quick to point out, however, that in the final analysis Israel could not feel totally satisfied with the Armistice Agreements. A more comprehensive arrangement with the Arab world was necessary.

> The series of Armistice Agreements has [undoubtedly] strengthened our territorial status . . . protecting us from attack. They would appear to have freed us from an absolute connection to a political peace [treaty] . . . [but] we would be ignoring our basic interests if we imagined that the Armistice Agreements answer all our needs and that we can calmly remove the matter of a final peace treaty from our agenda.[32]

Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, rarely mentioned the formal, legalistic aspects of the Armistice Agreements. He believed their effectiveness lay in

the parties' willingness to uphold the terms. This depended on the degree to which each side felt the agreements catered to its national interests, and on fear of the consequences of violating them. The agreement in itself, according to BG, could not prevent the Arab states from impinging on it if they believed that doing so was to their advantage. Pinchas Lavon (Defence Minister 1953–5) seems to reflect BG's attitude on the true nature of the agreements.

> One can either be for or against the Armistice Agreements. However, neither war nor peace . . . hinges on them. Imagine for a moment that the Arabs intend to wage war today. Would the Armistice Agreement deter them? Let us also imagine that we are planning an attack on the Arabs . . . would an armistice agreement restrain us? Why do we have to create theoretical arguments and imaginary positions for ourselves? . . . There are neither advantages nor disadvantages [inherent] in the Armistice Agreements.[33]

These statements illustrate the minor importance ascribed to the formal, legal aspects of the agreements by BG and other activists in the Israeli leadership, who believed that Arab willingness to abide by the Armistice Agreements depended chiefly on fear of Israel's reaction, and not on an adherence to legalistic phrasing. Therefore, he understood that it was important to stress the bilateral nature of the agreements, the principle of reciprocity. As to the agreements' influence on daily security matters, BG stated:

> The first principle [we should insist on] is to guarantee that all the stipulations in the Armistice Agreement are signed by both sides; under no circumstances [should we agree that they be concluded] between us and the United Nations or another country . . . [Secondly], the agreement must be bilateral, i.e., conditional on being maintained by the second party . . . The cancellation of reciprocity means the agreement's annulment . . . [Thirdly], if the second party fails to fulfill its obligations, and the United Nations is powerless to enforce it to . . . then we will take unilateral action in response.[34]

The Value of an Eventual, Stable Agreement

Another view of an Arab–Israeli settlement focused on its practical side. The main question was: How far would it go in liberating Israel from the threat of a second round of fighting and allow it to divert a larger portion of its budget to pressing civilian needs?

It will be recalled that BG's attitude on a political arrangement was intrinsically pessimistic. He perceived that hostility towards Israel was embedded so deeply in the Arab world that there was no reason to expect

that any form of political arrangement would bring about a basic change.[35]

The roots of this hostility, he declared, could be traced to the start of the Zionist enterprise; later events – the War of Independence, the Arabs' ignominious defeat, and the rise of political complications – only intensified the basic animosity towards Israel and heightened the desire for revenge.

The unstable nature of Arab regimes also contributed to BG's estimate that even if an Arab government suddenly appeared willing to sign a political treaty, out of genuinely honest motives, and enter into normalization with Israel, one question would still linger. How long would this government survive? BG felt that

> in the Arab world we cannot know who will rule tomorrow. When we deal with America, Great Britain, or France, it may be assumed the governments there will remain stable. Permanency in these states rests on public opinion and the political party system. One party accedes to power, another steps down, but [on the whole we know that] we are dealing with a stable system. This is not the case in the Arab world.[36]

Ben-Gurion understood that the root of Arab governments' instability lay in their rise to power through force, as opposed to the democratic process. They lacked popular support, he claimed, and their continued authority was in perpetual danger of being usurped.

> Nasser is a tyrant, who was not elected by the Egyptian people. He rules by the strength of a military junta. The same holds true in the other Arab states . . . We cannot know what will happen in one country or the next, which strongman will suddenly rise to stardom, and what his policy will spell [for us].[37]

Besides this feature of the Arab world, the impression remains that BG observed human history as an endless chain of war mitigated by temporary lulls. War was seen as part of the nature of things and peace as the exception. Towards the end of the War of Independence, BG penned the following lines. They stand in stark contrast to the hopes of those who believed that once the fighting was over peaceful relations would ensue: "The end of the war – will there ever be an end? Even if the war ends today, and a peace treaty is signed, will not another war take place before [real] peace is attained?"[38]

Elsewhere he repeated this view in even bolder terms: "Even when a peace treaty is signed and declared," he stated, "it should be regarded only as a cease-fire, for all wars until now have occurred between nations at peace with one another."[39]

Ben-Gurion often portrayed an Arab–Israeli agreement as having extremely limited value for diminishing Israel's fears of another confrontation. His assessment stemmed from circumstances in the international

arena where Israel's delicately balanced geopolitical position and the tenacity of Arab hostility drastically reduced the practicality of an Arab–Israeli agreement. Furthermore, he did not believe that such an accord would allow Israel to reduce its military expenditure significantly and release funds for civilian projects.

> Even after a final peace agreement, we will still need the army. As long as the danger of a world war has not passed and nation lifts up sword against nation, we will have to guarantee the state's security by military means . . . We strive for a stable peace, but there is great concern that even in the best of circumstances it will only be an armed peace. As long as nations embark on war, Israel will be in danger of a renewed attack and invasion by Arab countries, thus a perpetual state of alert is demanded of us.[40]

Conditions for an Agreement

Israel's leaders were aware that participation in drawn-out negotiations for a political agreement would be perceived as an expression of Israel's willingness to make substantial concessions. This was based on the widespread belief that a political solution would require Israel to compromise on all the major issues: final borders, Palestinian refugees, and perhaps even Jerusalem. On all three issues Israel was politically isolated *vis-à-vis* the Arab world and the international community.

The Territorial Issue

Israel's borders at the end of the war visibly manifested the desire of the national leadership, especially BG, to draw up a new territorial map, larger than that allocated by the United Nations Partition Plan. The IDF's unconditional military superiority in the last phases of the war allowed it to achieve this goal.

The Armistice Agreements were considered by many of Israel's top officials to be formal recognition by the Arab states of the new borders that had been formulated as a result of the War of Independence. Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett and others tended to exaggerate their evaluation of the agreements' authority. Soon after the war, he presumed that they "guaranteed Israel's territorial integrity on the existing borders even if the United Nations itself decided to intervene".[41]

Sharett also believed that the United States would have great difficulty culling international support, with or without the United Nations, to force Israel to make any form of surrender on the Armistice Agreements' borders. It seems that Sharett was inclined to bestow a loftier meaning on

the agreements both in the Arab–Israeli context and in Israel's relations with the international community.

> Our refusal to surrender any area from the territory we now hold poses no threat of a serious international imbroglio. It would be very difficult to find a majority in the United Nations in favour of detaching any area whatsoever from the State of Israel, a two-thirds majority at least would be necessary. It is extremely doubtful whether even the United States would see this as a matter of "letting justice be done" and support the principle of territorial exchange on the basis of the 1947 agreement . . . Assuredly, many countries would be agitated at participating in a United Nations precedent that harmed the territorial integrity of a sovereign state, especially one that is a member of the United Nations.[42]

In reality, an entirely different picture dawned on Israel's leaders. The ink was barely dry on the Armistice Agreements when powerful voices were heard in Arab countries calling for Israel to make territorial concessions in exchange for a peace accord. During the Lausanne Conference, BG considered the Arabs' position as unequivocally denying Israel the major portion of its wartime gains. His assessment was based, *inter alia*, on the report by Eliyahu Sasson detailing a meeting he held with the head of the Egyptian delegation.

> Mun'im [head of the Egyptian delegation] spoke candidly: One, no Arab countries are presently willing to sign a peace treaty with Israel. Two, any agreement reached at Lausanne will require the Conciliation Commission to bring it to a debate and vote at the United Nations . . . and if ratified, it would go into effect without the signature of the parties involved. Three, after this, Israel can enter separate negotiations with each Arab state to establish economic and diplomatic relations. Four, it is an unalterable fact that the Arab states will not agree to border annexations beyond the November 29 Partition Plan. If Israel demands the Western Galilee, it will have to surrender another area. Five, Egypt will not surrender Gaza, and also demands the Negev from Majdal [Ashkelon] to the Dead Sea. According to Mun'im, the Americans also support this.[43]

The Arabs' demands eventually won broad international recognition, including that of Great Britain and the United States. But, regarding the territorial issue, one year after the signing of the Armistice Agreement the Western powers presented a united position that opposed any attempt to forcefully change the territorial status quo between Israel and her neighbours.

In a Tripartite Declaration on 25 May 1950, the United States, Great Britain and France warned against efforts by one of the parties in the region to use force, or threaten the use of force, to obtain its national goals. "If it

is discovered," admonished the Three Powers, "that one of the countries in the region is planning on forcefully violating the borders or armistice lines, we will immediately prevent this according to our obligations as members of the United Nations, either within the framework of this organization or outside of it."[44]

Israeli leaders who called for the continuation of the territorial status quo on the basis of the Armistice Agreements stressed the positive aspects of the Tripartite Declaration. They regarded it as a declaration granting support for Israel's official position on the international recognition of the armistice lines. However, the declaration omitted the specific steps to be taken by the Great Powers in the event of a status quo violation. At a later date, Abba Eban pointed out this crucial aspect:

> Instead of supporting our suspicions [of the Arab world] . . . England and America are trying to portray the 1950 declaration . . . as one that solves all the problems. To this we reply that no document contains our salvation. If you rely on documents in dealing with the Arabs, then we would be willing to propose an Israeli document that would balance the Arab one . . . Even in the world of [formal legalism] this document is on a very inferior level because it lacks all the basic requirements of an authentic security guarantee. Nowhere is it stated that the Great Powers are obligated in any manner to assist Israel militarily . . . if attacked . . . Therefore [in our opinion] this is a worthless piece of paper.[45]

In contrast to their erratic position on the question of forceful alteration of the status quo, the Great Powers understood that an Arab–Israeli accord must include some degree of territorial concession by Israel. The hard-liners demanded that Israel return to the partition borders. These were the only lines, they charged, that could guarantee international legitimacy, having been ratified by an international organization. The moderate position proposed an Israeli compromise withdrawal somewhere between the partition borders and the armistice lines (as proposed by Prime Minister Eden in his "Guildhall speech" in November 1955).[46]

The demand for Israel to make some kind of territorial concession in exchange for a settlement was voiced at almost every meeting between representatives of Israel and the Great Powers. An illustrative expression of the Great Powers' position can be found in an Anglo-American memo from 1955: "Israel must make concessions. The Arabs will not reconcile themselves to reaching a settlement with Israel over the present boundaries."[47]

A number of attempts were made to arrive at an Arab–Israeli accord at that time. The climax came during 1955-6 within the framework of a plan for a comprehensive settlement that referred primarily to the Egyptian front. The preference for seeking a breakthrough in Egyptian–Israeli relations was based on Israel's territorial surrender in the Negev. In March

1953, assessing the magnitude of Egypt's demands, Foreign Minister Sharett stated:

> The territorial question may come from the American side in the form of a demand to create a free passage zone between Egypt and Jordan in the Eilat area. [However], it might end up as a surrender of Eilat, although this would be in the distant future as far as I can see. Nevertheless, I do not rule out the possibility [of such a demand].[48]

In general, Sharett's evaluation of the Great Powers' demands was accurate. As Foreign Minister he had played a dominant role in the formulation of relations between Israel and the international community. Therefore it may be assumed that he knew better than anyone in Israel's leadership the positions of the Great Powers regarding an Arab–Israeli settlement.

It should be emphasized that for the most part the Great Powers refrained from revealing to the Israeli leadership a detailed settlement plan. They felt that strong demands on Israel would be counter-productive and could scuttle their negotiating efforts before it was certain that the Arabs were willing to accept the terms.[49]

One memo summarizing the Anglo-American position called on Israel to withdraw from two "triangles" in the Negev whose meeting point would be on the Beer Sheva–Eilat highway, so that territorial continuity would be created between Egypt and Jordan. The US Secretary of State, Dulles, had no qualms about a plan which implied Israel's surrender of one-third of the Negev.[50]

In private talks between the American and British foreign ministers, the possibility of an Israeli evacuation of Eilat was also broached. In their estimate, "peace" with the Arab world was a goal worth the price of "village lands". In another scenario, Eilat would remain in Israeli lands, but would be isolated geographically from the rest of the country by the Arab "Negev wedge". However, the Americans recommended that Israel be granted free passage to the city through a desert corridor.[51]

Israel's Position on the Territorial Question

Ben-Gurion had no doubts of the potential danger of a political agreement based on any form of Israeli concession. He was convinced that current armistice lines – although by no means ideal for defence – guaranteed adequate security for the majority of the Jewish population and safeguarded the status of Jerusalem. Therefore it should come as no surprise that his position on an Arab–Israeli peace settlement admitted no territorial surrender. He called for a continuation of the territorial status quo as

formulated in the Armistice Agreements and refused even to consider unilateral withdrawal, expressing his opinion on this issue on numerous occasions:

> Peace with Egypt is the highest priority in Israel's foreign policy, but our desire for peace does not mean it will be attained. Right now, the Arabs do not feel it is necessary [for them], and for the life of me I do not know why they should. Although it is in our vital interest, the Arabs should know ahead of time, and the Americans should not have a shadow of doubt before they proceed on policy discussions, that three subjects are non-negotiable: 1. Territorial withdrawal. 2. The internationalization of Jerusalem. 3. The return of Arab refugees.[52]

On another occasion he chose much blunter language to express his determination to reject any demand for territorial concessions in the context of a political settlement: "We will not permit [territorial concessions] to take place, as long as we are alive," he stressed. "Our sons and daughters will fight this to the death."[53]

Nevertheless, it seems that despite BG's outspoken opposition to withdrawal he did not totally reject Israeli flexibility on territorial questions. From his point of view, it appears that Israel would be willing, in principle, to consider territorial concession in exchange for a genuine peace agreement.

> We would agree to border corrections on the basis of territorial exchange, for example the transfer of the Gaza Strip from Egypt to Jordan. We would agree to allow Jordan free passage to and from Gaza through Israel, and the free use of the port of Haifa. In return, Israel demands that: one, no foreign military presence should remain in Western Jordan [the West Bank]. Two, Jordan's agreements with foreign powers have no legitimacy on the West Bank. Three, this territory will not be annexed by another country in the event that Jordan unites with Syria or Iraq.[54]

In a letter to Sharett concerning the value of an Israeli–Syrian non-aggression pact, BG hinted that in the context of a genuine peace agreement – in contrast to a limited political settlement – he would be ready to make territorial concessions:

> If we demand a non-aggression pact, and the Arabs agree, we will be asked to make additional territorial concessions. If we do not agree, the responsibility will fall on our shoulders for not signing the pact. There is no basis for our surrender of territory for a non-aggression pact that neither adds nor detracts from our security. Making peace demands concessions, but they should be worth the price of a peace agreement.[55]

Ben-Gurion made no secret of this policy. He revealed it to the Americans. A report by a senior American diplomat on his talks with BG,

mentions that the Israeli Prime Minister often repeated his willingness to consider border changes on a *quid pro quo* basis.[56]

In February 1956, the American intermediary Robert Anderson reported that in his discussions with BG, the Prime Minister clearly stated that he was prepared "to concede areas that Nasser is not dreaming of" if Nasser would only agree to meet with him. Since BG refused to elaborate on the details of these concessions, Anderson assumed he was referring to "border adjustments".[57]

It would appear then that despite discrepancies in nuance and emphasis, Sharett accepted BG's basic position in rejecting territorial surrender in exchange for the Arabs' willingness to arrive at a vague sort of arrangement in the future. Like BG, he too expressed his earnestness in considering reciprocal concessions. Regarding the conditions for an Arab–Israeli agreement, he reiterated his opposition to changes in the status quo that included territorial concession.

After heavy American and British pressure to create a land bridge in the Negev between Jordan and Egypt under Arab sovereignty, Sharett informed the United States government that Israel was willing to discuss land concessions within the framework of settlement negotiations. But, at the same time, he stated in unconditional terms Israel's refusal to announce *a priori* territorial surrender in the Negev.[58]

Working frantically to derail the idea of land concessions, Israeli officials, led by Sharett, introduced a number of basic objections:

1. The demand was fundamentally unethical. Had not the Arab countries initiated aggression against Israel in 1948, exacting a horrific price in life and property? Instead of yielding hard-won territory, Israel should be compensated by the Arabs for its suffering and losses.
2. Demanding land concessions from Israel would not hasten a peace agreement, as the Great Powers believed. Rather, it would whet the Arabs' appetite for additional concessions that Israel would never consent to, which would ruin the chances for a peace settlement.
3. The demand for territorial concessions nullified the legitimacy of the Armistice Agreements. It was in no one's interest to violate their status by proposing plans that contradicted them.
4. It was outrageous to call on Israel to partition its territory in order to satisfy the Arab desire for a geographical continuity that never existed in the first place and did not even serve Arab interests.
5. Demands on Israel for territorial concessions would beget reciprocal Israeli demands on the Arabs. This would be the outcome since Israel would not wish to be at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the Arabs. Thus, peace negotiations would lapse into an impasse.
6. Israel's signing of the Armistice Agreements should be seen primarily

as conceding areas considered inseparable from the rest of the country. It was immoral to demand further concessions.

7. If the Arab goal was genuine then there was no need of territorial continuity across the Negev in the first place, because Israel would naturally allow free passage between Egypt and Jordan and other Arab states.
8. Israel must take into consideration the possibility that Arab territorial continuity in the Negev would jeopardize Israel's strategic, political and economic security by severing Eilat from the rest of the country and blocking free shipping on the Red Sea.
9. Territorial continuity between Arab countries, especially Egypt, and Africa and Asia, would not be in the West's interests. It would aid Nasser's regime in advancing subversion throughout the Arab world and topple pro-Western governments.
10. The Negev was an area of great economic importance to Israel, and as such could not simply be cut off. Sharett further referred to the Negev's potential for large-scale settlement, irrigation projects, industrial development, and the use of the Dead Sea's resources. With an outlet to the Red Sea, Israel was no longer dependent on the Suez Canal, which, as was proved in the last war, could be instantly barred to Israeli shipping.[59]

Despite Sharett's determined resistance to any form of territorial concession, like BG, he continued to believe that the issue of "mutual border adjustments" should remain open for discussion. Addressing the Lausanne delegation on the possibility of Gaza's transfer to Israel, Sharett ordered the team to reject summarily any demands for land concessions to Egypt as compensation for Israel's annexation of the Gaza Strip.

> However if negotiations reach an impasse, and it appears necessary to mitigate absolute rejection, it would be possible to discuss border adjustments in the northern Negev – in both the eastern and western parts . . . for the benefit of both Jordan and Egypt. But, under no circumstances should any concession be made in the southern Negev, including Eilat.[60]

In talks with a western diplomat, Sharett made it clear that "Israel had no qualms about surrendering areas in the Sharon Valley in exchange for a termination of the [Jordanian] 'enclave' in the Latrun area which threatened the road to Jerusalem".[61]

The Refugee Issue

The refugee question, no less than territorial concessions, plagued Israel in the international arena. In justifying its territorial position, Israel claimed

that the United Nations-backed Armistice Agreements were considered legitimate by the international community and the Arab world. As far as the refugee problem was concerned, Israel's international position was much weaker. In fact, everything that Israel did with regard to the refugee problem made it appear "brazen".

The General Assembly of the United Nations regularly passed resolutions on the refugee issue contrary to Israel's interests. The majority of decisions were based on General Assembly Resolution 194 (11 December 1948), which had established the Conciliation Commission. According to this resolution "refugees desiring to return to their homes and live peacefully with their neighbours would be allowed to do so at the 'earliest practical date', and those not desiring to return would receive compensation for their property according to international and just legal rulings".[62]

Israel's stand on this issue received special attention because of its deeply moral and humanistic nature. Inside a closed party forum, Sharett acknowledged:

> Regarding the refugee question, we are on the defensive and they appear as our accusers. Whatever the case, world sympathy lies with the refugees because of their suffering. And if Israel is to blame, then the world accepts this . . . There is no comparison between our border policy and the refugee issue. With borders we are dealing with an inanimate object. But with the refugees, who are living people, it is another story . . . The border question is of practically no interest to the international public . . . not so with the refugee issue. Here a keen awareness of human suffering is involved. Who would not take note of this?[63]

Officially, Israel announced that it did not accept responsibility for initiating the refugee problem. According to the Israeli version, it was Arab refusal to accept the United Nations Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947, and the full-scale invasion they launched, that had resulted in the flight of the Palestinian Arabs. All other causes, such as Israeli military activity, were of secondary importance. It was absolutely clear to Israel that if the Arabs had accepted the Partition Plan and refrained from an all-out general attack, then the refugee problem would never have been created in the first place.[64]

Israel's claims of innocence with regard to the creation of the refugee problem did not win international approval. Even Israel's political leadership was aware that under the present circumstances it would not be absolved from making an effort to solve the problem. In a letter to the Lausanne delegation, Sharett wrote:

> The [refugee] issue has decided the fate of the country, [having created a solid Jewish majority], however, it has meant great suffering, hunger, and

> destruction for multitudes of people . . . The main brunt of the refugee problem today . . . lies not in the realm of morality, but in praxis. The question of responsibility should not trouble us, but finding a solution should . . . On the first point we have made up our minds. We deny any responsibility for having created the problem, but we recognize our interest in resolving it.[65]

During the Lausanne Conference, the United States applied heavy pressure on Israel to consent to the return of Arab refugees. In an attempt to justify its position, the United States argued that Israel should not object to the final number of refugees – 400,000. Had the 1947 Partition Plan been carried out, US officials claimed, there would have been 500,000 Arabs in the country. Since the number of Arabs in Israel was now estimated at 150,000, Israel should allow the return of 250,000 in order to appease the United States and the United Nations.[66]

The State Department was serious about these numbers, notwithstanding its awareness of the dangerous implications for the survival of the Jewish state. In an April 1949 memo, it recommended applying continuous pressure on Israel "by every means available" until it agreed to repatriate 200,000 refugees. Israel was forced to announce, as a first step, its willingness to absorb some, but without specifying how many.[67]

But the Americans were not satisfied with this response and continued to urge Israel to give an exact number. The United States felt that general proclamations of willingness were insufficient and that the time had come for action. Without a clarification of the exact number of refugees allowed to return, they claimed, the Arab states would also refuse to absorb the majority of them, and a practical plan for attaining funds for this goal would have to wait.

Under relentless American remonstration, the Israeli government had little choice but to acquiesce and express its willingness to accept 100,000 refugees. This was done in the understanding that their absorption would take place within the framework of a comprehensive Arab–Israeli peace settlement. (It should be noted that the 100,000 included 25,000 refugees who had already returned to their homes, and another 10,000 to whom Israel had granted entry as part of the family reunification programme. The "real" number of refugees to be repatriated would be closer to 65,000 or 70,000.)[68]

The Israeli government hoped that this positive answer to the Americans would result in: (1) a let-up in the tension between Israel and the United States; (2) "toss the ball" into the Arab court, thus channelling American pressure in that direction; (3) allow progress in the Lausanne negotiations, or at least prevent their breakdown in the early stages; (4) stave off the refugee question being dealt with in the United Nations where Israel's status was at its nadir.[69]

But Arab rejection of the Israeli proposals and the failure of the Lausanne talks perpetuated the conflict. Consequently, Israel made it clear that its previous willingness to absorb 100,000 refugees was no longer valid. According to Sharett:

> It is true that at one point we offered, in exchange for peace, and as the last step to peace, the return of a specified number of refugees. We did this in order to see if reciprocity for compromise existed. They [the Arabs] never responded, and the proposal was cancelled.[70]

Israel's refugee policy now became an outright rejection of the demand for large-scale repatriation. Despite this, Israeli spokesmen reiterated their readiness to discuss family reunification on a humanitarian level and to consider monetary compensation. "We offer peace on the basis of the present situation," Sharett stated. "Payments we are willing to make, but a return of refugees is a different story."[71]

Gradually, international pressure on Israel, especially from the United States, began to wane. In a 1955–6 Anglo-American plan, it was agreed that Israel would be asked to absorb 75,000 Arab refugees in the course of five years and to furnish conditions similar to those of Jewish immigrants.[72]

Nevertheless, it seems that the Great Powers' position on the refugees was more flexible than their stand on the territorial question. Israel was not being asked to admit large numbers of refugees into her territory. During a discussion between President Eisenhower, Secretary of State Dulles, and the special envoy to the Middle East, Robert Anderson, in early 1956, Anderson suggested settling the refugees in the Sinai Peninsula, Iraq or Iran, and called on Israel to absorb only 50,000. It does not seem that his suggestion was ever officially presented to Israel.[73]

At one point, Sharett raised the idea of a *quid pro quo* deal: Israel would pay the refugees compensation and the Arabs would lift the economic boycott. The money gained by removing the boycott, he surmised, could be diverted to Israel's economic assistance to the refugees.

> I told the Americans that the Arabs should terminate the boycott. Let's assume it cost Israel $5,000,000 a year . . . we would be prepared to channel it to a trust fund for refugee compensation instead of keeping it for ourselves . . . But as long as the Arabs cause us financial loss they will get nothing.[74]

The Essence of Peace

In a concluding memo on the Anglo-American plan for an Arab–Israeli settlement, conventional wisdom held that present circumstances in the Arab world precluded a final peace treaty. Therefore, the only alternative

was to propose a non-belligerency pact and consign the final accord to the distant future.

> While peace treaties between Israel and the Arab states remain our ultimate objective, Arab public opinion does not make it feasible to insist upon such treaties as an immediate objective. We should endeavour to bring about, to the maximum extent possible, permanent arrangements that would provide the substance, if not the form, of peace. Our objective should be to obtain the termination of the state of belligerency between the countries.[75]

Another British memo expressed this more bluntly. Within the context of a political agreement, it assumed that the Arab states would be asked to end the state of war with Israel and alter the terminology in the Armistice Agreements so as to render them, in effect, non-belligerency pacts.[76]

Tactical Aspects

Alongside the vital issues afflicting Israel's relations with the Arab world, its political leadership was also concerned with tactical questions, that is, *how* to present Israel's positions to the Arabs in future negotiations. One issue dominated: if, and to what degree, was it beneficial for Israel to acknowledge its desire for a settlement?

A survey of BG's statements reveals that he gave the tactical aspects of presentation very little of his attention. It seems that he preferred to concentrate on essential issues. An outstanding example of this can be seen in the attempts by Foreign Ministry officials to convince him not to include in one of his Knesset speeches an invitation to the Arab world for peace negotiations. They pointed out that this had already been done and had made no impression on any Arab leaders. Therefore, they claimed, its repetition would be a waste of time. Furthermore, they argued, it would lead Arabs to believe that Israel was "wooing" them.[77]

Ben-Gurion rejected the Foreign Ministry's advice although he too doubted that such an appeal would elicit a significant response from the Arabs. Nevertheless, he felt that such a statement might send a message to the Arab world that Israel's intentions were genuine and that its Prime Minister was determined to say what he wanted "without taking the opinions of gentlemen diplomats into consideration".[78]

It was only natural that the "burden" of dealing with the tactical aspects of this issue should fall on the shoulders of Moshe Sharett and his staff. Sharett tended to give heightened prominence to the tactical aspect of presenting Israel's positions. On this level he exuded an aura of self-confidence. For years he had directed the diplomatic corps of the "unborn state", and was regarded as the leading authority in the subtle art of

Ben-Gurion and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles

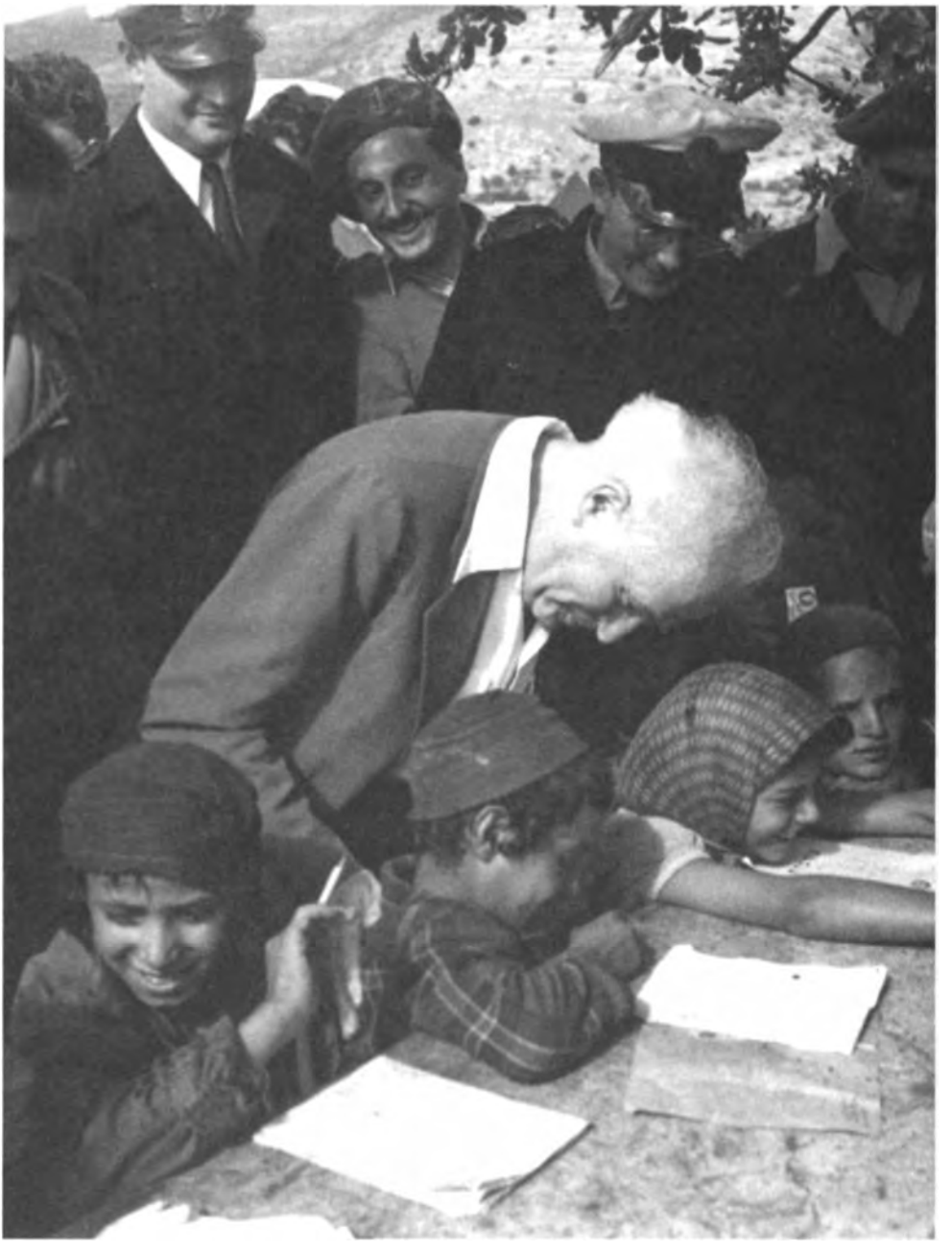
Ben-Gurion is Being Blessed by an Orthodox Rabbi

Ben-Gurion and Yigal Allon

Ben-Gurion, Abba Eban and Secretary of State Dean Acheson

Members of the Israeli Team to the Armistice Talks in Rhodes

Ben-Gurion Visiting a Camp Built for Jewish Immigrant Survivors of the Holocaust



Ben-Gurion and Yemenite Jewish Children

Ben-Gurion and President Eisenhower

Ben-Gurion and President Kennedy

negotiating. Moreover, since BG stood aloof on the tactical issue, Sharett was granted plenty of scope for political manoeuvring, and as will shortly be related, his views were similar to BG's. Sharett's ceaseless efforts at reaching a political settlement despite the perplexities and dangers involved, is common knowledge. However, he was careful not to display over-enthusiasm, and preferred to maintain statesman-like reserve. He was aware of the dissonance between Israel's desire to end the conflict and the tactical necessity of displaying a guarded position. On occasion he admitted that the two poles actually complemented one another.

> We must strive for as comprehensive and broad a peace as possible, and do everything to hasten it. At the same time, we must proceed slowly and fearlessly . . . Tactically we are dealing with two polarities that appear contradictory while in fact they are complementary . . . We must free ourselves from proclaiming our belief in achieving peace, but at the same time we should make every effort to ascertain that our vision of peace is not misinterpreted by the major international players.[79]

The Arab countries, he believed, were convinced that Israel's shattered economic, political and social condition would compel it to seek some sort of political settlement at almost any price. According to Sharett, this assessment allowed the Arabs to persist in their heavy-handed, stubborn demands since they were sure that Israel would eventually yield.

This evaluation, Sharett claimed, was wildly off the mark. Israel was basically united in its rejection of Arab demands that endangered its existence. In addition, Israel felt no need to bow to Arab dictates. It had concluded the war with the upper hand and would continue to maintain its military superiority *vis-à-vis* the Arab world.

However, declarations by Israeli leaders that repeatedly broadcast Israel's desire for a resolution of the conflict had the effect of leading the Arabs to the logical conclusion that peace was a matter of survival for Israel. This assessment only encouraged them to consolidate their uncompromising positions.

It was widely held that exuberant expressions of the need for peace by Israeli leaders would, paradoxically, stymie the chances for a settlement. Israeli coolness, on the other hand, could discourage Great Power involvement in the peace process, especially on the part of the United States. This was deemed favourable to Israel's national interests because of the wide gap between the positions of the two sides, Israeli and American, regarding conditions for a final arrangement and because of the fear that American involvement would harden the Arabs' position.

It also seemed that Israel's repeated peace declarations would stiffen the position of the United States. The Americans could claim that if Israel was so keen on peace with the Arabs then it should display more willingness to

make serious concessions. This, of course, would have been detrimental to Israel's bargaining position. In a staff meeting, Sharett admitted:

> We could end up having American pressure applied against ourselves. There are hints from the White House that say, "Why isn't Israel doing anything for peace?" This means that "Israel has to offer more concessions so that the Arabs will agree to peace." ... The impression could be gained in the Western world that achieving peace is as likely as splitting the Red Sea. And if peace is so important to Israel and the rest of the world, then all the Middle East issues should be re-examined, and in the end [it will be seen that] the real cause of trouble there is the State of Israel.[80]

Finally, Israel's enthusiasm to obtain a peace agreement could have impaired its political status in the opening negotiations, placing it in an inferior position. Israeli eagerness, in contrast to Arab indifference, could have created a situation whereby Arab willingness to come to the negotiating table would be considered a major concession on their part even before actual discussion commenced. In this scenario, Israel would have been pressured to reward the Arab world for its "concession".

Concerned over the danger of tactical inferiority, officials in the Foreign Ministry reviewed the need to create a balance in the Arab–Israeli negotiations so that the Arabs' taking part in the talks would not be considered in itself a concession requiring an Israeli *quid pro quo*. Abba Eban warned:

> We cannot allow ourselves [to fall into] a tactical situation whereby the Arabs demand a concession from us, and we demand the status quo. In this case, all the mediators will search for the golden path between Arab demands and the status quo. This cannot be allowed to happen. We should make reasonable demands to the Arabs, proving, for example, that these borders are unacceptable to Israel's economic-security situation, and that they would lead to our strangulation. We should also clarify our position that peace [agreement] must create conditions for [real] peace.[81]

In order for Israel to extricate itself from this tactical quandary, Eban offered a concrete proposal to enhance international awareness of Israel's demands from the Arabs:

> We recommend that Israel re-deploy along the present borders and make a modest territorial demand that would not be interpreted as a departure from the Armistice Agreements . . . Israel might demand a widening of the [Mediterranean] coastal strip, changes in the Jerusalem vicinity with guaranteed free passage to Mt Scopus, the Latrun area, etc. These are minor points but when combined they form a major revision of Israeli demands. We are under no obligation whatsoever to assume that only the Arabs feel boxed in by the existing borders, whereas for us they are pure joy and pleasure . . .

> The world must get used to the idea that we will settle for nothing less than mutual compromise within the context of bilateral demands.[82]

Partial Settlement – Pros and Cons

According to conventional wisdom at the time, the chances for a political settlement were next to nil and a limited accord was the only alternative to war. Proposals were raised for overcoming the formidable obstacles that lay in the path of a settlement, namely Israel's refusal to accept the Arabs' peace terms, and the Arabs' rejection of Israel's demand for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

Partial settlement, it was claimed, had a greater chance of realization. The Arab states would be asked to accept limited obligations, beyond those in the Armistice Agreements, for establishing peaceful relations. Israel for its part would be called on to make concessions within the framework of a comprehensive political settlement.

During this period, Foreign Minister Sharett showed himself to be a true believer in the idea of partial settlement. He struggled against the "all-or-nothing" view held by several of the state's leaders, including BG. He perceived that the Arab world had recently suffered a severe trauma with the establishment of Israel and would find it excruciatingly painful to adapt to the new reality required for peaceful relations. At the same time, he firmly opposed far-reaching concessions by Israel within the framework of a comprehensive political settlement.

Sharett promoted the interim agreement as the only way out of the impasse. Its chief advantage, he believed, lay in its applicability in the foreseeable future. "We need not imagine, as we once did, that peace will be a *fait accompli* that will descend on the world one day as a great windfall . . . Rather, we must be prepared to progress step by step, solving one problem at a time."[83]

At the heart of the interim agreement lay the need for reciprocity. On principle, Israel rejected the unilateral proposals it was being called on to make, even if they were not detrimental to its vital interests. "Will partial agreements satisfy us?" the ambassador queried rhetorically. "I reject the assumption . . . that by a unilateral act on our part, we could improve the atmosphere and break the deadlock . . ."[84]

On another occasion it was proposed that Israel unilaterally grant Jordan the right to use the port of Haifa, outside the framework of a peace agreement. The advantages of this proposal from Israel's point of view were not only economic, but also, more importantly, political and in the interests of security. In a debate held on the eve of the signing of the

Armistice Agreements, Walter Eytan explained the significance of a unilateral accord with Jordan.

> If we grant the Jordanians free use of Haifa's port, they will then be dependent on us. Abdullah once asked me, "What about bringing in weapons?" I answered him, "Weapons, fine! Better than anything else!" My reasoning was that the Jordanians could easily import their weapons by other routes, without any supervision on our part. [But] if they grew used to bringing them in via Haifa, and we should decide to block their shipments, that would make things difficult for them.[85]

One of the members of the Israeli delegation to the armistice talks, Yehoshofat Harkabi, was encouraged by this prospect. In a memo to Eytan, he suggested a similar option and described its advantages.

> Since Haifa would be a terminal for goods to Jordan, we could only profit from this . . . In addition to gaining foreign currency, [we would also acquire] tremendous political leverage . . . We would be able to strengthen the status of the king . . . and if we wisely suggest this to Jordan, without asking for immediate recompense or linking it to a peace agreement, [then] Jordan would favourably concur to this arrangement. This would be our first breakthrough in the Arab world and would bring it closer to us.[86]

This proposal was later discussed with American officials. Israel's position was based primarily on the demand for mutual concessions – not on unilateral Israeli concessions. Reviewing the possibility for a partial settlement with Jordan that would include free use of Israel's Mediterranean port, Sharett clarified Israel's determination to apply the principle of mutuality.

> We are always prepared to clarify the possibility of a step-by-step approach towards peace . . . But this progress must be mutually enacted. Whatever the case, there is a limit to the "down payment" we can offer unconditionally. [Jordan's] free use of the [Haifa] port crosses this limit. It is a crucial card in our hands for attaining peace, and if we play it without exacting a price, then how can we convince Jordan to sign a peace treaty with us? . . . Therefore, for the right of free use of the port, Jordan has to agree to renewed commercial ties between the two countries.[87]

A somewhat different position was taken by Sharett in connection with the refugee question. It will be recalled that Sharett had proposed a partial agreement based mainly on Israel's willingness to repatriate a limited number of refugees and make monetary remuneration in exchange for the termination of the Arab boycott. However, on at least one occasion Sharett also expressed readiness to work for a unilateral solution to the refugee problem – that is, without a reciprocal concession from the Arab world.

This was based on the assumption that the return of the refugees was of vital concern to Israel.

> Eban has stated that we . . . have to be prepared to progress by stages, to solve one problem at a time . . . but not without returns . . . I wish to say that for some time I have been troubled by this approach . . . Why? Because I see that the solution to the refugee problem first of all serves our own interests . . . It is not a concession on our part in exchange for a reciprocal concession. By solving the problem we are freeing ourselves from a tightened noose . . . [but] I believe that it will not be easy to win our public over to this view.[88]

Ben-Gurion's position on a partial settlement was also based on the principle of reciprocity. While not rejecting outright the idea of an intermediary stage, he emphasized Israel's willingness to arrive at "peace by steps". Nevertheless, he insisted that Israeli concessions, even the smallest, must be met with parallel concessions by the Arabs.[89] In this context BG treated with total disdain the idea of Israeli concessions in exchange for a mere Arab announcement of the cessation of hostilities, or even willingness on their part to conclude a non-aggression treaty. "An Arab commitment [of this kind] is already in the books in the form of the Armistice Agreements and would add nothing."[90]

In a letter to the Foreign Minister, following attempts at reaching a settlement with Syria, BG reiterated that he did not categorically reject an intermediary agreement with the Arabs, but that it would require a comparable concession on their part.

> It is difficult for me to accept that "the Syrians have shown good will in arriving at a solution to certain problems, and that the Israelis have not reciprocated [as you have charged]. The Syrians demanded what they do not have – land and water rights . . . The question is not whether to negotiate the demilitarized area . . . but what the Syrians are offering in exchange for land and other rights [we are expected to give them] . . . I am in complete agreement [with those who think] . . . that there is no point in demanding a non-aggression pact, since the Armistice Agreement includes, for all practical purposes, a non-aggression pact . . . On the other hand, I reject the idea that "the termination of the territorial conflict with Syria would be a great achievement" [as you have stated]. In the manner the Syrians have proposed to resolve the territorial conflict, it would be a simple matter to resolve all such conflicts in the world – if one side agrees to the demands of its foe. As long as the Syrians refuse to grant us any form of compensation, I have no intention of entering into official talks on [conceding our rights within] the demilitarized area. At any rate, we must never concede our exclusive right to the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, unless Syria offers a fitting exchange, and I find it difficult to imagine this happening.[91]

When asked in the Knesset whether Israel was prepared to allow Jordan

free use of the port of Haifa, BG replied that this would only be discussed within the framework of a final peace treaty. "We were referring to the industrial and commercial value of the Kishon River basin for navigation," he stressed. "This region is uniquely qualified to be an international free trade area, and when peace comes, [it can also serve] as an outlet for Jordanian goods."[92]

Probably the most carefully phrased expression of BG's views on a partial agreement and its link to a final peace treaty may be found in Abba Eban's talks with senior US officials. "BG's position on border arrangements with Arab countries," Eban informed them, "is that territorial concession is Israel's trump card and as such must be held as the final card to be played."[93]

The Time Element

The time element was a major factor determining BG's evaluation of the advantages of an Arab–Israeli agreement. The main question revolved around one issue: which side would benefit most in the long run from the absence of a solution to the conflict. Two basic considerations were at play in BG's calculation. On the one hand, he feared the Arab world's implacable hatred of Israel. He warned incessantly that bitter fighting could resume in another round of hostilities.

> Remember this simple truth: if we have to fight in the future, the past will not repeat itself. There is no guarantee that our enemies will act as they did in the last war. The opposite is true, it should be assumed that they have learned from their defeat, and will try to correct it.[94]

Analysing the reasons for the Arab defeat, he pointed to their armies' low level of training and command in the period, in comparison with the IDF's inherent superiority. "We won," BG wrote in his diary, "not because our army conducted itself gallantly, but because the Arab armies were rotten. Will this always be the case?"[95] And on another occasion he listed in detail the main causes of Arab defeat:

> Our victory this time should not be a guide for the future. The Arabs were defeated because, one, their strategy was disastrous. Two, they lacked a unified command. Three, their equipment was in deplorable condition and they lacked air power; Egypt's navy was deficient. Four, their manpower too was sorely lacking. We succeeded in enlisting more people. Five, their morale was at a low level. Six, their learning ability was inferior. Seven, they lacked a military industry.[96]

The second consideration was that BG was certain that the Arabs would

soon correct their shortcomings, and at some point challenge Israel much more effectively. Should an outstanding Arab leader appear, one who could rally the Arab world round his personality, the process of "learning from past errors" would be accelerated. In a letter to the Chief-of-Staff, in October 1949, BG was explicit about his anxiety.

> In our security planning we must keep in mind . . . that all our military training, organization, and equipment must be directed to future conditions and needs . . . The IDF's combat experience in the War of Independence, while a blessing, will not suffice [underline in the original]. In all probability we will be confronted by a stronger and more dangerous enemy.[97]

The Israeli leaders felt that time was working against them in the international arena, making it increasingly difficult for Israel to demand full implementation of the Armistice Agreements on the basis of international law. According to Sharett:

> The Jerusalem question remains undecided because its solution lies only within the framework of a final peace treaty. It is enough to recall [that access to] Mt Scopus [is generally blocked despite Jordan's commitments to the Armistice Agreements] . . . and our demand [for the right to visitation rights in the Jewish Quarter] in the Old City [according to the Armistice Agreements]. The Arabs and the world have grown accustomed to the fact that Jews no longer have access to prayer at the Western Wall. Years will pass and a new status quo will be established . . . And lest we forget, the Suez Canal is blocked to us . . . These are only a few examples of the restrictions we face that have no solution within the context of the Armistice Agreements, and that can only be resolved within the framework of a final peace treaty.[98]

Statements such as these were designed to awaken Israel to the need for a political solution at as early a stage as possible. With the passage of time, it was argued, the victory of the War of Independence would fade, and the Arab world's re-armament would harden their position against political settlement. Israel's chances of attaining a favourable resolution to the conflict would decrease with each passing year.

At the same time, Israel's leaders could point to some remarkable achievements: border expansion beyond the Partition Plan, a solid Jewish majority inside Israel, and a freezing of the plans to internationalize Jerusalem. BG and other leaders harboured no doubts that these successes could be attributed to the IDF's decisive victory.

Yet they were aware that Israel's gains still had to acquire international recognition. The international community continued to call on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, at least as far as the partition lines, and to reabsorb a specified number of Arab refugees. Pressure was also

applied on Israel to place Jerusalem under some form of international jurisdiction.

The Arab states, naturally, supported these and even more radical demands. Surrender of Israel's fruits of victory became a prerequisite for a political settlement. BG regarded this as a devastating blow, a major threat that could seriously compromise Israel's basic security interests. Thus, he adopted a position whereby Israel categorically rejected any truncation of its military achievements. Paradoxically, resolution of the conflict would entail a loss of these gains. On the other hand, as more time passed, the world would be more likely to accept the reality of the post-1948 Middle East.

The passage of time, Israel's leaders hoped, would lessen Arab demands for a change in the status quo. Zionism's basic *modus operandi* since its inception had been closely connected with the time element, to strive to create, incrementally, facts on the ground that would eventually be granted universal recognition. Through the decades the success of this system had undeniably been proved.

Even in 1958, two years after the Sinai War, BG continued to articulate the importance of the passage of time for the consolidation of the 1948 victories:

> Only a few people still believe that Jerusalem will be taken from Jewish hands. On the issue of our borders . . . at present not one country in the West considers returning to the 1947 borders, or even seeking a compromise between them and the current borders . . . Concerning the refugees, it would be exceedingly hard to find a statesman today who seriously imagines the likelihood of repatriating the refugees inside Israel.[99]

The impression from these statements is that BG was doubtful whether Israel would have existed in its present size had it not suffered a war with the Arabs. He repeated this theme in many statements during this period, in which he highlighted the central events in the history of Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel and Arab attempts to obstruct and sabotage the country's development. In a meeting with senior IDF officers in 1955, he stated:

> Had we not been faced with Arab military aggression, we would not have had to develop our own military strength and learn the lessons of battlefield valour, nor would Jewish labour have been created. Had it not been for Arab opposition to us, the Jewish city of Tel Aviv would not have been founded . . . Only after the attacks against Petach-Tikva did the Jewish farmers there pledge an oath to safeguard Jewish labour. Only after the Arab riots in 1936, was a Jewish force of 20,000 armed policemen created. Only after the dock strike at the port of Jaffa, was the first Jewish port in Tel Aviv constructed. If now we possess a state with [these] borders . . . it is thanks to Arab oppo-

> sition . . . Had peace reigned between us, there would never have been mass immigration . . . instead, we would have established a "New Carthage" that probably would not have survived.[100]

Ben-Gurion and Sharett shared similar ideological perspectives on the "role" and implications of the time element in the Arab–Israeli conflict. Sharett was basically saying, "let time take care of things". With the passing of the years, the Arabs' shock at their defeat would fade and the passion for revenge would gradually dissipate. In rhetoric reminiscent of BG's, Sharett declared:

> I believe that the passage of time without peace with the Arabs is harmful to us. [However], in the meantime the status quo is becoming an unalterable reality. It is considerably more difficult to discuss border changes now than it was in 1949 or 1950. And it will be much more difficult to demand the return of refugees than it was a few years ago.[101]

In many speeches during this period, Sharett spoke of "practical Zionism", a code word that referred to the gradual building of the country through successive national projects and settlement in spite of external opposition. Sharett understood that Israel's existence was a shock to the Arab world, a foreign implant in the Arab body. As in nature, the body rejects foreign intrusions. However, he believed that eventually there would be a need to accept Israel's presence despite the initial opposition. Sharett believed that Israel's foreign policy must project stamina and imperturbability in the face of Arab rage, and avoid escalation and confrontation at all costs.

According to BG, Sharett seemed to have gone one step further and considered the time element as the most important factor even in the daily process of decision-making. BG was convinced that the aphorism "time heals all wounds", or "laissez passer", as Sharett understood it, was progressively turning into a guideline for Israeli policy. This approach, he feared, would lead the country to adopt a policy of passivity, leading to a throwback to the Diaspora mind-set, and would be a far cry from the nature and rationale of modern Israel.

This also explains why a clash over BG's and Sharett's perceptions of time was unavoidable. BG, it seems, was willing to concede that time was a concrete component shaping Israeli foreign policy, but one that should be included sparingly. While the lack of an agreement was likely to benefit Israel's national interests, BG stressed that it should not lead Israel into the trap of "stagnated thinking"; Israel was in a relentless "race against time" and must strive to shape reality according to its interests, perpetually aware that "time is short".

An expression of the gap between the views of BG and Sharett regarding

Israel's relations with the Arab world, and their evaluation of the "time element", can be seen in the following letter BG wrote to his colleagues. While omitting mention of Sharett by name, the style and content leaves little doubt to whom it referred.

> The core of the argument... is not in the realm of politics, but of psychology. For some people, avoiding action assures immunity from hardship and danger, and their logical thinking leads them to this conclusion . . . These people are convinced that the lack of action wards off danger. However, I am fed up with this line of reasoning. While a defeatist attitude can sometimes be extirpated, a defeatist character – almost never can.[102]

4

Israel's Perception of the Arab Threat – The Dilemma of Daily Security

The Arab States and Infiltration

After the War of Independence the Israeli leadership regarded the Arab threat along two basic lines: one, strategic (all-out confrontation); the other, daily security. The latter continuously occupied Israel's national leadership on two levels: rhetorical and military.

In the early years of the state, the daily security policy focused on direct response to hostile acts such as infiltration, sabotage and border ambushes that originated in neighbouring Arab countries. Infiltration played a key role in determining the manner and intensity of Israel's daily security policy.

Despite the importance of infiltration in the formulation of Israel's defence policy, a precise definition of the term remains elusive. Numerous forms of aggression were carried out in this period, with fluctuating degrees of violence against Israeli civilians, soldiers and infrastructure; infiltration was only one of them. The common denominator was its origin in neighbouring Arab countries and penetration through the armistice lines.

Shortly after statehood began, the repeated "harmless" (or "innocent") infiltration appeared more in line with trespassing and squatting. Despite its innocent nature, this form of infiltration was considered a serious source of continuous danger to the new state for the following reasons:

1. If Israel had not responded swiftly and decisively, infiltration could easily have developed into a mass invasion of refugees. This could have had a deleterious impact on the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs, with further implications for employment, housing, food supply, etc.[1]
2. Israel's proven restraint could have led the Arab world, as well as the international community, to the erroneous conclusion that Israel's borders were pervious and indefensible and that Israel was wavering

> in its determination to protect its status as a Jewish state. Such an assessment could have had detrimental consequences for Israel, in light of the Arabs' relentless demand for territorial concessions and the return of a fixed number of refugees.[2]

As infiltration grew more violent, the debate within Israel over infiltration revolved mainly around the extent of its autonomy. The main question centred on the degree of independence it enjoyed. Some observers emphasized its independent character; others claimed that it was the responsibility of Arab host states.

Israel's official position, buffered by solid parliamentary and public support, charged that the neighbouring Arab states were fully to blame for the creation and continuance of infiltration. Israel also announced that it considered itself under no obligation to investigate each incident to determine if the infiltrators had acted independently or had been abetted by official agencies in their host countries.

Israel adopted this comprehensive view as a moral and legal justification for its planning and execution of retaliatory acts alongside its daily security policy. In other words, in the absence of conclusive evidence of the Arab governments' collaboration in infiltration-based hostility, Israel was claiming that they were nevertheless guilty by association. In this way, Israel defended its right to retaliate across its borders.

Blaming the Arab states for infiltration was an example of the Israeli political-security elite's attempt at justifying its retaliation policy; but it also illustrates its sincere belief that the Arab states indeed bore complete responsibility for border violations. This was based on the assessment that the Arab regimes were ruled by centralized governments with iron-fisted authority and absolute control of all matters within their borders.

Israel's position, however, could not smooth over the jagged complexity of official Arab complicity. Many questions remained unanswered within the framework of this "tough" Israeli stance. No wonder then that during this period Israel's leaders and government agencies designed for appraising Arab policy, frequently expressed consternation and bewilderment at the Arab governments' actual degree of responsibility for infiltration.

The source of the confusion stemmed primarily from the attempt to define the degree of independence that infiltration had within the context of the conflict. In the years following the War of Independence, there was a tendency to view infiltration as an autonomous phenomenon that could survive outside the framework of Arab–Israeli relations. Sometimes this even led Israeli leaders to make statements that appeared to exonerate the Arab countries from their unofficial involvement in infiltration-based hostilities. In a political speech in July 1952, Ben-Gurion asserted:

> We do not live in a state of peace, but in a state of war. Every week witnesses another soldier killed by infiltrators. There seems no end in sight to this . . . for the simple reason that between 600,000 and 800,000 Palestinian refugees are festering on the borders . . . These people have been evicted from their fields and homes; entire villages have been uprooted. These people are hungry and resentful . . . Therefore, there is no way that infiltration will cease, even if the neighbouring states were intent on suppressing it; and there have been cases where they have cooperated [with us] out of necessity in an effort to curb it. [But] they are powerless to control infiltration.[3]

It seems that after the War of Independence, the Israeli leadership was unable to arrive at a consensus regarding the degree of responsibility of the Arab states, especially Jordan, for infiltration activity. Opinion swayed from charging them with full complicity to seeing only their technical or passive support. Three categories of difficulties may be discerned:

1. The dilemma in determining if a unified policy existed in the Arab world that supported Palestinian infiltration. It seems that the Israelis were aware of the debate raging within Arab governments between the supporters and detractors of massive assistance to infiltration. It is also possible that the Arabs' final policy was a compromise between these two trends.
2. The difficulty in pinpointing the central governments' position. Some Arab states were apprehensive about continued infiltration, and preferred to safeguard their vital interests. On the other hand, there were "field-level elements" (especially low-grade officers, but also unit commanders), government officials, etc., whose deep sympathy for the infiltrators blinded them to the harmful political implications for their own state. Therefore, it may be assumed that even if the Arab governments had dispatched specific orders to field commanders and local officials to suppress infiltration, it is doubtful whether these orders would have been carried out to the letter.
3. The difficulty in appraising the objective factors (the nature of the armistice borders, topographical conditions, and political developments) and then drawing an accurate picture of the Arabs' ability to extirpate infiltration.

Israel's leaders recognized the objective difficulties facing Arab countries on this issue. On occasion Israeli officials even made announcements to the effect that the Arabs were doing "something" to arrest the phenomenon. However, in the same breath the statements usually criticized the Arab governments for not doing enough, a view expressed by BG, albeit in reserved terms, in a talk with the United States ambassador in 1953.

According to the ambassador's report:

> Although Ben-Gurion admitted that it would be impossible for the Arab governments to completely suppress infiltration, it was possible for them, in his opinion, to curb it considerably . . . He believes that infiltration from Jordan could be limited if the Jordanian government and its army honestly wished to do so.[4]

As time passed, the Israelis became convinced that the "independent" aspects of infiltration would soon desist and it would become part of the overall Arab struggle against Israel. This assumption was based on the Israeli view of the Arab states' unquenchable desire to torment the Zionist state, combined with their profound aversion to involvement in a full-scale military confrontation. Thus, the Israelis perceived that the Arabs saw infiltration as the safest and most pragmatic way of waging a general struggle at this stage.

Israel discerned that the Arabs viewed infiltration as the best means for advancing the claim that the Armistice Agreements had not terminated their struggle. Furthermore, Israel felt that because of the sporadic, limited nature of infiltration the Arab states probably assumed that it would not lead them on a collision course to conflagration. This view was well expressed by Reuven Shiloah, a high-ranking official, in his consultation with Israeli ambassadors in August 1953:

> Although I would assign many of the frontier incidents to objective facts: refugees squatting close to the frontier, an extremely lengthy border, unemployment, the ease with which penetration and plunder are possible – I would not be surprised if one day the Arab countries would view armed infiltration in a favourable light and start to organize it . . . From the Arabs' view, infiltration provides a very convenient weapon to wield; it requires neither effort nor organization on their part. [On the other hand] if we overreact, we put ourselves in an uncomfortable position.[5]

In late 1953/early 1954, a change can be observed in Israel's assessment of the "origins" of infiltration. Incursions inside Israeli territory grew bolder and violence against civilian targets in the centre of the country increased. As the level of fatalities and damage reached unprecedented proportions, it became clear to Israel's security chiefs that infiltration was now being waged with the active complicity of regular army units.

One of BG's more revealing statements on the gradual change in Israel's perception refers to the link between border transgressions and Israel's willingness to adhere to the wording of the Armistice Agreements. Speaking before senior IDF staff officers, BG stated:

> The first principle that Israel must stand by is to ascertain that all the obligations contained in the Armistice Agreements are mutually binding to Jews

> and Arabs, and under no circumstances between us and the United Nations or another foreign power . . . Secondly, it must be a bilateral agreement; i.e., obligation is stipulated by its bilateral commitment . . . If reciprocity is annulled – the matter is over.[6]

This was a signal to the neighbouring Arab states that Israel regarded acts of infiltration as part of the overall Arab effort to destroy Israel's defensive strength. Arab infiltration was a flagrant abrogation of the commitments that had been signed in the Armistice Agreements. Therefore, Israel regarded infiltration as an outright violation of both the letter and spirit of the agreements. Israel now had the legal and moral right to initiate its retaliation policy, and it also placed in question the entire purview of commitments.

However, it seems that despite Israel's assessment of the growing co-operation between the infiltrators and Arab military commanders in the mid-1950s, the exact nature of this alliance was not always clear. From numerous references, it appears that there was no consensus of opinion on this question. The "soft-liners" tended to regard the cooperation as passive assistance by Arab officers who "turned a blind eye" to infiltration. The "hard-liners" viewed the infiltrators as an organized military contingent acting on the orders of neighbouring Arab security services, although the majority of infiltrators could hardly be regarded as regular troops.[7]

Assessing the Threat

In addition to trying to figure out where the overall responsibility for infiltration lay, Israel's leaders debated ideas about the type of action needed to reduce its casualties. Their assessment that the root of infiltration was embedded in the Arab world's fanatical hatred of Israel and its sense of injustice confirmed the Israelis' belief that both infiltration and the refugee problem would remain "indefinitely" on the agenda. "As long as the refugees are not permanently settled in an Arab country," BG foresaw in June 1951, "and peace not signed between us and our neighbours, then the refugees will continue to be a disturbing, aggravating factor exacerbating the conflict."[8]

The Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, agreed: "Daily security events," he said, "have proved that the refugee problem is not a passing phase but a condition that will endure for a long time, perhaps ten years. Ten years? Who knows how long we will have to live with the present security arrangements?"[9] Even Zalman Aranne, a staunch opponent of the government's activist line, stated unambiguously that "we need to look soberly at the fact that we will be living indefinitely with a border war".[10]

It seems certain that the infiltration, particularly its violent aspects, awoke feelings of acute anxiety in Israel's Jewish citizens, both in border settlements and in urban centres. On the national level, the phenomenon placed in question the state's ability to guarantee its citizens a reasonable sense of personal security.

To illustrate the seriousness of the situation, statistics on fatalities, woundings and damaged property were frequently presented. But they do not reflect accurately the wrenching sense of fear felt by Jews in Israel during this period. This emanated from a number of causes: the audacity displayed by the infiltrators; their penetration into the heartland of the country; the threat of massive Arab rearmament; the fragile composite of the newly emerging Israeli society; the declared "neutrality" of the Great Powers and the United Nations towards Israel; and above all, the knowledge that infiltration was actively supported by Arab countries whose stated goal was the annihilation of Israel.

In this light, one must consider the claim that Israel's retaliation policy was designed *inter alia* for domestic public consumption, being a harsh punishment of the infiltrators and their proxies, and serving to repress infiltration-based violence. It must be recalled that the memory of the Holocaust was still fresh in the minds of the majority of Jews in Israel. Injury to Jewish citizens acquired meaning of enormous portent and intensified public demand for severe retaliatory acts that would eradicate the plague of infiltration or, at the very least, significantly reduce it. No national leader could ignore this demand.

Even Moshe Sharett, Foreign Minister and one of the leading critics of the policy, was forced to recognize the powerful influence of this emotional factor on decisions concerning retaliation. In 1955, following deterioration along the Jordanian border, Sharett wrote:

> It was obvious that I would be asked to agree to retaliation, and this time I would have to give my consent. In recent months I had prevented a number of serious incidents from taking place but this had only brought on heightened tension among the public. I cannot push their tolerance threshold anymore. Border tension has to be neutralized, otherwise an outburst of anger will occur even among many of my colleagues, and I will have failed in my attempt at educating the public, achieving nothing.[11]

A few months later, he stated, "there is one overriding reason for retaliation – raising the morale".[12]

The immediate danger associated with national demoralization lay in the possibility that a large number of civilians living in border settlements would abandon their homes. Their villages were located on the front line of the infiltrators' path and naturally suffered more damage than any other

section in the country. To make matters worse, most of the border settlements were populated by new immigrants.

The national leaders were concerned that the immigrants' ties to the soil would not withstand the relentless tension and trepidation. The government had to prove to the immigrant settlers that it was doing everything in its power to protect them. BG warned:

> If an evil wind [war] blows up from the south [from Egypt], first in its trail will be the new immigrants . . . They wanted to abandon Patish, but since young men and women from Kfar Vitkin have come to Patish [following BG's call for volunteers from veteran settlements], the flight of the newcomers has been checked.[13]

In addition to the "precarious" nature of many border settlements, Israel's leaders were aware of the immigrant settlers' sense of alienation and disappointment at what seemed to them discrimination and indifference on the part of the "establishment" and wealthy sectors of society located in the centre of the country. Not only were the immigrants given a disproportionately small share in the national resources in comparison with other sectors, but they were also compelled to bear the burden of daily security to a greater extent.

Ben-Gurion was keenly aware of these feelings. In the wake of criticism of his retaliatory policy, especially after the Sea of Galilee incident in December 1955, he tended to emphasize the psychological gap, as well as the geographic one, dividing the critics from those in urban centres in the middle of the country. Frontier settlements, he admonished, were the state's first line of defence, and if they were attacked and abandoned, then Israel's entire population, including people in the centre of the country, would suffer.

> The fate of these settlements, is the fate of the entire state . . . 400,000 people dwell in Tel Aviv; they know perfectly well that infiltrators will not reach their homes. But do they realize that if the border villagers flee their homes, then it would also be the end for them too?[14]

Nevertheless, in a speech delivered a few months before the planning stages of the Sinai campaign, he played down the daily security threat and the danger of infiltration, leaving his listeners with the impression that they should come to terms with the idea that it would remain a permanent feature of Arab–Israeli relations:

> It is impossible to define as war attacks by gangs of thieves, murderers, Fedayyun, even military units that cross the borders and shell our settlements and ambush our patrols, or even [the recent] border incursion by an Egyptian battalion at Nitzana. War will escalate not by individual acts along the Jordanian, Syrian, or Egyptian border, for this has been going on for the last

> three years. I remind you, this was the same story throughout the pre-state period.[15]

By the end of 1955, Israel's leaders were acutely fearful of an imbalance in military power with the Arab states, especially Egypt. As a result of large-scale arms deals between the Arabs and the Eastern bloc, the danger of a "second round" grew increasingly tangible. As the threat to daily security declined, in its place Israel's security chiefs sensed the dread of an approaching all-out war. As one Mapai MK aptly put it: "Today [December 1955] infiltration has ceased to be the main problem in our lives . . . in the light of a greater danger [of an all-out war]."[16]

The Retaliation Policy and Its Goals

The murderous nature of infiltration and the resultant fear that took hold of the country forced the nation's leaders to search for appropriate responses. The entire political spectrum was united in declaring that the phenomenon could not be allowed to continue and military action would have to be initiated. Sharett denied the charge that the national leadership was divided over the subject of retaliation. The issue as he saw it was not whether retaliation should or should not be carried out in principle; it was about the tactics to be employed.

> The truth, my colleagues, is that I see no debate here between one faction claiming that under no circumstances should there be a [military] response, and another faction claiming that an [armed] response should be made every time for every incident.[17]

Even among retaliation's harshest critics, no one believed that Israel could passively suffer the outrage of increasingly violent infiltration and abuse of its territorial sovereignty. The argument surrounding the daily security policy dealt not with moral principles, but with the policy's intensity, frequency and aims. "I have never proposed a line of no-response," Sharett retorted, "rather the opposite. Of course we must respond, but I insist that certain factors be taken into consideration and I stand by this demand."[18] Over the years Israel's retaliation policy has received much attention from scholars, statesmen and military personnel. Various aspects of the policy have been analysed in light of declassified documentation. Scholarly opinion, in general, has conclusively presented the retaliation policy as a rational programme for achieving well-defined military and political goals that were part of Israel's overall defence strategy.

Nevertheless, the nagging impression persists that retaliation was also an outlet for the Israeli public's basic emotional need for punishment and

revenge. The inability to strike at the infiltrators after each incursion gave way to a policy of punishing those close to them, their proxies in those countries where the raids were launched. The retaliation policy may thus be seen as an answer to the popular demand "to do something". This explains BG's terse statement during political counsel, "Jews are being killed; we must avenge their deaths."[19]

The rationale behind the retaliation policy assumed that it would force the Arab countries, within whose territory the Palestinian infiltrators were dwelling, to take steps to prevent its continuation. Israel's severe manpower shortage, lack of resources, tenuous position in the international community, and rigorously high standards of military ethics, meant it was unable to eradicate infiltration by itself. It had to take steps that would convince the Arab world to do the job.

The Arab military–political establishments, it was reasoned, had the ability to suppress, or at least limit, infiltration because of (1) their geographical proximity to refugee concentrations where the majority of incursions originated; (2) their intimate knowledge of the groups actively involved in infiltration and the intelligence data they could amass; and (3) the fact that Arab army units, unlike their Israeli counterparts, were totally lacking in moral scruples over the methods they could employ in suppressing infiltration.

Inside Israel, the supporters of retaliation had no illusions over the difficulty of the task. They were aware that Arab society was basically sympathetic towards the infiltrators and ready to lend assistance to their attacks against Israel. As Israel understood it, the Arabs perceived infiltration as a legitimate means, one of many, for liquidating the Zionist entity.

Israeli policy designers were cognizant of the fact that the willingness of Arab regimes to clamp down on infiltration stood in direct conflict with their "dictates of conscience" and natural interests. Therefore, the only way to force Arab leaders to undertake effective measures against infiltration was to convince them that the overall cost of supporting it was much greater than any profit they could expect to reap. This explains the following statement by the IDF Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan:

> Our forces had no possibility of pursuing infiltrators across the border, tracking their movements there, capturing and punishing them. Only the armed forces in those countries, the military and police, can do this with the information they have collected prior to or pursuant to a terrorist strike by trailing the infiltrators and capturing them. Only at the stage when the infiltrators have been punished will thieving, robbery and murder appear futile to them. Most Arabs do not regard pilfering from a stranger as a crime. Since the War of Independence, the thirst for revenge and the hatred of Israel have intensified . . . The war against the infiltrators and their punishment must be

> placed on the Arabs' themselves, and not on Israel. Arab armies can struggle against Arab infiltration, and convince their populations of the need to oppose it, only if it is proved that a cow stolen at an Israeli kibbutz will place the inhabitants of Gaza in grave danger.[20]

Even those who harboured reservations over the "ideology" at the heart of the retaliation policy found it difficult to deny its inner rationale. Moshe Sharett, for example, who was not prone to soften his speech concerning various aspects of retaliation, was forced to admit the strength of its proponents' claim.

> There is one explanation [for the retaliation policy] that carries weight . . . Acts of reprisal awaken the [Arab] governments from their stupor and motivate them to act against infiltration. Each regime . . . is interested in avoiding trouble as much as possible . . . This is a cogent consideration.[21]

Those ardently in favour of an activist security policy comprising reprisal raids believed that the Arabs' intrinsic hostility to Israel was a given fact. The Arabs' goal, they believed, was the annihilation of the state, and no amount of retaliation would influence them to abandon this ambition. Retaliation could only affect Arab willingness to actively realize these ambitions. A vigorous expression of this view was given by the Minister of Defence, Pinchas Lavon, during a stormy party debate:

> Sharett has stated that military response . . . intensifies Arab hatred against us. This is somewhat imprecise . . . In what way has tension heightened? How can it be measured? Before the reprisals, were the Arabs willing to sit down and negotiate with us? Is it only now that their willingness to do so has abated? . . . Does anyone among us really believe that the Arabs were ready to talk with us, but our reprisal acts deterred the peace momentum? . . . I shall allow myself to disclose to you that, yes, our responses are very deterring. [So much so] they have not produced Arab counter-responses.[22]

At the same time, those in favour of the retaliation policy claimed that only they could fathom the Arab character and that Israel's failure to respond militarily would almost certainly raise the level of infiltration. Lack of response, or only a muffled reaction, they asserted, would not be perceived in Arab states as self-restraint from a position of strength, as many Israeli soft-liners wished to believe, but as an expression of weakness. Such an approach would surely intensify terrorist incursions.

> Based on our comprehension of the Arabs, a show of weakness on our part will not advance the peace . . . Our inaction will only weaken our position. One can even devise precise mathematical formulas for when infiltration will escalate, and when it will subside.[23]

To make matters worse, it was further argued that the lack of an Israeli military response could prove to be a catalyst in the Arab world, strengthening radical circles that supported the continuation and propagation of terrorism. Extremists could claim justification for their position that infiltration posed no real danger to the Arabs. In fact, Israeli restraint could be interpreted as a severe blow to "dovish" groups in the Arab world who feared the results of infiltration and who were working to curb it. According to one Mapai parliamentarian who endeavoured to analyse Arab thinking on the subject of infiltration:

> It should be obvious to us that every hostile act against us that succeeds strengthens the position of the aggressors and activists in those countries . . . An act of aggression that goes unanswered adds to their influence in the Arab streets and villages . . . The infiltrators who are responsible for acts of terrorism along our borders, are also responsible for terrorism in the Arab streets and villages. They demand special rights for themselves, and for every successful raid that goes unanswered [by us], support for them surges.[24]

It seems that the debate over the efficacy of the retaliation policy as a deterrent was never fully resolved, because of two main factors: the goals of the policy, and its alternative. If, as claimed, the purpose of retaliation was to totally eradicate infiltration, then this policy might be seen as an inefficient method. However, it appears that even at the outset its designers did not intend it to solve far-reaching goals. Retaliation, then, seems to have been adopted because the government had to "do something" in response to increased aggression. Sceptical of the feasibility of an Arab–Israeli peace arrangement in the foreseeable future, they viewed retaliation as necessary for realizing limited security goals. "Let there be quiet and a semblance of order; half a peace, three-quarters of a peace, but enough that allows us to breathe," implored Pinchas Lavon.[25] The policy was instituted, in my opinion, by a government fully aware of its limitations, in order to provide an answer to the urgent security issues and allow civilian life to function as normally as possible. "The retaliatory strikes we administered," admitted Dayan a few years later, "were not a solution; but, had we not carried them out we would have faced an intolerable situation. They acted as a kind of brake on terrorism, but they did not seal the border hermetically."[26]

An effective analysis of Israel's retaliation policy requires posing a hypothetical question: What would have been the scope of infiltration along the armistice lines had there not been reprisals? Unfortunately no definitive answer can be adduced. However, by the same token, it simply cannot be ascertained whether Israeli reprisals led to an escalation of infiltration.

Retaliation Policy and the Danger of All-Out War

Ben-Gurion and others often presented the link between infiltration and Israel's right to survive; but Israeli leaders could not ignore the possibility that a policy of retaliation would lead to an all-out war with the Arab states. It should be emphasized that BG was usually reluctant to speak on this issue. The statements of others, however, who were in favour of the retaliation policy, first and foremost among them Moshe Dayan, seem to reflect BG's perspective.

Supporters of the retaliation policy emphasized its importance in defining the game rules in the conflict. This consisted chiefly of Israel's ability to convince the Arab world that it would obstinately and vigorously resist attacks on its civilians and their property, and feel free to take decisive counter-action. According to Dayan:

> We must decide what is permitted and forbidden in our relations with the Arab countries and their citizens. We must be wary not to submit to any form of injury, even a minor one, if we can prevent it. In the past when our neighbours raided Jewish areas, we never justified "acceptance of the situation" . . . We have to be aware of the possibility that the present border unrest will become a fixed feature, that it will be an expression of the Arab world's relations with us.[27]

Israel's stubborn insistence on applying "game rules" in its relations with Arab countries was presented as a means of slowing the decline towards total war. It has been claimed that because of Israel's failure to clearly signal its intended responses, a dangerously ambiguous perception could have taken hold of Arab leaders regarding their "freedom of action" on the borders.

A hesitating, weak-willed image of Israel, it may be presumed, could have encouraged the Arab states to bolster their support of infiltration activity. In other words, Israel's failure to display determined rejection of infiltration, in effect, intensified hostile activity by the infiltrators. This in turn forced Israel to respond with increasingly violent reactions. The road from here to a full-scale Arab–Israeli war was rapidly being paved.

Those in favour of retaliation further claimed that it reinforced the Arab states' sense of military inferiority. That they avoided hostile reactions after retaliatory acts was proof of their awareness of Israel's military superiority. This awareness might dissuade the Arab states from continuing to support aggression. In Dayan's words:

> In a roundabout way, the retaliation policy has demonstrated the power balance in the Middle East as perceived by the Arab governments. When

> Egypt, after the Gaza raid, did not declare war on us, this meant that they and other Arab states realized their inability to defeat us.[28]

Supporters of "Dayan's" retaliation policy actually believed that positive relations with the Arab world could result from Israeli counter-aggression. Arab inability to prevent a brazen Israeli response would be understood as a resounding expression of Israel's military superiority and its utter seriousness in wielding it. In addition to addressing Arab hostility in the short run, Israeli retaliation, they claimed, would most likely lead to the Arab world's gradual acceptance of Israel's existence, and eventually to a willingness to sign a peace settlement.

It was also hoped that the retaliation policy would shake the Arab world from its dream of destroying Israel in the near future, and persuade the Arabs to come to their senses, and seek peaceful relations with their Jewish neighbour. Paradoxically, then, it appears that proponents of the retaliation policy expected not only that an Arab–Israeli clash would be averted, but that the chances for achieving peace would be facilitated. The logical outcome of this view was described by the policy's architect, Lieutenant-General Dayan:

> If an Arab state could order its forces to cross the border [following an Israeli reprisal] and strike at us, it would do so. When an Arab country shows self-restraint and refrains from action, according to the Arab mentality, this means it is weak and incapable of facing up to Israel. The political manifestation of inferiority towards Israel is as hard for Arab governments to swallow as the reprisal attack itself. Therefore, it is a sober awakening for the Arab public regarding its relations with Israel and especially the likelihood of destroying the Zionist state. Israel's reprisal raids have forced the Arabs to constantly ask themselves: "Is the destruction of Israel realistic, or should we give up on it?"[29]

Israeli hard-liners further claimed that there was no need to fear the incorporation of retaliation into the "game rules" of Arab–Israeli relations even if the policy led to another Middle East war. Under present conditions, the infiltration level was so detrimental to Israel, anyway.

Another of the hard-liners' claims was that the retaliation policy should not be limited by the fear of war (as several of its opponents charged). Otherwise retaliation would soon grind to a halt. Pursuing this line of argument, the hard-liners asserted that if Israel demonstrated its apprehension of another round of fighting, this would undoubtedly create the sense that it was frightened of a clash with the Arab armies. This in turn would have a crippling effect on Israel's deterrent capability. Mapai MK Yigal Allon, a retired general and a leading proponent of the retaliation policy, stated:

> I see no logic in admitting to the Arab leaders: "Have no fear." I too do not look forward to initiating a war or any form of armed aggression; but there is no political sense in supporting military activism, on the one hand, and being fearful over the collapse to war, on the other . . . Why should we announce to Abdullah and Nasser that the most they can expect from us is "some kind" of response [rather than all-out war]?[30]

Some political supporters even claimed that as long as Israel enjoyed what appeared to be an obvious long-range military advantage, then the war option need not be categorically rejected, nor should the retaliation policy be halted. From the security point of view alone, it was held, the war could serve Israel's vital interests (and not because of the infiltration problem). Speaking candidly before a closed party forum, Pinchas Lavon said:

> Allow me to comment about war. If I were to judge the subject of war from a purely military point of view, I would say, and only in this forum would I dare to admit it, that now is the most convenient time for us [to initiate war] . . . If this were only a military matter, then right now would be more advantageous for us than tomorrow or the day after.[31]

In this light, hard-liners in favour of retaliation rejected the claim that it was necessary to remain committed to the Armistice Agreements at any price as guarantees against war. This claim, they charged, was unsubstantiated because if the Arabs even partially maintained the Armistice Agreements, it was only because they were aware of their inability to defeat Israel on the battlefield. Otherwise it would be preposterous to imagine the armistice framework as an obstacle. Lavon revealed:

> It is wrong to think that the Armistice Agreements were a barrier to war. That is meaningless posturing because . . . the matter does not rest on the Armistice Agreements. Let's assume for a moment that the Arabs are prepared to wage war today, and that it suits their interests. Is it reasonable to think that the Armistice Agreements would prevent them?[32]

Lastly, the proponents of retaliation asserted that the war option could be effective in thwarting the ceaseless attempts of the Great Powers and the Arab world to reach a political agreement based on a major Israeli concession. An agreement of this sort would have been detrimental to Israel's vital interests, perhaps even endangering the very existence of the state. In June 1955, MK Yitzhak Ben-Aharon explicitly expressed what seems to have been the deeply felt sentiments of most of the party members as well as the majority of the national leaders:

> The relentless Arabs' aggression against Israel is only a part of the dangerous

> global conflict . . . [Their] policy is to force Israel into accepting American–Arab dictates . . . There also exists a British–American–Arab collusion to pressure Israel into a new Armistice Agreement . . . Therefore the question of Israel's active defence is not a matter of revenge or reaction according to the principle of "an eye for an eye". The question over the type of ongoing, vigorous, physical defence of the country is a crucial determinant in our struggle to block the Arabs' plans to crush Israel's territorial and political limbs.[33]

In the final analysis, political and security considerations brought the Israeli hard-liners, led by Dayan, to the conclusion that an aggressive retaliation policy complemented Israel's key interests. At an early stage in his role as Chief-of-Staff, Dayan laid out the policy's explicit goals. Concerning a conversation he held with BG in June 1954, he wrote:

> When I told him that I aspired to a more aggressive policy, he [Ben-Gurion] abruptly asked two questions: "What do you mean by aggression? Do you intend starting a war?" I replied that I was not in favour of a war initiated by us, but I was opposed to the concession of any of our territory; and if because of that the Arabs wanted war – I was not opposed. Their threats should not be obstacles to our enterprise.[34]

Dayan was convinced that Israel had to formulate its security policy with the goal of hindering the Arab states in assisting the infiltrators. He believed that Israel should make it clear that continued infiltration would most probably lead to a large-scale armed confrontation. Fully aware of Israel's military superiority, Dayan came to realize that the "no-war no-peace" approach was unworkable, and that the Arab states must be forced to choose between a total cessation of terror, or the consequences of war.[35]

Dayan claimed that Israel did not want to force the Arabs to accept a political agreement, but wanted rather to convince them to cease their belligerency. According to him, Israel was prepared to endure the "no-war no-peace" format as long as the Arab states allowed it to carry out its vital national projects. In a lecture before staff officers in January 1955, Dayan outlined his view of Israel's relations with the Arab world:

> For all appearances, the condition of "no-war no-peace" has been agreed upon by both sides. But the Arabs have accepted it on condition that there will be no peace . . . that the Negev will not be irrigated, that the Suez Canal remain closed [to Israeli shipping], Eilat blocked, and that the Fedayyun continue to plunder and murder. Israel agrees to "no-war no-peace" on condition that war is not waged within its borders. Israel can live without a peace arrangement with the Arabs on condition that it is allowed to build settlements, irrigate, traffic on the seas, and carry on a normal civil existence.

> Both sides are willing, it seems, to continue with a state of "no-war no-peace", but the question is one of emphasis: "no-war" or "no-peace"?[36]

Dayan believed that the Arab world would refuse Israel's conditions as a basis for bilateral relations, and would continue in its low-intensity struggle. Consequently, he estimated, an Arab–Israeli military confrontation, or more likely an Egyptian–Israeli one, was fast approaching. It boiled down to a question of which side would strike first.

Dayan also perceived that the question of American arms supplies, in late 1955, was no longer relevant in light of the rapidly closing military confrontation. In addition to Israel's basic scepticism of such "generous" offers, other facets of the issue occupied Dayan's mind. Even if the Americans agreed to the weapons sales, it would take several months until they were operational. American bureaucracy was so labyrinthine and slow-moving that it was doubtful whether the weapons would be available before the storm broke.

Colonel Haim Herzog, Israeli military attaché to the United States (thirty years later, Israel's sixth president), elaborated on the difficulties of American arms supplies:

> Every act of arms procurement requires drawn-out and complex manoeuvring . . . It must be remembered that under normal conditions at least six months have to pass until the first, politically inoffensive item arrives . . . Controversial supplies, or large quantities of weapons, usually take . . . between nine months and two years, sometimes even longer.[37]

Dayan believed that even if the United States were willing to supply arms to Israel, they would only be defensive weapons. Furthermore, Israel's freedom of action would be drastically limited by a long list of stipulations. It may be assumed that the United States would demand Israel's signature to guarantee non-use of the weapons for offensive purposes. Israel would thus be deprived of the option of initiating a preventive war.[38]

Dayan also expressed his concern that a prolonged discussion within Israel over the possibility of procuring American arms would result in the continuous postponement of military action against Egypt. By the end of 1955, an Israeli attack was considered by General Dayan to be of the highest importance. "Deep in Dayan's heart," writes Mordechai Bar-On, "the growing apprehension took root that delaying IDF action . . . meant the cancellation of the whole plan. The promising telegrams from Eban and Sharett about Israel's chances for attaining American arms had the effect of darkening Israel's skies with clouds of dangerous illusion."[39]

Although the value of the weapons should not be disparaged, Dayan felt that in the final count it was Israel's inner strength that would determine its ability to overcome external threats. In 1956 he wrote:

> We do not belittle the value of arms and equipment . . . but one thing must be kept in mind: arms alone do not produce strength. A weapon is a dead piece of metal . . . Countries that rely on foreign aid instead of their own resources, who view the gift of weapons as an alternative to their soldiers' individual effort and fighting spirit . . . these countries will learn that iron "will not bring miracles", and new equipment is not synonymous with security.[40]

Ben-Gurion's views on this issue were less absolute. They reveal his deep uncertainty over the security policy and his apprehension at the encroaching danger of a military confrontation. In his diary he writes pointedly against exploiting the retaliation policy to achieve any goals other than the cessation of infiltration. This may be a reflection of his apprehension over Dayan's machinations for a speedy military confrontation:

> We have no intention of using the border conflict for any political goal whatsoever, other than ending murderous acts . . . This is something we have to do. We will use our forces for this purpose, but for no other objectives whatsoever.[41]

The more the tension heightened between Israel and the Arab states, against a background of daily security violations, and the more intense the danger of the outbreak of a general war, the more vociferous became BG's warnings against being drawn into the "activism" that Dayan was vigorously pushing.[42]

Ben-Gurion's position was certainly the cause of Dayan's letter of resignation at the end of August 1955. The actual trigger for the letter was the last-minute cancellation of a retaliatory raid into Egyptian territory.

> The difference between the security policy recently adopted by the government and the security policy that seems to me absolutely necessary prevents me from carrying on with the responsibility as chief-of-staff. Therefore, I am handing in my resignation from the present position.[43]

Some months later, it appears a change took place in BG's outlook and he was ready to throw Dayan a long "rope" by which to apply his security plans. Nevertheless, it was clear that BG kept a tight hold on the other "end" of the rope. According to Dayan, in the course of October 1955 he and BG consolidated the principles of the security policy that Dayan presented to the IDF General Staff on 23 October 1955:

> 1. The basic solution to the worsening security problem was to oust Nasser from power.
> 2. In order to do this, it was necessary to challenge Egypt at the earliest possible date, before Soviet weaponry was incorporated into the Egyptian arsenal rendering the operation more difficult, if not impossible.

3. The greatest effort should be made to acquire more arms and ammunition before the confrontation, but one should not be dependent on the other.
4. The confrontation should take place in the form of escalation; however, since Israel had to defend its justification in the international arena it could not allow itself to cause the escalation by means of a provocation that would appear murky and complicated.
5. In military terms, all this meant that any attack on Israeli forces or settlements would result in a furious large-scale response.[44]

Despite this understanding, BG seems to have remained distrustful of giving a "free hand" to the Chief-of-Staff. In fact, up until the start of the Sinai campaign, he openly expressed growing scepticism over the value of an Israeli-initiated war. A prominent expression of his position is revealed in diplomatic correspondence during a military operation that was carried out against Egypt in November 1955 (the Nitzana incident). At the time a leading military figure suggested to BG that he take advantage of the losses being inflicted on the Egyptian forces in Sinai and launch a wider campaign that would destroy the Egyptian army. BG refused.[45]

According to the same source, the IDF continued to request permission to move to large-scale responses in the months following the Nitzana incident. It was made explicit to BG that the more time passed, the stronger the Egyptians' position grew as their defence capability improved. The postponement of an attack would exact a heavier toll of Israeli battle-casualties. Yet, BG persisted in refusing permission to escalate.[46]

His erratic positioning on this issue reflects the painful choices he had to weigh in late 1955. In contrast to Dayan, BG was absorbed, in this period, by a great apprehension over the exorbitant cost of another Arab–Israeli war in which, he feared, more than one Arab country might participate. In a meeting with Labour Party intellectuals in December 1955, against the background of the Czech–Egyptian arms deal, BG said:

> A terrible thing has happened in Israel. Although our public has heard about it a number of times, I fear they do not take it seriously enough . . . I believe we will survive [a war forced on us], but at a very high price. There will be devastation, cities will be bombed . . . If there is an Egyptian attack we will have to mobilize all our manpower because we will not only be up against the Egyptians. We will have to protect our eastern and northern borders as well. At best a quarter of a million men will have to be called up. Think of the damage this will do to the state's economy.[47]

Darkly fearful of the future and sensitive to domestic criticism of the shoddy preparations for the approaching war, BG expressed hope that arms supplies to Israel would avert or at least forestall the need to launch a preventative war. A clear example of this was given by Yaacov Herzog, a close advisor of BG, in a conversation with the American ambassador:

> Ben-Gurion consistently stated that the solution to the Egyptian threat lay in Israel's procurement of arms and not by a preventative war. He was convinced that if enough weapons could be attained from the West, they would be a decisive answer to Egypt's rearmament, and Nasser would realize the hopelessness in expending so much of Egypt's resources on weapons instead of economic development.[48]

Although BG doubted the United States' willingness to supply arms to Israel, he was not prepared to abandon all hope that the Superpower would come through with the deal. He was determined to pull strings to clinch the deal before initiating a preventative war as Dayan was urging. "It is terrible the way things are developing now," he confided to Dayan in November 1955. "The coming weeks will teach us what the Americans have decided regarding the [sale of] defensive weapons. We'll see if they give them. Right now, if we initiate hostile acts, it would be suicide."[49]

In the middle of December 1955, BG convened a meeting with the IDF General Staff and attempted to present them with his rationale for avoiding war:

> If we weigh all the various options before us, and I am aware that each one means life or death, then the decisive factor is to concentrate all our efforts on attaining arms, improving the army's defence capability, and not jeopardizing ourselves by starting an aggressive war that could end in our defeat and occupation by a foreign force that we would be unable to oppose. This would probably signify our moral defeat in the eyes of the world. We would be standing alone before the world community. For these reasons, as I understand the situation, the wisest course of action for the government would be to refrain from initiating a war.[50]

Ben-Gurion had no qualms about searching elsewhere to acquire weapons for Israel. In a closed party forum he suggested turning even to the Soviet Union:

> Our main task now is procuring weapons. I believe we should look immediately to the Soviet Union, even if our chances are one in ten. We should demand that they supply us with weapons – the same kind and quantity that they gave to Egypt. We should base our demand on two reasons: if they furnish us with weapons, then war will be averted. Nasser would not dare fight us. If they do not give us the weapons, then at least we won't have any pangs of conscience that we remained without them, or with not enough of them because we did not turn to Soviet Russia.[51]

According to Dayan, BG retained his hope for American arms until he received the final negative answer in March 1956:

> Ben-Gurion wished to consult with us on our reaction to the United States' refusal to supply weapons, as stated in Dulles' recent answer to Eban... Ben-Gurion himself was astonished and furious.[52]

Political Considerations

One of the principal debates over the retaliation policy centred on the role that politics played in policy formulation and execution. At first glance, the basic differences of opinion among the nation's leaders, especially between BG and Sharett, seem to highlight opposite views. But on a closer look differences come into focus over the degrees of emphasis to be placed on political considerations or on purely military ones. None of the country's leaders was suggesting that either aspect should be disregarded, they were all aware that in Israel's special circumstances national security and political factors were inseparable.

In BG's world concept, political considerations formed a central pillar in Israel's *modus operandi* in the international arena and the Arab world. Nevertheless, he repeatedly stated that as long as Israel's survival hung in the balance, it was imperative to opt for security–military considerations rather than political–justificatory ones. "Foreign relations should not determine our path. If something should interfere with our foreign relations – then so be it. There are things more vital [to us] than foreign relations."[53]

Israel's prime task, he avowed, was to guarantee its physical existence as an independent, sovereign state. It could meet this challenge only if its military superiority was maintained and its deterrent capability was able to thwart its enemies' destructive intentions. Thus, the importance of national security considerations assumed pre-eminent importance in the decision-making process.

In practical terms, when politics and diplomatic interests conflicted with national-security and military ones, BG had little doubt that the latter should take precedence. Although he was undoubtedly aware of the retaliation policy's dangerous impact on Israel's relations with the United States, and in particular on the delicate negotiations for an American–Israeli defence pact, he made it known that these considerations were nevertheless inferior to military ones. "The defence pact with the United States is important, but our daily security is no less so; if there is a conflict in this – then it cannot be avoided."[54]

When asked to explain the obstacles encountered by Israel in its efforts to gain international support, he repeated this view. On the background of increasing domestic and foreign criticism over the operation in the Sea of Galilee area (11 December 1955), BG stated sharply:

> The problems involved in justifying our action should not be minimized . . . However, if they paralyse us, then I would have grave doubts about our ability to keep the state functioning, to settle the Negev, defend the borders, and safeguard the lives of our citizens.[55]

Ben-Gurion regarded world opinion's vociferous opposition to Israeli reprisals as a given factor in international relations that Israel had no control over. The roots of this attitude should be sought, he felt, in the history of the Jewish people. He was prepared to admit, however, that in addition to historical factors, the special nature of Israeli retaliation, especially its scope and results, contributed significantly to the absence of international backing.

In discussions with Abba Eban, the ambassador to the United States, BG explained why the media focused on Israel's retaliations into Arab countries while downplaying the murderous provocation of Arab infiltration.

> It is clear that according to public opinion our enemies' position is superior to ours. Attacking an individual or a lone building does not make the "news" in the foreign press. Even when twenty, forty, or a hundred Jews are killed over a protracted period, this too is no great sensation for getting international attention.[56]

The IDF raid against Syrian military positions dug in along the Sea of Galilee (Operation Olive Leaves, 11 December 1955) led to a major debate within the national leadership over the relative importance of political accountability. In the months preceding the attack, Israel had slid into a siege mentality in the wake of a strangling political and military blockade. There were three main reasons for this:

1. In September 1955, Nasser's announcement of a Czech–Egyptian arms deal had shocked Israeli leaders, filling them with apprehension. The arms deal dramatically elevated Egypt's stature in the Arab world and heightened Nasser's image as the leading figure of Arab nationalism.
2. This was followed by the signing in October of an Egyptian–Syrian military pact.
3. Throughout this period intense efforts were underway to reach an Arab–Israeli agreement to end the conflict. At the heart of this diplomatic activity was the goal of pressuring Israel to concede considerable chunks of its 1948 victory spoils.

The Sea of Galilee raid took place while Foreign Minister Sharett was in Washington, tensely negotiating American arms supplies to Israel. Before

arriving in the United States, he had met with the foreign ministers of the Great Powers in Geneva, hoping to induce them to agree to weapons sales. The European attempts failed, but his talks with American officials, especially with Secretary of State Dulles, led Sharett to believe there was a chance that the United States would look favourably at selling defensive arms to Israel.[57]

The goal of the Israeli raid had been to capture the Syrian gun emplacements, blow them up, engage the enemy in combat if they offered resistance, and take prisoners. For various reasons, the raid was larger than originally planned, with six IDF soldiers killed and twelve wounded. The Syrians suffered nearly fifty casualties with thirty captured. The size of the Israeli attack triggered the suspicion that its real goals had been far more ambitious than what appeared in the operation's order.[58]

In this light, it comes as little surprise that Sharett and his circle bitterly criticized the operation as an expression of BG's and other hard-liners' total disregard of extremely sensitive political and moral considerations. Added to this was BG's inexcusable "crime" of ignoring a matter of vital strategic concern: the opportunity to acquire United States military hardware.

Sharett believed that the Americans would stipulate that the arms supply depended to a great extent on Israel's security policy, especially its willingness to exercise restraint in its retaliation policy. Discussing the arms deal negotiations, Sharett declared: "If the chance to attain weapons depends on our action . . . then we will have to exhibit restraint in our responses."[59]

When informed about the raid during his talks in the United States, he could not conceal his anger and frustration: "I felt," he said, "that the decision to carry out the operation was the gravest mistake . . . it took place on the very evening that I was awaiting an answer on American weapons sales. I saw the decision [to attack the Syrians] as torpedoing [all my efforts] . . . For the first time in my life I faced the danger of a total nervous breakdown."[60]

In his diary, Sharett also vented his anger over the Syrian raid: "Ehud Avriel [a high-ranking Foreign Ministry official]," he wrote, "phoned to tell me that an attack on Syria had occurred . . . My whole world darkened . . . Again [I had] the impression of bloodlust and military provocation. No killing had preceded the operation this time, and there had been no public preparation, not even a prior announcement."[61]

Several politicians, who in normal times were overwhelmingly supportive of the retaliation policy, and who had even advocated its escalation, now joined the Sharett camp in castigating the IDF raid. They included the opposition leader Menahem Begin (Herut Party). At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, Begin went so far as to demand BG's resignation.

A similar criticism, though less in the public limelight, was levelled by the heads of Achdut Ha'avoda, a party noted for its activist line on security issues. BG exclaimed to one of the leaders, Israel Galili, about his "amazement at the attitude your colleagues in the government have shown towards Operation Sea of Galilee". In reply, Galili made it clear to BG that the criticism by Achdut Ha'avoda ministers was not over the raid itself, but over its timing.[62]

There is little doubt that this reprisal, more than any previously, succeeded in uniting the political spectrum against the retaliation policy. For the historian, the multitude of voices complicates the task of discerning between opposition to the general character of this particular attack, and criticism at its unfortunate timing.

Ben-Gurion, as was his wont, replied acidly to all the critics, stubbornly reiterating that the operation had been launched in response to repeated attacks on Israeli fishermen. Syrian activity, he stressed, was a violation of Israel's territorial sovereignty, and in principle was equivalent to invasion of the country.

> For all practical purposes it matters not whether a foreign army captures part of our territory or aims its war machine against our citizens on the seas or within our borders, it will be considered an enemy attack. This is an invasion not of troops, but of artillery shells. When the United Nations dawdles at condemning them [the Syrians], we refuse to surrender any section of the Sea of Galilee, and it is our job to get rid of the canons.[63]

Ben-Gurion rejected the proposal that Israel's response to infiltration should be "small raids" in order to facilitate the Foreign Ministry's efforts at damage control in the international arena. He asserted that Israel could not allow itself to fight in the same manner as the enemy, with small-scale raids of limited scope. Israel's reaction would follow low-level attacks. Furthermore, unlike the infiltrators, Israel would not choose civilian targets, but only military and police ones inside enemy territory. These raids would have to be on a scale greater than those executed against Israel.

Ben-Gurion was willing to admit that the retaliation policy in its present format complicated Israel's ability to defend its self-image. But, he added, Israel should not be deterred by this when it was convinced of the justice of its cause. No country in the world, he reminded his listeners, had to deal with security problems as daunting and complex as Israel's. Therefore, it was easy for others to preach the benefit of moderating responses.

> Israel is unique in the world. I am referring to its current security situation. I know of no other country besieged on all sides, whose neighbours have signed armistice treaties with her, but who have broken them. Regarding the Untied Nations: it is supposed to defend us, in reality it does nothing . . . I know of no other country in the world where bands of murderers infiltrate

> from every direction unto her territory . . . if not every day, then every week . . . There is no parallel to this in the world. And because it is so unique, and no other nation has gone though a similar experience . . . we are asked to show restraint! Good advice! . . . People are being killed . . . in our local waterway – and we should practise restraint! . . . I refuse to accept this. We are no different from other nations. We have a right to live . . . if the United Nations is impotent or unable to assist us – then we will deal with [our security] in our own way.[64]

Referring to the claim that the number of casualties on the Syrian side was much higher than what was intended before the operation, BG answered that the precise number of casualties could never be known before a military operation. It depended not only on the attacking force, but also on the defenders.[65] He also asserted that when a military unit was sent across the enemy border, it had the authority to exercise its own judgement according to developing situations. He demanded that everyone accept without question the army's explanation of recent circumstances and the reasons for their deviation from the original plans.

Ben-Gurion continually refuted what he considered to be criticism of military conduct during the operation along the Sea of Galilee. In particular he denied the charge that the IDF had deliberately widened the scope of the operation in order to escalate it into a major Arab–Israeli confrontation. It was common knowledge, he avowed, that the IDF was under civilian control and hence forbidden to initiate action on its own. In the Knesset, he thundered:

> Moral words and preaching have been publicly levelled at IDF officers, charging that the IDF has no authority to act on its own, that the army is only a branch of the state, that it is dependent on government orders . . . These statements in themselves are true, but the IDF and its officers do not need to be preached to. As Minister of Defence I have strictly enforced the absolute obedience of the army to the country's elected institutions. The IDF and its entire officer corps have been unwavering in their submission to the authority of the civilian, democratically elected government and in refraining from acting on their own.[66]

Elsewhere BG stated: "Another charge was voiced by Ya'akov Hazan (Mapam). According to his private sources of information, the army had received orders to carry out a limited raid, but someone had enlarged the scope of the operation . . . I have informed him that the operation was carried out exactly as my orders stated.[67]

Ben-Gurion believed, moreover, that some of the criticism stemmed from domestic political jockeying, primarily from the bare-knuckled struggle that individuals and parties were waging against the Chief-of-Staff, Dayan. Going on the attack, BG accused the operation's critics, most

of whom resided in the centre of the country, of haughtiness and insensitivity towards the distress of the border settlers. Israel would continue to react vigorously, he pledged, to prevent injury to its citizens wherever they lived.[68]

This implied that the fate of the border settlements was the same as that of residential areas in the centre of the country. He reiterated his conviction that the security of the entire country was dependent, to a great extent, on the ability of the border settlers to hold the line in defence of their homes. Taking aim at G. Schocken, the editor of the daily *Ha'aretz*, BG bluntly declared:

> There is an obvious difference between the owners of a major publishing house and fishermen from the Galilee. The publishers hail from aristocratic stock, they are intellectuals, distinguished businessmen, whereas Galilee fishermen are simple workers, earning their living from tough manual labour on the sea. However, the Israeli Government is obligated to defend the lives of the industrious fishermen and guarantee the sovereignty of the Sea of Galilee, no less than that of Tel Aviv . . . Those who would like to be considered public educators, who hand down their opinions from comfortable offices in Tel Aviv, are ignorant of an elementary, and perhaps tragic, truth. Without effective defence of the borders, the residents of Tel Aviv too will not be safe . . . All of us living in the state, from Metula to Eilat, are in the same boat, and one fate awaits us all.[69]

Alongside this brand of rhetoric vigorously defending the IDF and its conduct during the operation, BG occasionally hinted at the annoying doubts he had about the operation and its timing.

> I am aware that questions may be asked, and I do not wish to discuss them right now, about the timing, place, and circumstances of the raid. These are legitimate procedures, I admit, but I prefer not to add anything further on this subject.[70]

In a letter to Ambassador Eban following the operation, he also left the impression that he had some lingering reservations with regard to the operation:

> Explaining our position is not easy, infinite effort is required. Do not be dismayed by the first hostile reactions in the international community. If it is a question of justice, then our side [will triumph]. This was the nature of Operation Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the timing could be questioned. But, to my deep regret, the decision was based on the fishing season. This is the time of year that the Galilee fishermen need the eastern bank, and this year they were fired on by the enemy.[71]

When speaking with foreign diplomats, BG was much more candid

about the operation and its timing. The American ambassador sensed that the Prime Minister regretted certain aspects of the attack and its implications for Israel's request for arms. The ambassador also added that BG was well aware of the need to rethink his decisions on retaliation, especially for their geopolitical impact.[72]

Other Western diplomats posted to Israel also perceived that the acerbic criticism BG had weathered over the Sea of Galilee operation would have a far-reaching influence on his position regarding the retaliation policy in general, and the importance of political and national-image considerations in particular.[73]

According to the American ambassador's report of 16 December 1955, BG convened a meeting of the General Staff and announced that in the next few months the IDF would be ordered to display exceptional restraint along the border even in the face of provocation. These coming months, he informed his listeners, would be critical for the American arms shipments to Israel and the future of the country.[74]

Operational Aspects of the Retaliation Policy

The general criticism against retaliation was not directed at the military response *per se*. The moderates too, led by Sharett, understood that Israel had to respond harshly to the low-level war being waged from inside Arab countries. The main indictment against the current policy was that it was ineffective and insensitive to the political repercussions and to Israel's image.

The critics rejected the claim that military factors alone should determine Israel's response and that any deviation from the rationale of the reprisals would detract from their benefit. The same critics tended to present the retaliation policy as a conditioned reflex in response to infiltrators who executed acts of sabotage inside Israel. While it was clear that Israel would respond with punitive strikes against suitable targets inside the infiltrators' host country, the raids generally incurred innocent casualties, sometimes in considerable numbers, and aroused negative responses throughout the world.

This *modus operandi*, it was claimed, was based on the presumption that Israel's only option against infiltration was military force. The IDF's constant need for solutions to the urgent problems caused by infiltration had shackled the nation's decision-makers into a narrow mind-set whereby the army was the only answer to Arab hostility.

This assumption, it was charged, was far removed from reality. In addition to the IDF, other branches of the state could play a useful role in achieving Israel's strategic goals. At the highest levels of the IDF, thinking

had become adhered rigidly to a particular type of large-scale reprisal. Limiting the number of agencies involved in the retaliation policy and minimizing its goals had weakened the need for creative, bold thinking that could offer original, unconventional approaches to quashing infiltration.

It was further claimed that even if military action alone could seal up the borders, the IDF was not obliged to conform to a method so one-sided and predictable. The military branch had other means at its disposal. The retaliation policy in its current format merely succumbed to the endless chain of event–reaction, and muddled the international community's identification of the party responsible for having initiated hostilities. In the best of circumstances, accountability was pinned equally on Israel and the Arab states; but in most cases the brunt of the blame was laid on Israel.

Finally, it was claimed, the present retaliation policy did not mete out "punishment" in proportion to the "crime". Israeli reprisals were usually far more severe than the events that preceded them. It should be kept in mind that Sharett taught his listeners that much of the infiltration activity was actually an expression of relatively low-level violence.

> Generally, one or two persons slip over from the other side. I cannot say if the people who came to Kisalon [a village near the Jerusalem Corridor] intended only to steal cows. When a Jewish guard approached, they shot him and took his weapon . . . I am not certain they only came for cows. On the other hand, our goal is not the theft of livestock; we conduct military operations.[75]

The critics of the present policy offered an alternative: beefed-up IDF deployment and patrols along the borders to confuse the enemy and limit their activity. The Minister of Education, Zalman Aranne, one of the most outspoken critics of the retaliation policy, stated:

> We need to look at things soberly. We have been forced to live indefinitely with a border war. I believe, and I direct my words to the Minister of Defence [Ben-Gurion], we need to establish a defence network for Israel. There is no official order that the borders must remain half-guarded as they are now . . . It seems to me that the state's border defence system should be organized in a way that will limit enemy provocation and our need to counteract.[76]

At the same time, critics of the policy were calling on the designers of retaliation to end the vicious circle of event–reaction. The critics demanded stringent self-restraint and the avoidance of reflex responses even in the wake of outrageous acts of infiltration. Restraint on Israel's part, they claimed, could lead the other side to have second thoughts about sabotage.

Furthermore, Israel's self-restraint would be a clear signal to foreign governments and the international public that the Arabs were the initiators of regional tension and unrest. If border infringements continued, then

Israel's military options would always be available. Following an Egyptian military incursion, Sharett surveyed the security situation and spoke before a small political forum in May 1954:

> The question was what to do. Different views were tossed about. On one hand . . . if we do not teach them a lesson . . . another incursion will take place . . . The IDF's prestige is still high in the eyes of the Egyptian army [so that] we employ restraint and see what happens. If it becomes clear that this only results in more attempts on their part to sound us out with "blood-hounds", and this too passes without punishment, without our reacting, then their courage will be strengthened and we will have to strike at them decisively. [But] if things turn out differently and the Arabs refrain from further hostilities – then we have succeeded in breaking out of this vicious cycle.[77]

Changing the design of the retaliation policy, it was claimed, would also create greater understanding and sympathy in the international arena for Israel's military operations. Thus Israel would have lifted itself out of a static way of thinking, and at the same time it would ease things on the political and diplomatic fronts. Sharett summed up his thoughts on this subject:

> It is necessary to develop a more sophisticated programme of action – not mechanical and repetitive – but a programme that includes respites in our retaliation. From time to time it is necessary to break the chain so that it will be clear who is initiating aggression. Our methods must be reviewed and updated. I am very troubled by the pall of routine that has overtaken us, by the fixed thinking that no other option other than a military one exists, that only the army can produce the appropriate response. Even military activity requires creative thinking.[78]

One of the alternatives to the current policy emphasized striking at specific targets in different places, aiming directly at those who unleashed and supervised infiltration activity. Declared Sharett:

> It seems to me that in order to achieve a direct hit we have to devote more attention to basic intelligence gathering. In other words, more investigation, detective work, and pinpointing of targets . . . The psychological and morale-boosting benefit of a direct hit, as opposed to wreaking random mayhem, cannot be over-estimated.[79]

The critics also stated that raids of this kind should be carried out by small, clandestine, highly trained military or civilian teams. This would go far in ensuring that the strikes attracted little attention in the international arena; press coverage would be minimal, and hostile foreign reaction would also be significantly reduced. This alternative, according to its proponents,

would safeguard political and public-image interests, as well as security and military concerns.

This strategy, it was claimed, would allow Israel to clear itself of the responsibility for the raid, if it so desired. Such denial, it was asserted, would not harm Israel's credibility, for the truth (that Israel had sent teams across the border) would be known only to a circle of insiders. The concept of "ghost" reprisals that could not be directly traced to Israel was repeatedly hinted at. In an article on the subject, Sharett was quoted as stating:

> Acts of reprisal are a kind of weapon that the government cannot allow itself to surrender, since great importance is put on its use. The quantity determines the quality . . . Sometimes the thought strikes me that it would be in our interest to carry out partisan operations, in the nature of blood for blood, to equalize the balance, but only to equalize it. It is likely that we would not encounter hostile reactions in the world each time if we liquidated no more than the number the Arabs had killed inside Israel.[80]

At the same time, Sharett expressed his growing concern over the civilian authority's supervision of the proposed special operations units.

> Let us assume that no difference of opinion exists between us about setting up units over which we have no control . . . It seems natural that this would be an army or border police unit, or a special brigade. I would not be opposed to having settlers, trained and equipped by us, counted among them . . . I believe such a unit would require extreme control on our part, because a rogue gang of cutthroats, by its very nature, could cause wanton damage.[81]

In all likelihood, the critics' accusations and suggestions were familiar to the retaliation policy's creators, BG and Dayan. It seems logical that these critics would have presented their ideas in great detail to the Prime Minister and Chief-of-Staff. It may also be assumed that the critics' proposals were studied, evaluated, and frequently put into effect.[82]

From statements made by BG and Dayan, their thinking cannot be characterized as dogmatic and routine. Their preference for the same method of retaliation does not necessarily prove that other possibilities were overlooked or that they were guilty of one-tracked thinking as their critics, especially Sharett, claimed. It would be more logical to assume that various alternatives to the existing policy were put forward and rejected. In a closed forum, BG confided to his colleagues about his difficulty in designing the retaliation policy:

> The means of guaranteeing daily security were crystallized after much deliberation, and much trial and error. We lacked proper tools, and what we had was not suited to the task. Also the method was wrong. Until we finally developed a modus operandi . . . we studied at length how best to strike at the infiltrators. We experimented with different types of raids, even employing

> partisans. Most of these attempts failed. There were, I admit, some military fiascos, even ethical ones; until we realized that a special unit must be established that would receive the proper training in order to carry out extremely demanding missions.[83]

The retaliation policy may be said to be Israel's only method of combatting infiltration. In the years after the 1948 war, infiltration occasionally took on the dimensions of a "ragtag invasion" that Israel's security forces were unable to block. Fighting infiltration by defensive means had failed through serious obstacles such as a lack of coherent border demarcations along the armistice lines; budget and manpower shortages; and legal, moral and political restrictions.[84]

Facing these formidable hurdles, retaliation came to be regarded as the only effective means at Israel's disposal for countering incursion. The retaliation policy was not selected, as its opponents tried to prove, through ignorance of its problematic features. It was employed, rather, with a clear awareness of them. In Israel's particular situation of long, meandering borders, lack of strategic depth, an exposed and "fragile" population especially in frontier settlements, severe cutbacks in manpower and financial resources, and the ethos of national defence within the norms of a moral and legal framework, it appears then that the retaliation policy adopted was the only realistic option.

Ben-Gurion knew of the complications that retaliation added to Israel's foreign relations. Despite this, he made it perfectly clear to the US ambassador that he saw no other solution to suppressing infiltration. He even requested this experienced diplomat's advice on how to protect the state's citizens and property in the absence of a retaliation policy.[85]

As to the "professional" aspect of the policy, BG let it be known that once a decision had been made and the military was given the green light, then the political level could no longer interfere with operational details. This meant that criticism of certain operations should be examined using strictly military tools.

It appears that the concept of specific targets that Sharett and others proposed, as an alternative to the existing policy, was seriously considered by the military chiefs. Moshe Dayan, for example, felt that no benefit could be gained from small-scale operations of the type Sharett had suggested. In fact, from Dayan's point of view, "no response" was preferable to what Sharett was proffering. Sharett commented in his diary:

> Dayan habitually stated that there was no sense in "pinpointing" reprisals that struck at military sites or civilian groups or refugees. Cairo would not be moved by such acts. Only large-scale raids would convince Egypt to act quickly and seriously in suppressing infiltration. If acts like these were forbidden us, Dayan felt, it was better to avoid any form of reprisal.[86]

In the highest echelons of the Israeli security establishment the various types of retaliatory strikes, other than the standard IDF one, were rejected. Dayan opposed Sharett's idea of breaking loose from the incident–reaction chain in which reprisal must take place proximate to the incident. If too much time were allowed to lapse, it would be preferable to cancel the reprisal, exhibit restraint, and gather strength from self-control.[87] However, according to Dayan, this method had been tried several times and failed. "We sought a way to bring about an end to infiltration," Dayan said. Ben-Gurion said after numerous acts of sabotage: 'We will not respond this time.' So we did not respond but sabotage continued."[88]

Officials from the Foreign Ministry, led by Sharett himself, gradually came to the conclusion that the alternatives to the current retaliation policy were not bearing the expected fruits. They began complaining to diplomatic representatives about their despair at a policy that was not only falling short of its goals, but was achieving the opposite results. After talks with Sharett over Israel's retaliation policy, the American ambassador drafted a report outlining the Foreign Minister's views and the atmosphere in the country:

> Israel's restraint, instead of bringing calm to the region, has spawned two vicious Arab attacks . . . This has created an extremely pessimistic atmosphere in Israel. Sharett claims that he has done all in his power to block a government decision to respond [massively]. However, he cannot say how long he can hold back the storm in the face of the latest attacks.[89]

It should be mentioned that the retaliation policy began to gather momentum only after a long period of serious and embarrassing IDF fiascos across the border. This was probably another reason for the large-scale reprisals. People were claiming that if Israel wished to recover the IDF's deterrent image and strengthen its self-confidence in the (apparently unavoidable) next war it should adopt an uncompromising retaliation policy. According to Dayan:

> Reprisal acts are a medicine for us . . . They help us hold up under the tension in settlements and in the army. Without them we would not have a fighting nation, and without that – we would be lost.[90]

A few years later Dayan praised the retaliation policy of the early 1950s as a prominent factor in forging the IDF's fighting spirit, strengthening its attack capability, and raising its self-confidence.

> In my opinion, we went to war in 1948 with high fighting standards in self-defence . . . [But] I do not think that the War of Independence taught us high standards of offence . . . Defence was deep in our veins . . . Then came acts of retaliation, and the standards jumped to a higher level. Although these raids were executed by elite units, the whole nation read and heard about it

> . . . The unit itself that carried out these missions sensed the praise lavished on it and felt that its laurels were a gift to the nation . . . The unit's performance created a state of alertness in the entire army and pride for everyone in uniform. After a number of successful strikes, the question: "Why am I serving in the army?" ceased to be asked and no longer troubled the minds of military personnel. As the security situation worsened, people not in uniform . . . felt a tinge of discomfort [at not serving] in this period.[91]

Dayan later admitted that the element of "feeling" played a very minor role in determining Israel's aggressive retaliation policy, and was actually only a side effect:

> We should be careful in our wording lest the impression be given that we supported retaliation in order to raise IDF morale. If this were only a matter of sharpening the sword, I would not have urged this policy so incessantly. Reprisal, however, did have the effect of honing the blade.[92]

In summary, it would be erroneous to conclude that the retaliation policy that BG and Dayan employed was characterized by one-tracked, dogmatic, stodgy thinking. Such a claim ignores the fact that the policy's goal was not to act as a deterrent that would bring a complete cessation of the infiltration; rather, it was meant to lower infiltration to a "reasonable standard", and more importantly, to place Israel's relations with the Arab world on a new footing. In other words, it seems that Israel's leaders were fully convinced that this policy was the most realistic solution to Israel's strategic needs at the time. Despite the policy's limitations and shortcomings, it is highly unlikely that its opponents and sceptics offered alternative plans that could have dealt more effectively with the menace of infiltration.

5

The Territorial Status Quo and the Armistice Borders

Ben-Gurion's views on the territorial status quo and the armistice borders are among the most complex features of his political thinking. Examination of his statements reveals an intricate mosaic of diverse perspectives and profound insights.

The intricacy of the subject precludes a simplistic attempt at labelling BG "for" or "against" the continuation of the territorial status quo prevailing since the end of the War of Independence. Among Israel's political divisions over the border question, BG's ideas stand out because of their originality and acumen. Various political groups at times tried to "adopt" his positions for their cause, each one embracing a particular aspect of his *weltanschauung*.

Even at the outset of his political career BG gave vent to his ideas on the country's borders, and throughout his life he was wont to repeat them. The numerous plans for an Arab–Israeli territorial arrangement, and the public debate they generated, led BG to view the question of the territorial status quo and Armistice borders from different angles. The following discussion outlines BG's main concepts on these issues.

"Historical Borders" and "Natural Borders"

Ben-Gurion rejected the standard terms "historical borders" and "natural borders" as principles for determining Israel's borders. In their place he offered the innovative concept of borders as dynamic parameters dependent on changing circumstances. He often stated that the serpentine changes drawn on the historic map of Eretz Israel nullified any claim to "historical borders".

> There is no truth whatsoever to [the concept of] historical borders; they do not exist, there are none in Israel, just as none exist in America, Russia, or

> any other country. Of all the repeated transformations in human history, border changes are the most common.[1]

Ben-Gurion used this argument to refute his critics, who charged that he had abandoned the principle of "Greater Israel" because of his willingness to accept the Partition Plan. "Of those who mourn 'Greater Israel'," BG said, "I am ignorant of what they are referring to. The Land was 'greater' only in the days of foreign rulers who conquered Eretz Israel and neighbouring regions. The borders of Eretz Israel have constantly changed from one generation to the next. Few terms are more ambiguous than 'historical borders'."[2]

Similarly, BG also examined the term "natural borders" from a pragmatic, flexible point of view, and came to the realization that the meaning of the term was in a perpetual state of flux. He rejected the assumption that a natural border contained inherent strategic importance. In his opinion, it should be perpetually re-examined in light of changing circumstances.

Thus BG refuted the charge that Israel had to place its eastern border along the natural border, i.e., the Jordan River and the mountain range to the west. Even if the "naturalness" of this border was true, he asserted, then after Israel had been established along this line, unpredictable circumstances could still alter things and Israel would again find itself in need of a more secure "natural border".

> Once we reach a mountain top or river bend, the strategists discover that in order to guarantee their security, we must seize control of the entire surrounding area and beyond . . . There is no end to this.[3]

It was this frame of mind that led BG to remonstrate against the illusions of right-wing circles who claimed that the army's deployment along the Jordan River would improve Israel's security and permit serious cuts to be made in the defence budget.

> We have grave doubts about [the benefits of] "natural borders" and I would not advise anyone to have trust in them. I do not believe that any so-called "natural obstacle" will help us reduce the defence budget.[4]

Criteria for Determining Israel's Borders

If indeed deep-rooted concepts like "historical" or "natural" borders were eliminated as valid practical concepts in BG's political thinking, the question remains: what was the alternative? As usual, BG, does not facilitate our task by presenting a clear substitute. From his statements, though, the determining factor for the borders appears to revolve around the state's relative strength, namely – its military power, at specific times.

Letting the nation's borders depend on its military power involved certain moral questions. It is inconceivable that BG was unaware of this, and it probably explains why he refrained from discussing it publicly as long as he was in office. Upon retirement, however, he felt free to speak openly about the state's borders, military power, and morality issues. In an exceptionally candid press interview, he once revealed:

> *Question*: What would you say to your grandchild today if he asked you: What are Israel's borders?
> *Ben-Gurion*: I would answer him: They are the borders of the Homeland, my child. That is all.
> *Question*: And if he is as stubborn as his grandfather, and persists: When did Sinai cease to be ours? I heard that you were there and announced to the whole world: All of Sinai is ours. [A reference to BG's pronouncements, during the Sinai campaign, on Israel's rights to the Sinai Peninsula.]
> *Ben-Gurion*: I would answer him: It ceased to be ours the minute we had to give it back [a few months after the Sinai campaign].
> *Question*: Then you are saying that the borders fluctuate according to military force?
> *Ben-Gurion*: There are no absolute borders . . . They are not based on an abstract principle but are determined by necessity.[5]

We now turn to the question of how BG's highly theoretical, political concepts of the state's borders took practical shape when the issue was characterized by a high "degree of fluidity", i.e., prior to the signing of the Arab–Israeli Armistice Agreements. In this period the borders had not been determined and various ideas for a territorial solution were still being bandied about.

Ben-Gurion carefully avoided committing Israel to a precisely defined border map. His guiding principle was simple: to maintain the maximum number of options. He opposed the tendency to define territorial aspirations or delineate a border map, even when areas of strategic importance were involved. "Our political supporters," he declared shortly after accepting the United Nations Partition Plan, "must summon all their moral strength to avoid irredentist speeches, publications and propaganda, and intolerable language about the seizure of Eretz Israel, Jerusalem, and other places."[6]

This direction of thinking led him to vigorously reject any hint of defined borders in the wording of the Declaration of Independence. During the political debate over this issue, a fascinating dialogue ensued between BG and one of his most outspoken opponents, Felix Rosenblitt (later, Pinchas Rosen, Israel's first Minister of Justice).

> *Rosenblitt*: There are questions about the borders that must be discussed.

Ben-Gurion: If we decide not to discuss the borders, then we won't discuss them.
Rosenblitt: But this is a legal issue.
Ben-Gurion: Men determine what is legal . . . This is a declaration of independence . . . Where is the legal ruling for this act? . . . Why not declare it? We do not know . . . [how the War of Independence will end and how the border lines will end up], so why should we commit ourselves [in advance to a concrete map]?[7]

In the People's Council on the eve of independence, BG explicitly stated:

Regarding borders, we have decided *to evade the issue* . . . We neither reject nor accept the United Nations proposals. The issue has been left open for developments.[8]

Years later BG related his reasons for opposing defined borders during that period. The main argument rested on whether it should be specified in the declaration of statehood that Israel would be set up only in those areas allotted by the United Nations General Assembly. BG was passionately against this:

Let's assume that during a war we capture Yafo, Ramle, Lod, the Jerusalem Corridor, and the Galilee, and that we wish to hold onto them. Well, it just so happens that we did take these places![9]

Despite BG's efforts at evading the term "historical borders" it seems that its religious–historical characteristics were very familiar to him. In different periods he even spoke at length about the Jewish people's right to all of Eretz Israel on both banks of the Jordan River:

1. In a memo to the British Labour Party in 1921, BG drew a map of Eretz Israel based on "natural borders". The map's features are not important in this connection. What does call for attention is his assertion that in outlining the map, "We have taken into consideration the historical borders of Eretz Israel."[10]
2. In later correspondence, it turns out that he had a vague concept of "strategically safe borders". "There is no reason for including the Sinai Peninsula, Lebanon, or regions of Syria or Saudi Arabia."[11]
3. Elsewhere he distinguished between "the borders of Eretz Israel" and those of the "State of Israel": "The State of Israel is not identical with Eretz Israel. The state's borders have been determined by [the outcome of our political and military struggle]. The borders of Eretz Israel, on the other hand, include Hebron, the Old City of Jerusalem, the entire Jordan Valley, and more . . . The Law of Return too, one of the country's Basic Laws, has retained the term "Eretz Israel" because this law grants every Jew in the world the right to return to Eretz Israel."[12]

"Minimal Borders" – The United Nations Partition Plan

When the United Nations Partition Plan was adopted on 29 November 1947, BG announced to the world that the Yishuv accepted the plan in its entirety. Bitter struggles within the Yishuv over this decision seem to have lent greater authority to the leadership's commitment to the Partition Plan.

Over the years, Israel, with an eye to the media, tactically emphasized its willingness to go along with the United Nations plan. Its readiness to pay the price of the plan's "absurd" borders was constantly voiced by official spokesmen eager to demonstrate Israel's heartfelt desire to reach a peace agreement. Israeli approval was contrasted with the obstinate, uncompromising Arab position, utterly disdainful of the Partition Plan, which rejected the idea of a Jewish state no matter what its borders were.

Even Sharett, one of the most moderate ministers in the Cabinet, admitted that the price being asked was tantamount to "surrendering almost half of the country, whose entire redemption had been beseeched in prayer and hope for so many generations".[13]

After the war, an effort was made to prove to the world that by accepting the Partition Plan, Israel had demonstrated its sincere wish to avert bloodshed, and preferred even a loose and unfavourable agreement rather than another round of fighting. This was Israel's policy despite its full understanding of the terrible injustice the plan would cause.

> When we agreed to the Partition Plan, we accepted it in all honesty. We did this not because the plan was good or just, but because a small area received through peaceful means was preferable to us than a large area won by fighting.[14]

It seems that although these attitudes truly reflect the national leaders' positions on settling the conflict, they actually show only half the picture. Concentration on statements alone might distract us from the need to examine the reality from different angles. Basically, Israel's presentation of the events tells only its side of the "truth"; and it is questionable if it expresses all "the truth".

Ben-Gurion's acceptance of the Partition Plan appears to be based on his highly developed, integrated understanding of the Arab world, the international community, and their relations to the Yishuv and to Zionism. BG, it seems, came to believe that the Arabs would never agree to the existence of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel regardless of the borders. In fact, he felt that the border map played only a minor role in the Arab world's outlook on partition. He was convinced that map coordinates and histor-

ical topography meant nothing to the Arabs since their only interest was in impeding the establishment of a Jewish state.

Under these circumstances BG concluded that the creation of Israel and demarcation of its borders would, unfortunately, be decided by force, and that in this struggle Israel would have to "go it" alone. He wrote in his diary in no uncertain language: "We were ready to accept the November 29 United Nations decision, but we knew that the United Nations was impotent, and that the Arabs would try to decide things by force (with the help of Britain). War was inevitable."[15]

Elsewhere he declared openly that a military confrontation with the Arabs was unavoidable:

> We knew from the start, well before the outbreak of hostilities, that we would eventually come to a military clash with the Arab states, and it was clear that it would demand a supreme sacrifice on our part to survive the onslaught.[16]

In retrospect, it appears that BG's decision to accept partition was based on his conviction that the prospects for normal relations with the Arabs were extremely poor. Radical trends and the accompanying sense of empowerment in the Arab world, gave the Arabs reason to believe they could push aside the United Nations decision. All these factors led BG and other Zionist leaders to realize that confrontation between the Arab world and the Zionist state was a foregone conclusion.

It seems reasonable to assume that the moment the November 1947 partition map was drawn up, BG understood that war was inescapable. It also appears that he realized the country's borders would be determined by the outcome of the confrontation. Years later he recalled his thoughts at this dramatic time:

> I told my colleagues that it was unnecessary to demarcate the borders. The state would not come into existence through power of the United Nations' authority, and the Partition Plan would not decide our permanent borders. The state . . . would be established only through the strength of the Jewish people; in other words, Jewish military power that was still in the process of being created . . . The army would determine the borders.[17]

That was also Dayan's view, as he recollected many years later: "Ben-Gurion's support of the Partition Plan," he stressed, "rested on the assumption that partition was not the final word. By the force of our growing strength *we would expand* our control to areas beyond the partition borders and we would settle all of Eretz Israel."[18]

It seems reasonable, then, that prior to his approval of partition, BG made it clear to his closest colleagues in the national leadership that the Yishuv's commitment to the partition borders would depend on how far they related to the future state's national interests. If they were beneficial,

then IDF activity would be restricted to within the lines; if not, then Israel's military activity would be unleashed wherever necessary.

At a later stage, when the Arab–Israeli conflict had become a permanent feature of the region, BG reiterated these principles with greater trenchancy. In a famous speech, he railed against the view, popular in certain circles, that the goal of the war was to safeguard only "what there is"; namely, those border lines that had been approved by the international community:

> I disagree with this view. In this war we have one goal only: the realization of Zionism and not just defence of the Yishuv . . . We have the strength to defend the entire country and I know where the source of our strength lies . . . It is our Zionist willpower.[19]

It was natural that Israel's commitment to partition eroded with the turning of the tide in the war and the assurance of victory. Nevertheless, BG repeatedly asked his political colleagues to refrain from using expressions that might suggest Israel had an obligation to any of the border maps, and especially that of the United Nations. In a meeting of the State Council, he asserted:

> One of our colleagues asked why we had to promise a return of the captured territories. Nobody has said anything about this. It would be unwise to announce their surrender . . . Events are still taking place . . . We have the strength to liberate more of the homeland.[20]

Foreign Minister Sharett followed suit, but in his moderate, reserved manner was cautious, while the war was being fought, not to shut the door on the Partition Plan. He qualified his belief that in the present circumstances Israel's commitment to the United Nations plan was rapidly disintegrating. Partition, he explained, was based on four principles: (1) Jewish and Arab states should be established in Eretz Israel; (2) Jerusalem should be governed under international rule; (3) the two states should form an economic union; (4) partition should be realized by peaceful means.

The presentation of these four principles was intended to support his claim that Israel's commitment to partition was minimal. Since the Arabs were not adhering to the main sections of the plan, especially its realization by peaceful means, Israel was also "freed" from its obligations (albeit Sharett felt that this should not be made public).

> When we accepted the United Nations decision, we accepted it *en bloc* . . . If some of its sections do not serve our needs, then our acceptance will be reopened to debate . . . This need not be decided right now, but it should be understood that the question remains open and our previous approval is no longer binding . . . I am not claiming that the 29 November plan is no longer valid, but it is difficult to imagine its revival.[21]

In talks with King Abdullah in May 1949, Sharett candidly admitted that partition was no longer applicable for Arab–Israeli negotiations. Reporting on his talk with the Jordanians, he revealed:

> The Jordanian Prime Minister asked if we had agreed to the 29 November United Nations decision, or if our intentions, as understood from my statements, meant that negotiations would proceed only on the basis of the war's *faits accomplis*. I told him that the November decision had lost all meaning, and that the only practical basis for negotiations was the *faits accomplis* on the ground. The Prime Minister reacted somewhat harshly, even angrily, for if this was true, then the Arab world would have nothing to say to us and peace could be forgotten. I explained to him that the United Nations decision was now dead and buried. It had been founded on assumptions that had not been realized . . . It was impossible to turn the clock back.[22]

As the years passed, it became apparent that the Partition Plan would remain an unused tool. After the War of Independence the awareness sank in, even in Arab countries and in the international community, that the plan had lost all likelihood of being employed as a solution to the conflict. Israeli military superiority had been clearly demonstrated in the last stages of the war at the point when the Arabs understood that continued fighting would only cause them to suffer greater damage, including the loss of additional territory in the "Arab Homeland". Their consent to signing the Armistice Agreements signalled their acknowledgement of Israel's military might and ability to design a new border map, which became the armistice borders.

This did not prevent the Arab countries, however, from insisting on an Israeli withdrawal to the original partition borders as the minimum lines acceptable for a political agreement. Over the years, the vigour of this demand wore off as the Arab countries themselves ceased to believe in the practicality of their ultimatum, whose repetition was obviously mere lip-service. A similar process took place in the international arena where the plan had first been appraised as a valuable programme for a Middle East settlement. Here too changes gradually took the bite out of original positions and eroded their effectiveness.

Armistice Borders – The Implications of the Missed Opportunity

After the Armistice Agreements were signed it dawned on all parties that the armistice borders had actually become Israel's "permanent borders" and a withdrawal from them was totally unacceptable to the Zionist lead-

ership. BG viewed the border map as Israel's greatest achievement of the war. His main interest now lay in safeguarding the borders and foiling all attempts at forcing Israel into a narrower territory.

On the basis of this new border map, he reiterated Israel's readiness to reach a peace agreement with the Arab countries. Peace, he stressed, would be based on the territorial status quo created at the end of the War of Independence (sometimes he added a defined time span, such as "an agreement for one hundred years").[23]

Under BG's dominating sway, Israel appeared content with its new borders and had no plans for territorial expansion. However, the picture was vastly more complicated. Despite the great satisfaction over the armistice borders, a pervasive malaise can be detected among the nation's political leaders over the new map, especially regarding the eastern (Jordanian) front and Gaza Strip.

The prevailing feeling was that the new borders were acceptable only because they were the result of military and political circumstances at the end of the war. In other words, the map was created under an "emergency order" limited by the degree of international pressure applied to Israel in the last stages of the fighting, preventing it from further territorial expansion. Consequently, it was widely felt that Israel was not obliged to view the present borders as either beneficial or final.

Unease over the armistice borders combined with a deep sense of missed opportunity from the feeling that the IDF could easily have captured more ground at the end of the fighting. Mention was also made of another prize that slipped out of Israel's grasp – attaining a larger Jewish majority by "hastening the exodus" of additional Arabs.

This view comes as somewhat of a surprise. For decades the Zionists have claimed that Israel's survival in the War of Independence should be seen as nothing short of a miracle. After such an achievement, it would seem logical for Israel to be euphoric rather than frustrated by a gnawing sense of omission or failure. To recount, at the end of the war:

1. Israel had enlarged its territory beyond what was allocated in the Partition Plan.
2. The Arab countries had given their *de facto* recognition of the new borders within the framework of the Armistice Agreements.
3. A guaranteed Jewish majority had been created in Eretz Israel (following the flight of hundreds of thousands of Arabs).
4. Jerusalem's status was established as the capital of Israel.

Despite the country's appreciation of these achievements and its realization that heavy international pressure had retarded territorial expansion, a chronic sense of lost opportunity was festering that would

reach full expression in the following years. People who were personally involved in decision-making exhibited signs of inner conflict; more than anything they seemed to express uncertainty and ambivalence at taking a definite position and reaching the "final truth".

Ben-Gurion himself, as head of the political–military establishment during the war, made statements that are perplexing and difficult to categorize, such as his unequivocal rejection of the double accusation that the whole city of Jerusalem could have been captured, and that the failure to do so lay in the political sphere.

> If this was true we would have to place the government or Knesset members on trial, perhaps before a military tribunal . . . Much blood was spilled trying to liberate Jerusalem. We succeeded in taking a large section of the city, and it truly saddens me to hear these absolutely false accusations.[24]

Ben-Gurion repeated these sentiments many years later in response to charges put by Yigal Allon, ex-commander of the Palmach, that the military had botched the capture of Jerusalem.

> He [Allon] does not know what happened during the War of Independence even though he was a good commander . . . He is not familiar with the war's history. There were very few Jews in the Old City [of Jerusalem], around 1,500 facing 20,000 Arabs. There was a serious lack of weapons in both the Old City and the rest of the country . . . The battle for Jerusalem ended because we were unable to fight any longer.[25]

Elsewhere BG claimed that reasons other than the balance of forces prevented an expansion of the armistice lines, especially on the eastern front. Towards the end of the war (January 1949) he declared:

> We welcome peace in place of war . . . If tomorrow the Arab countries desire peace with Israel . . . we will make every effort to reach an accord with them . . . Even though we are aware that more could be achieved through war.[26]

In a Knesset debate on the Armistice Agreements shortly after the war, he spoke in like manner:

> I prefer not to delve into the question whether we could have seized more territory . . . I accept the assumption that we could have captured the Triangle [an area located between the Arab cities of Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarem] and Hebron. But the whole picture had to be looked at before embarking on these military campaigns.[27]

At a later date, in a fascinating dialogue with the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, BG revealed that the failure to secure parts of Jerusalem during the war did not stem from a lack of military capability:

Dayan: All of the objectives we failed to capture could have been taken. This includes Latrun [the entrance to the Jerusalem Corridor], Gaza, Faluja [modern Kiryat Gat] and Jerusalem.
Ben-Gurion: So why didn't we?
Dayan: We weren't stubborn enough.
Ben-Gurion: I know why we didn't take Jerusalem, and it was not because our strength was lacking.[28]

Several years later BG was asked what he regretted in hindsight. His reply:

> There is something that I do regret. During the war I proposed a certain policy to the government . . . That was back in 1948 after Jordan broke the Armistice Agreement. But a majority in the Cabinet was opposed . . . to capturing Jerusalem and the Hebron region.[29]

Ben-Gurion later revealed that he had no doubts that the IDF could have seized Jerusalem and Hebron in an offensive and then swept east and taken the Dead Sea area. When the Jordanians violated the Armistice Agreement by sabotaging the Rosh Ha'ayin–Jerusalem water line, BG announced that Israel too was no longer bound by the stipulations of the agreement. After consultation with IDF officers, he ordered the army to advance into territory east of the armistice lines. In later testimony, however, the exact size and location of the area intended to pass into Israeli sovereignty was not given.

The following statements reveal the ambiguity over this subject: "The war will be more than a punitive strike. Since they have hit our water line, we will seize an area south of Ramallah." "We will capture all of Jerusalem and the Hebron region, but no more. We are not talking about areas to the north [of Jerusalem]." "The war should be fought for the entire city of Jerusalem all the way to Hebron . . . Our border should be the Jordan River and Dead Sea." "I proposed to the government that we attack . . . the entire Hebron region extending south of Ramallah, through the Jerusalem district, all the way east to the Jordan River and south to the Negev." "I suggested . . . going to war against Jordan in order to seize the whole area south of Ramallah all the way to Akaba; in other words, the entire Jerusalem and Hebron regions."[30]

The IDF's ability to execute these operations, it seems, was not seriously questioned. The main problem was the time element. BG's appraisal was more "optimistic" than that of the General Staff.

> The General Staff told me that we could capture the entire area in two weeks. Other people, including myself, thought that seven days would suffice, perhaps even less.[31]

In his statements in this period one detects a subtle criticism of the

General Staff. It is conceivable that BG expected the army to manifest a more enthusiastic approach to his expansionist plans and display greater confidence in the government. At one point he even took exception to the General Staff's performance during the war and obliquely referred to its responsibility for losing the opportunity to gain more territory.

> If Moshe Dayan had been Chief-of-Staff at the start of the War of Independence, the state's borders today would be different, and we would have attained a greater military victory . . . Unfortunately I did not know Dayan then, but I had the feeling that they [opposition to BG within the IDF] were trying to conceal him from me.[32]

The sense of lost opportunity following the war was especially directed at Jerusalem because it was only a moderate objective, and because of its historic, religious and symbolic meaning for Israel and the Jewish people. One of the most vociferous charges brought against the military "fiasco" referred to the alleged understanding between Israel and King Abdullah over dividing the jurisdiction of the city. According to this rationale, the reason for not capturing Jerusalem was political, and totally unrelated to Israel's military capability.

This accusation naturally became the target of criticism from several directions. One of the most prominent scholars of the War of Independence, Elhanan Oren, determinedly assailed this charge by presenting a detailed description of IDF deployment and a comprehensive survey of events. He came to the conclusion that the failure to capture Jerusalem stemmed solely from military considerations. To buttress this claim he quoted Yitzhak Rabin, commanding officer of the Harel Brigade during part of the war.

> I have read [the charges which state] that for the sake of peace with Abdullah, Ben-Gurion was willing to concede sections of Jerusalem . . . This contention has upset me. Why? Because I was witness to how intensely Ben-Gurion wanted [to take the city]. There was no political interest involved here. Actually the opposite held true. There was a political call to liberate the city. If Jerusalem was not liberated during the fighting, then it was because we were not able to liberate it, and whoever says otherwise does not know what he is talking about.[33]

One of the loudest exponents of the "lost opportunity" theory came from Yigal Allon. He repeatedly voiced his conviction that the IDF could have easily seized additional areas of Eretz Israel. He laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of the politicians, i.e., the nascent state's leaders.

> I was not satisfied with the way the War of Independence ended. If it was up to me, things would have turned out differently . . . The border lines should

> have been different. Even then I was convinced that we had to reach the Judean Desert and Jordan River in order to create a stable defence line and prevent future wars; no one would listen to me.[34]

This blunt language was spoken by a top commander of the war, involved in nearly all of its theatres of operation. His charges relate not only to Jerusalem and its vicinity, but also to areas void of national–emotional sentiment. In a meeting with BG during the war, Allon bitterly castigated him for the lost opportunity to seize more territory.

> Opportunities for overwhelming victories were let slip by – in the Galilee, at Malkiya [on the Lebanese border] and Jenin [on the West Bank]. Even after Operation Nachshon [the attempt to liberate the Tel-Aviv–Jerusalem road] no convoys went out [to capture additional areas].[35]

Elsewhere Allon recalled BG's other "crimes", particularly his order to withdraw from eastern Sinai and his decision to forgo the capture of the Gaza Strip.

> I pointed out to Ben-Gurion that we were about to miss an historic opportunity for I was certain that the Egyptians would not give up Gaza in the armistice talks. Ben-Gurion stood up and said: "I shall bring you Gaza on a silver platter from the negotiation table, there the issues will be decided by our victories."[36]

Ben-Gurion did not take these broadsides passively. He often described Allon's operations in eastern Sinai as having taken place without the knowledge of the civilian authorities. "Yigal Allon," he stated, "served in the War of Independence as the commander of Yitzhak Tabenkin's private army within the IDF; this was a force known as the Palmach . . . Allon decided on his own initiative to cross into Sinai."[37] Occasionally he was even more outspoken: "Without consulting anyone, General Allon chose to carry out a foolish and reckless act."[38]

Justifying his order to Allon to withdraw at once from newly captured areas, BG revealed his own immense anxiety over the possible deployment of the British army against Israel.

> Foreign Minister Bevin continuously sought a pretext for getting involved in the war on the Arabs' side. A secret memo that he sent me bristled with threats. *Inter alia*, if we crossed the Egyptian–Israeli border in northern Sinai, Great Britain would consider it a *casus belli* . . . in this case, the entry of Great Britain on the Arabs' side would probably have turned the tables on our entire position in the war and jeopardized our final victory. Therefore, I ordered Allon to withdraw immediately.[39]

Ben-Gurion and Sharett: "Sorrow for Generations"

The sense of a missed opportunity for gaining more territory is further highlighted by the incessant rivalry between BG and Sharett in the period after the war. In order to demonstrate to his colleagues Sharett's dangerous political views and his unsuitability for the highest offices of government, BG frequently exposed Sharett's "past sins", such as his advocacy against the seizure of "homeland territory", including Jerusalem. "On one occasion," BG wrote to Mapai officials, "by his single ballot, Sharett voted against my position which caused, if I remember correctly, 'sorrow for generations', and I know that he later regretted it."[40]

In another letter, BG accused Sharett even more maliciously:

> The first time he [Sharett] disagreed with me on a vital issue it was by his single vote in the Provisional Government. I am not certain that he was happy or proud of this. I believe it led to a national blunder of inestimable proportions – the loss of the Old City of Jerusalem, the Hebron Block, and the northern section of the Dead Sea.[41]

Despite these harsh words, it is still questionable whether BG genuinely believed that Sharett's single vote did decide so crucial an issue in Jewish history. It is hard to imagine that BG was unaware that the final decision was in his own hands. One may assume that if BG had been fully convinced that the IDF should have fought more aggressively for Jerusalem and the surrounding area, then Sharett's opposition would not have stood in the way of government consent. In fact, in his diary BG himself practically admits his penitence for this "failure of judgement".

> I do not regret not capturing the Triangle, but I deeply lament our failure to take Jerusalem all the way to Kalia [northern Dead Sea] and further.[42]

It is doubtful whether BG's sorrow corresponds with the assessment that military operations were not carried out because the IDF was unprepared or because of political opposition.

On several occasions BG stated that the decision not to expand the borders was based primarily on the highest national interests rather than on military weakness. One of the main factors mentioned was the demography – the fear of losing a Jewish majority. The nearer the Arabs' flight came to completion, the clearer it became that territorial expansion would mean a larger hostile population, a dangerous fifth column, within the state's borders that would pose a threat to both the Jewish and democratic character of Israel. In a Knesset speech on the Armistice Agreements, BG spoke frankly about this danger:

> If we wish to build up the Jewish state [in all of Eretz Israel] it must be based on a dictatorship of the minority unless the methods used in Dir Yassin [an Arab village where a massacre was carried out during the War of Independence] were adopted throughout the whole country . . . Such a Jewish state, in the present demographic reality of western Eretz Israel is impossible if it is to remain democratic simply because the number of Arabs is greater than the number of Jews, and Dir Yassin is an inconceivable programme for us . . . Today, in 1949, we have to choose between the following alternatives: a greater Eretz Israel, the democratic State of Israel, or the forced expulsion of the Arabs?[43]

Another factor that influenced BG's decision to terminate the war and thus forgo the capture of more territory was his realization that national, economic and cultural projects were of more importance and should take precedence over other needs. Heading the list was mass immigration from both European and Asian states, and the need to channel enormous funds to immigrant absorption. On the eve of the signing of the Armistice Agreements, he declared:

> The question before us concerns Israel's highest priority at this moment of history, *absorbing aliya* [immigration] . . . more than anything else. Immigration has the potential of adding to our strength. Even our conquest of territories does not increase our security as much as the absorption of immigration. The fate of the nation is tied to immigration.[44]

The political ramifications of a unilateral Israeli military operation for border expansion led BG to see its dubious value. The lines reached by the IDF at the end of the war included considerable land outside of the area "allotted" in the internationally recognized Partition Plan. The decision to capture land beyond what had already been seized during the hostilities could have led several countries, including the Great Powers, to make a united move against Israel. A united front could nullify territorial gains, perhaps using military means to force Israel to return to the original partition borders. Sharett did not attempt to exonerate himself of personal responsibility for losing the chance to add territory during the war, preferring to instil in his colleagues the sense that the land won was sufficient for Israel's security needs and that they should be satisfied with this achievement and even appreciate the fact that the territory was not larger.

> In life as in politics, every decision is always a matter of the least of two evils. It is obvious that all of western Jordan [today's West Bank] would be preferable to the state we have won. It is also clear that the state we gained at the end of the war is larger than the state we were prepared to accept in 1947 . . . But the question remains: Which position can we take with the minimum of international logic applied to it? The basic question boils down to: Which choice is realistic?[45]

The Borders of "Eretz Israel" and the Borders of the "State of Israel"

As we have seen, a sense of ambivalence towards the armistice borders pervaded the thinking of BG and other top Israeli officials. On one hand, in public and private declarations, BG asserted that the armistice lines were Israel's permanent borders and should be finalized in a peace agreement. On the other hand, he also insinuated that the armistice lines could not possibly be considered the country's final borders.

Ben-Gurion circumvented this apparent inconsistency by differentiating between the borders of "Eretz Israel" and those of the "State of Israel". "The State of Israel", he asserted,

> is not identical with two basic elements that every other country more or less identifies with: land and people . . . This country lacks stable borders . . . I assume that all of you are familiar with the map of the state and that of Eretz Israel (these are two separate things) . . . Looking at the border lines on the map, they reek of instability . . . There are no natural borders or historical borders, only unnatural borders, and a distinction must be made between the State of Israel and Eretz Israel.[46]

As was his custom, BG avoided defining the borders of Eretz Israel. Interestingly, in most of BG's statements on border expansion, national, religious and historical motives were absent. Instead, he emphasized Israel's borders' vulnerability to infiltration and their precariousness in the event of an all-out war. Sometimes he included, within the perimeters of Eretz Israel, "Hebron, the Old City of Jerusalem, the entire Jordan Valley, etc."[47]

Elsewhere he stressed the difficulty of determining Israel's "natural borders", reiterating that the present borders, i.e., the armistice lines, suffered from "lack of naturalness". "Every strategist," he stressed, "would agree that we must retain the mountain range along the [eastern] border for defence of the country . . . and that the [Jordan] river that flows close by is also a natural border, separating the country from its neighbours."[48]

Ben-Gurion's colleagues in the national leadership were also aware of the gap between the post-1948 borders and Israel's basic security requirements. According to MK Ben-Aharon (Achdut Ha'avoda):

> Israel entered the War of Independence with borders guaranteeing neither security nor survivability. The Gaza Strip protruded like a spear in the state's flesh; terrorists, thieves and murderers used the Strip as a staging area for ambushing the Jewish settlements' transportation lines. We [unfortunately] have reconciled ourselves with the loss of territories long considered insep-

> arable parts of the homeland . . . [This resulted from] our objective weakness in the War of Liberation, our political weakness, and the weakness of a small Jewish community unable to muster all its strength and seize control of natural borders.[49]

Naturally, expressions like these had wide influence in Arab countries and the international arena, where they led people to believe that Israel had not reconciled itself to the territorial status quo at the war's end and had not given up its dream of border expansion. In a secret report from the US State Department, economic and demographic factors were considered the chief reasons pressing Israel towards territorial expansion.

> Israel has limited national resources, but is committed to unlimited immigration. There are groups in the country that support territorial expansion on the assumption that Israel cannot develop within the present boundaries.[50]

Routine expressions of hostility like this, from foreign governments, resulted in bitter counter-responses by Israel. The accusations were shown to be absolutely unfounded and part of a propaganda effort designed to vilify Israel's name in the international arena. It turned out, however, that Israeli officials admitted privately that these charges derived not necessarily from anti-Zionist propaganda but from "the Arabs' genuine fear of expansionist intentions which they relate to us".[51]

A Settlement with Jordan: Pros and Cons

As long as the territorial status quo was not in Israel's interest, then BG rejected any decision that would grant it permanence. This explains his reservations about a territorial settlement with the Jordanians based on the status quo. A diary entry written in the last phases of the war reveals:

> Our future must include peace and friendship with the Arabs. Therefore I am committed to holding talks with Abdullah even though it is doubtful whether the British will allow us to make peace. But it should be clear to the king that . . . we will not lightly condone Jordanian annexation of part of Eretz Israel.[52]

Nearly two years later, BG still held the same position of restraint regarding a peace agreement with Jordan. In his diary he recounted a talk with Sharett: "We discussed relations with Trans-Jordan . . . I conveyed to Moshe my heavy doubts about the value of a *political* settlement."[53]

A few days later, in a meeting with a high-ranking Israeli official, BG described in detail his reluctance to preserve Israel's precarious border map. "Trans-Jordan," he explained, "is neither a stable nor a natural country, it is based on a single individual: King Abdullah, who can meet

his fate anytime. The country is totally dependent on England . . . Is it in our national interest to agree to these absurd borders?"[54]

From a survey of BG's statements one cannot avoid the impression that he was extremely wary about committing Israel to the territorial status that had been formulated following the War of Independence. It is within this framework that his reservations about signing a defence pact with the United States should be examined. Such a pact, he undoubtedly feared, would prohibit Israel from initiating territorial changes. Speaking to Ambassador Eban, he said:

> I have stated that a defence pact intended to defend our borders, as well as the Arabs', is not in our interest. I am against a war of expansion, unless it is forced on us.[55]

Sharett too was sceptical about the benefit of a peace agreement with Trans-Jordan. He was disturbed about the possibility that such an agreement would lead to international recognition of Jordanian rule in areas that had been designated as part of Eretz Israel. In voicing his position, however, his style was less abrasive than BG's. While expressing his uncertainty, he also offered an alternative policy couched in "ambiguous" language:

> We have deep reservations on this matter. First of all, it means granting our signature to Arab sovereignty over different parts of western Eretz Israel, including Jerusalem. The implications of our approval contain unimaginable consequences for it is doubtful if this [the present Jordanian regime] is a matter of long-lasting stability. The whole area could be swallowed up by Syria . . . or even Iraq.[56]

These reservations explain Sharett's delaying tactics over a possible settlement with Jordan. At a staff meeting in the Foreign Ministry, he characterized the Israeli–Jordanian negotiations in the following descriptive way:

> The Jordanians said, "We want peace *immediately*."
>
> We said, "We too want peace, but we cannot run to it. We have to walk. The foundation of the edifice has been laid in the Armistice Agreements, and its walls are the agreements on Latrun, Mt Scopus, the railway, etc."
>
> The Jordanians replied, "You want to buy time and then abandon us. No, first there must be a signed peace treaty."
>
> We answered, "It is impossible to run to peace, we have to approach it slowly."[57]

An even more vigorous position was taken by the Director of the Foreign Ministry, Walter Eytan, when asked about Israel's priorities: a peace agreement with Egypt or with Jordan. "Egypt," he answered, "is preferable;

Trans-Jordan less so. Peace with Egypt would have an enormous influence on the Arab world; this is not the case with Jordan."[58]

Despite these reservations, when the time came for a decision, Sharett was fully prepared to reach an agreement with Jordan although it would mean Jordan's annexation of hefty sections of Eretz Israel. In a debate with BG, Sharett justified his position, thereby placing himself in direct opposition to Dayan. BG laconically recorded Sharett's views in his diary: "Moshe favours negotiations with Jordan; i.e., recognizing the annexation of the West Bank by Jordan."[59]

Sharett admitted that an Egyptian settlement was preferable. Its unfeasibility, however, led him to rationalize the special advantages of the Jordanian track. Peace with Jordan implied *de jure* recognition of its annexation of the West Bank; but this, he believed, had little practical meaning, because Jordan was ruling the area *de facto*, and Israel had no intention of embarking on a war of conquest.

> If we reach a settlement with Abdullah that contains recognition of our sovereignty over part of western Eretz Israel, then it should be signed wholeheartedly. If we succeed, we will not be losing anything. In fact we will only be gaining a better position than the present state of affairs. As it stands now, Abdullah rules over the West Bank, and we have no plans to go to war over it.[60]

Sharett was convinced that an agreement with Jordan would have a positive influence on four major issues: (a) It would grant legal recognition of the armistice lines by an Arab country. (b) It would be a milestone on the road to solving the refugee problem because Jordan's position on this issue was relatively flexible. (c) It would strengthen King Abdullah and reduce his dependence on Great Britain. A decline of Britain's power in the region was in Israel's interest. And finally, (d) the agreement would break the circle of isolation surrounding Israel. It would ease security tensions and reduce the danger of another round of fighting.

On 22 February 1950 the Israeli Cabinet met to discuss plans for an Israeli–Jordanian settlement designed to "safeguard the existing armistice borders". In the course of the discussion, BG and Sharett both stated that they agreed to the proposed outline, although in the same breath they pointed to the unresolved issues still facing the two countries. Sharett claimed that the new agreement should be considered a stage beyond the Armistice Agreements.[61]

Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, emphasized the shortcomings of the new agreement, especially Israel's official surrender of parts of Jerusalem, and its recognition of Jordanian control of the West Bank. Nevertheless, BG too regarded the new agreement as a turning point in relations with the Arab world where the advantages were greater than the disadvantages.[62]

Politicians from other parties who were potential coalition partners also shared this view. In their efforts to justify adherence to the agreement they raised the following points:

1. A peace agreement would split the Arab world, which had until now been united in the struggle against Israel.
2. This would encourage other Arab states to follow suit.
3. The agreement would remove American pressure on Israel to make territorial concessions.
4. It would greatly enhance the legitimacy of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.
5. A settlement would end certain disputes between Israel and Jordan, such as the status of the Hebrew University on Mt Scopus, Latrun, etc.[63]

Sharett wielded all his diplomatic skill to advance the settlement with the Jordanians. He implored the United States ambassador in Israel to persuade Jordan to sign the agreement without delay. However, the ambassador reminded Sharett that Jordan was heavily occupied with a crisis that was more than a local power struggle between king and opposition. It was, the ambassador believed, a clash between positive and negative forces. Jordan, he stressed, was at a turning point in its history.

Consequently, the ambassador recommended that instead of pressuring Abdullah, the United States should lend him moral support. Sharett, he reported, was asking the United States to grant the king economic and moral aid, either clandestinely or openly. Sharett also suggested that it would be beneficial for President Truman to relay a personal message of encouragement to the king. A similar position was conveyed by Sharett to the British ambassador in Israel. Consequently, the latter came to the conclusion that "the Israelis are very interested in the success of the talks with Jordan, and have no need of being persuaded in this direction".[64]

Annexation of the Gaza Strip: Pros and Cons

At the Lausanne Conference a proposal was handed to the Israeli delegation that suggested that Israel should annex the Gaza Strip along with its entire Arab population. Zionist leaders had already wrestled with this issue in the past. The geographical location of Gaza, "which pricks our flesh like a spear", left no doubt in BG's mind that "according to the geographical rationale Gaza should be part of Israel".[65]

Added to this view were also two major strategic considerations: Gaza's proximity to Israel's population hubs in the centre of the country; and the

huge concentration of refugees living in squalid conditions and thirsting for revenge. Together they presented Israel with serious military threats both on the strategic level and on the daily security level. For these reasons, some politicians repeatedly accused BG of the unforgivable "sin" of ordering the Palmach commander, Yigal Allon, to withdraw from Sinai at the end of the War of Independence. By doing this, they claimed, BG had allowed the "historic opportunity" of taking the Gaza Strip to slip through Israel's hands. Years later, Allon recalled:

> Ben-Gurion's order to retreat from Sinai within one day and pull our forces out of Rafiah, where we had cut off Gaza from Sinai, was done in immediate response to American pressure. We forfeited a brilliant historical victory in order to achieve important political objectives.[66]

When the proposal to take Gaza and Sinai was put before the Israeli government, it naturally had a divisive effect. BG inclined to agree with the proposal, basing his reasoning on strategic, military, economic and political considerations:

> The Gaza coast is of absolute importance. The soil there is fertile; and fishing villages can be established. The area has both economic and defensive value. The border with Egypt could be here. Otherwise, this could develop into a serious military disadvantage in the future both on land and even more from the sea. Abdullah's presence in Gaza would be checked, and this would also keep the British out. This could prevent a territorial conflict, for if Abdullah (or his heirs) ruled Gaza he would undoubtedly demand a land corridor [from the Gaza Strip to Jordan].[67]

The main opponent of the proposal to annex Gaza was the Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett. Cognizant of the size of the population there (between 150,000 and 180,000, including refugees and permanent inhabitants), he was greatly disturbed. If Israel integrated the Gaza Strip the number of Arabs inside Israel would jump to 300,000. Taking into consideration the size of the Jewish population at the time (about 600,000), Sharett feared that the demographic balance would seriously endanger the Jewish character of the state.

He also claimed that annexation would prompt some of the refugees to return to their abandoned homes. This would lead to a return to the same dangerous, confrontational bi-national incongruity that had existed in the Yishuv before the War of Independence. At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Sharett stated:

> As for the Gaza Strip, our present policy is to leave the question open. Its annexation to Israel is not a simple matter . . . it entails our willingness to absorb 170,000 Arabs. The Arab minority would swell to 300,000, including

> the refugees, and we would not be able to withstand the pressure to permit their return to their homes. They would spread across the southern part of the country all the way north to Yafo.[68]

Yigal Yadin, the head of the IDF's Operations Branch, supported Sharett on this issue and offered the following advice:

> If they gave us the Gaza Strip on a silver platter and we took it, it would be a catastrophe. The problems involved with Gaza are insurmountable . . . We have three choices: (1) To convert the Gaza Strip–Rafiah region into an independent area, such as an Egyptian–Israeli protectorate, – an ideal solution in my opinion. (2) To announce our acceptance of the area as it is. (3) To propose a transfer of Gaza's Arabs elsewhere.[69]

Despite these reservations, BG succeeded, as usual, in mustering a government majority to agree to the proposal for acquiring the Gaza Strip. In talks with Mark Ethridge, the United States representative to the Conciliation Commission, BG announced that Israel was willing to accept the Gaza Strip, including the refugees, and that "Israel would allow them to return to their homes".[70]

In a memo to Truman (27 May 1949), a high-ranking US official revealed that Israel was ready to undertake far-reaching measures in order to gain control of the Gaza Strip. He also pointed out that the Israeli delegation at the Lausanne Conference had relayed to Ethridge (it remains vague whether this was done with or without BG's knowledge) its readiness to exchange a section of the Negev for the Gaza Strip. The nature of this trade-off was not made clear. In the ambiguous language of the memo:

> The State of Israel requests the Gaza Strip from Egypt. The delegation has made known its willingness to consider granting some form of territorial compensation from the Negev in exchange for Gaza.[71]

Israel emphasized the security–strategic aspects of the proposal. Heading the list of reasons, however, were those of an ideological–historical nature, such as the national commitment of Israel's leadership to areas of Eretz Israel: "It is inconceivable that the government would refuse land which is part of Eretz Israel."[72]

In addition to this ideological–historical factor, the following reasons were cited as justification for an Israeli decision to annex the Gaza Strip:

1. This Gaza Strip is not simply a tract of land; rather, it completes our control along the entire coastal plain extending from northern Sinai to the Lebanese border, from Rafiah [in the south] to Rosh Hanikra [in the north].
2. This solves a burdensome security problem along the coast. The Gaza

Strip also poses a threat to our rear: the Negev . . . The proximity to the nerve centre of the country . . . would cease to be a danger. We would be returning to a condition where the desert separates us from Egypt.

3. In this way Egypt would definitely be ousted from Gaza . . . Egypt is over-populated and immensely poor . . . If the desert ceases to be a barrier between Egypt and us, the Egyptian masses could easily be transported to this area and the Negev would be flooded with cheap Arab labour.
4. If the Gaza Strip is not in our control . . . the second state in line to gain is Trans-Jordan; and in this scenario we would be caught in a British pincer movement, England to the right, and England to the left. The Negev could be severed from the northern part of Israel at the first sign of violent riots.[73]

Sharett realized that a government decision would be obligating, he therefore moved tactically to defuse "the ticking bomb". In a briefing dispatched to the delegation in Lausanne, he advised keeping a low profile and avoiding the initiative in discussions on this issue. Moreover, he suggested that Israel should make it clear that there was a ceiling on the number of refugees it would be willing to take in:

> We must explain that the maximum number must be determined at the outset. Otherwise, there would be no guarantee that after we agreed to absorb all the refugees, others from Lebanon or Syria or Jordan would not be transferred there.[74]

Sharett also recommended that Israel should look into the possibility of repatriating refugees from the Gaza Strip in Syria or Jordan on the basis of the peace proposal raised by the Syrian president, Huns Za'im. According to Za'im's proposal, Israel would grant Jordan certain privileges, including the free use of the ports in Gaza and/or Haifa, in return for a peace settlement.[75]

The question of Israeli control of the Gaza Strip was revived towards the end of 1955 following intensive efforts at reaching a comprehensive political agreement, especially between Egypt and Israel. A British Foreign Ministry memo reveals that the Israeli Foreign Minister told a Western ambassador that Israel was prepared to consider a territorial exchange with Egypt: the Gaza Strip for the Nitzana (western Negev) region. Sharett believed the trade-off would be accepted because Egypt would acquire an area of strategic importance and relieve itself of the responsibility for Gaza by having Israel take possession of Gaza's 200,000 refugees, who would remain in refugee camps under the auspices of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA).[76]

British sources estimated that Israel would agree to this deal, because of the Gaza Strip's proximity to the centre of Israel, especially Tel Aviv, and the discovery of oil in the north-eastern tip of Gaza. Since Israel was opposed to making unilateral concessions for a political agreement, the territorial exchange for Gaza could be presented as a basis for mutual concessions.[77]

Changes in the Territorial Status Quo

Ben-Gurion and his colleagues believed that a settlement that included the transfer of the Gaza Strip to Israeli control was the best way of altering the armistice borders, and certainly preferable to the use of force. At the same time, BG was also aware that receiving enemy territory as a "gift" was an almost unheard of occurrence in international relations, and unrealistic in the context of Arab–Israeli conflict.

Assuming that this option was only theoretical, then the following question undoubtedly occupied the minds of Israeli leaders at the time: Should the present borders be accepted as permanent geographical features although they failed to satisfy basic security needs, or should Israel initiate a military strike to change them?

It seems that the political and ethical sensitivity of the issue required BG to express himself in cryptic terms on the subject. He seems to have recognized Israel's "right" to possess land in Eretz Israel that went beyond the armistice lines (although he never defined their perimeters). He also understood the strategic necessity of obtaining borders more convenient for Israel than those attained at the end of the war. At the same time, BG certainly knew that an aggressive move to improve Israel's "strategic map" could not take place in the foreseeable future. Apart from military difficulties in fulfilling such an operation, there were also severe political constraints. Thus, BG seems to have resigned himself to the fact that Israel's dreams for all of, or other parts of, Eretz Israel would remain a step-by-step process. According to BG's view of history, the present boundaries should be perceived as a transient phase on the long road to full Jewish territorial sovereignty in Eretz Israel. In the meantime, as long as no viable option existed to "incorporate" a larger area, Israel should take advantage of the present moratorium and work vigorously at constructing "the small country", creating Jewish society, establishing an economic infrastructure, strengthening the army, and preparing for the day when conditions would be ripe for expanding the borders.

In a letter to the Chief Rabbi, Isaac Herzog (apparently in reply to charges of failing to liberate Jerusalem during the War of Independence), BG explicitly stated his view on the conquest of Eretz Israel:

> The fate of Jerusalem and the country have always been interconnected. History, as related in the Torah, was also handed down scroll by scroll, and not all at once. I am certain the day will come when redemption is *completed*. Our generation, however, must do what is required and hope that the task will be finished by our heirs. We should remember the axiom "grasp all – lose all" and the inspiring words from the Book of Exodus, 23: 23–7.[78]

While not suppressing the Jewish people's yearning for "Greater Israel", BG beseeched the nation to "overcome its passion" and agree to the present borders as long as political, security, economic and demographic circumstances prevented the realization of more expansive territorial ambitions.

> In the interim period, until the realization of our dream can be fulfilled, we must display restraint and avoid open and provocative expressions of this dream . . . There are things that should be planned for but never spoken about.[79]

Ben-Gurion frequently made mention of the view that one of the key differences between Mapai and the right-wing parties was the exaggerated importance the Right placed on grandiose declarations despite their impracticality. Mapai, on the other hand, as a middle-of-the-road party, always adopted the pragmatic orientation:

> The basic difference between us . . . is that I have little faith in the value of bombastic declarations and speeches even when they concern glorious, sacred, historical, crucial issues such as the borders of Eretz Israel, the Eternal City, etc. [These declarations are of no consequence] unless accompanied by practical commitment and daily effort, no matter how difficult and exhausting, that will lead to their realization.[80]

This seemingly passive view reflects only one side of BG's political outlook. At the same time he also set the tone of the public mood, seeking openings, the right combination of circumstances to justify an Israeli initiative for changing the territorial status quo. An outstanding expression of this can be found in high-level debates immediately after the war when numerous questions were being aired: Were there forces on Jordan's West Bank seeking to break away from Abdullah's rule and be annexed to the State of Israel? How should Israel exploit this phenomenon?

During the armistice negotiations BG wrote in his diary:

> Walter Eytan [Director of the Foreign Ministry] informed me of a pro-Arab American who arrived in Tel Aviv via the Arab states, and spoke with refugees in the Large Triangle and Gaza region. The refugees want to join the State of Israel while retaining their autonomy . . . I suggested sending one of our people to look into the matter. If this turns out to be true, then it would fundamentally change things . . . Although it would be an added responsi-

> bility, it would give us the opportunity to keep Great Britain from entering western Eretz Israel.[81]

A few days later, he penned:

> We should be wary of the Arabs' mood in the Triangle when they sing praises of a connection with Israel and not to Jordan. But we should not minimize this possibility if it really exists because it could lead to a solution of the Jerusalem question . . . Linkage with the Triangle, if it comes about, would grant us a land bridge from Jerusalem to the Jordan River and Dead Sea. The Arab Legion, however, is deployed there, but it too is not invincible. If the Arabs are serious in their opposition to Abdullah and Egypt, then it is possible to overcome this obstacle.[82]

Sharett also received similar information, and hurried off to brief the Israeli delegation in Lausanne with the following dictum: "Continue examining the chances for an autonomous region in the western part of Eretz Israel, and the growing unrest in this direction."[83]

The Israeli ambassador to the United States, Abba Eban, also had authorized knowledge of separatist trends in Jordan. This influenced his vote on the United Nations decision to unite Ethiopia with Eritrea (which granted limited autonomy to the latter). He compared the two regions: Palestine and East Africa:

> Last week the United Nations passed a plan uniting Ethiopia and Eritrea . . . Eritrea was annexed to the Kingdom of Ethiopia and in effect swallowed up by it, retaining only its domestic administrative identity. We should view this event as a precedent for solving the problem of our borders. They cannot be amended by military means. There are, nonetheless, various elements and tendencies in the Triangle that are moving in the direction of separation from Jordan, and having Arab Palestine face westward towards Israel's Mediterranean coast with its ports and international commercial ties . . . A federative system would allow the Triangle to administer its domestic affairs through its own legal institutions . . . Under such conditions the present border would serve only an administrative function, like the separate political borders between states in the United States. The concentration of the Triangle's foreign affairs and security headquarters in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, would signal de facto annexation and in this way Israel would be free of the stranglehold of the present border.[84]

Ben-Gurion gave top priority to a peaceful transformation of the territorial status quo. On the other hand, it appears that he did not categorically reject the use of force. Under certain circumstances, which he defined as "crossing the red lines", such as the collapse of the royal house in Jordan followed by Iraqi military annexation of the country, he made it clear that Israel would be compelled to respond with its military might.

After King Abdullah's assassination, BG perceived a critical change in the region's status although the royal house remained in power, and he began weighing the possibility of military intervention. Aware that such a move could provoke a severe British response, he sought instead a kind of "package deal" with Great Britain, whereby Israeli activity on Jordanian soil would be accompanied by a simultaneous thrust to the Suez Canal in order to protect British strategic and economic interests. Hearing of Abdullah's murder, Sharett and Reuven Shiloah discussed these matters with BG, who told them in the course of the meeting:

> It is necessary to test the water by talking with [British Prime Minister] Churchill. He has a perspective through his familiarity with both the Arab world and us. It is important to explain to him that we must reach the Jordan River, and perhaps even Suez, and turn the canal into an international waterway. America is pushing England out of Persia, and it could do the same in Arab countries. We share a common interest with Great Britain.[85]

Ben-Gurion also inquired of his Chief-of-Staff, Mordechai Makleff, about the size of the military force needed for seizing all the territory to the Jordan River. Makleff's answer was straight to the point:

> With a forewarning of four days we can mobilize 7–8 heavy brigades, enough to capture this area, and we would still have enough reserve strength to handle the Syrian and Egyptian borders.[86]

Other officials, including Foreign Minister Sharett, regarded BG's policy as expressing the strategic goal of altering the territorial status quo under circumstances that would justify Israeli aggression. It appears though that Sharett harboured deep reservations:

> We should realize that if our policy is to seize the chance to correct the crime [insufficient territorial gain from the war] then this is not a policy of peace. Perhaps it is the best policy [we can devise], but it is not a policy of peace. It means sustaining a high level of tension – which means continuously adding fuel to the fire of hatred – which means obstructing the forces of peace in the Arab world, if there are any . . . The critical factor here is our thoughts and intentions because it is they that determine and hasten the development of events . . . They create in us a certain frame of mind that is reflected in a hundred and one ways, and when taken together add up to a very large sum.[87]

It would seem, then, that it was a policy of "striking when the iron is hot" that marked BG's policy of border expansion. On the other hand, he discreetly refrained from giving the impression that he supported, even indirectly, an unjustified Israeli-initiated attack (although he would probably have been satisfied if Israel was forced to strike first). At any rate, the

call to adopt a bellicose *modus operandi* was voiced by other groups, especially the right-wing parties and Achdut Ha'avoda.

The clearest expression of this 'activist' approach is found in a "personal, top secret" letter sent by Yigal Allon to BG shortly after the War of Independence. Allon reviewed the dangers facing Israel along its eastern border, and added:

> The solution to protecting the centre of the country will not be made by a "topographical improvement" of our defence line. We must strive to obtain reasonable "strategic depth" which, together with the prudent deployment of our forces, can guarantee the security of the state . . . We cannot imagine a border more stable than *the Jordan River, which runs the entire length of the country*. The Jordan's advantage lies not only in its water, which is not a serious obstacle against a modern army, but the entire Jordan Valley, extending to the steep foothills to the west, forms a natural defence line. It can be defended most efficiently by relatively small forces even against a modern army like the British.[88]

Allon realized that this plan clashed with major political and demographic realities, but he presented cogent counter-arguments. Brushing aside political complications, he assured BG that the fighting would be over quickly and the *faits accomplis* would be established before the international community could organize its response. Furthermore, Israel could find a number of justifications for its military venture. In the long run, Allon averred, protest waves and warnings would subside, but on the ground Israel's territorial gains would last for generations.[89]

Allon was fully aware of BG's fears of an increased non-Jewish minority with the addition of territories with a dense Arab population. Here Allon tried to assuage them:

> In the wake of the military operations a large number of Arabs, mainly refugees, would flee eastward. As for those who remained, we would surely find a solution that would allow them to live honourably and permit us to avert a military danger. Whatever the case, it is preferable that they remain under our control rather than under the enemy's where they could be mobilized into a military organization against us.[90]

Dayan too expressed similar, though more circuitous, sentiments in his role as Southern Front Commander. At a secret meeting two years after the War of Independence, he discussed Israel's right to initiate military action to alter the territorial status quo. It was probably only because he was in uniform that he avoided stating his views plainly on this subject, but merely laid out various options to the government, including the following suggestions:

> The first battle in the process of establishing the State of Israel is not over. We still have to determine if the spatial features of the country are final. The state has to decide if the present borders are satisfactory and should remain as they are. As for the war's achievements, time is on our side. If, on the other hand, we believe that our borders are not final . . . then time is against us . . . After WW II the situation in the Middle East allowed for change. These conditions are not over yet . . . However the possibility [for altering things] is approaching its end . . . [Nevertheless] our period is still amenable to change.[91]

Speaking in low key, Dayan endeavoured to convince BG to exploit the Jordanians' difficulty in upholding certain sections of the Armistice Agreements by making a grab for areas east of the armistice lines. In later testimony Dayan revealed this proposal and explained BG's reasons for rejecting it:

> I pleaded with Ben-Gurion to take Mt Scopus, Latrun, and the Old City by force, since Jordan was not abiding by Section 8 of the Armistice Agreements. I told him: "First of all, we can do it. We have the power (I was commander of the Jerusalem Region). Within a matter of hours we could seize the Latrun road, open it, and take Mt Scopus a second time. They signed a treaty, they put their signature on an Armistice Agreement, and you, Ben-Gurion, do not believe the Jordanians should be responsible for seeing to it that we attain our rights! The commitment to our rights is guaranteed in the agreement. If they [the Jordanians] are not carrying out their side of the bargain, then let us do it." If I remember correctly, Ben-Gurion showed me a letter he received from Giora Yosfetal who was in charge of immigrant absorption. It contained information on the number of Yemenite Jews who had arrived in the country and the percentage of those who were ill, and the diseases that were spreading through the transit camps. Ben-Gurion then spoke of the political pressure, mainly from the British, to resettle the Arab refugees in the southern part of the country . . . He got up and said: "At this point, nothing takes precedence over bringing Jews into the country and settling them in the Negev."[92]

Other documents also illustrate BG's grave reservations about the proposals to change the territorial status quo by military force. It was not, however, a rejection in principle of the use of force. His position on this issue was meticulously spelled out, with primary importance placed on solving urgent social and economic problems. In a meeting with senior officials in April 1949, he elaborated on this issue:

> Our domestic and foreign policy should always be determined by the state's interests . . . Israel's main interest at this hour, as I see it, is immigration . . . The fate of the country depends on large-scale immigration. We have, it is true, succeeded in enlarging our territory, but without settlement, these lands have no value . . . Settlement is the practical side of conquest. There is also a

> drawback to every policy . . . It can be argued that it was better to have captured the Large Triangle, Jordan Valley, and the Galilee, but these conquests cannot be compared to immigrant absorption. They have not brought us great advantage in our most vital interest: our commitment to peace with the Arabs.[93]

Ben-Gurion emphasized this position on many occasions: "I have no interest in aggression towards anyone, not even the Arabs," he asserted. "We have no need of additional territory, but of additional Jews, even though the borders are not ideal. This is how it stands. What we really need are more Jews."[94]

Elsewhere, he reiterated this view:

> I am against a war of expansion unless it is forced upon us. Our problem is the lack of Jews, not the lack of space. Conquest all the way to the Jordan River would be a dubious gain right now. It would mean an additional one million Arabs inside the state, more than we could possibly absorb. If they should take flight, then the refugee problem would worsen inside Jordan, and Arab hatred of us would escalate. We missed the opportunity during the war of realizing something very important, and it cannot be retrieved.[95]

This perspective was certainly acceptable to Sharett. Like BG, he did not reject in principle the use of force for changing the territorial status quo, but gave the highest importance to proving to the international community that Israel's acts were morally justifiable. Summing up his outlook, he declared:

> The State of Israel will not get entangled in military adventures by initiating territorial conquest and expansion . . . However, if the Arabs in their stupidity or malevolence create a situation whereby Israel can enlarge its borders without dishonouring the concepts of justice and fairness as accepted among the nations, and without injuring the Arab population – it will be necessary to give the matter consideration.[96]

6

Advantages of a Settlement and the "Lost" Peace

The previous chapter reviewed Israel's relations with the Arab world and the difficulty of a peace settlement. Now we turn to the question of whether the state's leaders believed that a settlement that had to include Israeli concessions would be in Israel's interest?

The benefit of a political settlement began to be questioned in the last stages of the War of Independence when Israel was proving its military superiority on the battlefield. The first question on the agenda was: Should Israel exploit its position to enlarge its war gains, or sheathe its sword and negotiate with the Arabs? During the war Sharett described the dilemma in no uncertain terms:

> At this point we have to clarify our position . . . Are we interested in war or peace? . . . Should our political initiative be directed towards renewing the fighting, continuing our conquest, or negotiating for peace?[1]

The gamut of opinion within the Israeli political system was split even more divisively once the sides sat down to armistice talks. Israel's first Knesset election (25 January 1949) provided the competing parties with the opportunity to offer voters clear policy statements for resolving the conflict.

Mapai's pragmatism called for a cease-fire based on Israel's territorial gains at the close of the war, and the hope for a negotiated settlement. In contrast, there were two categories of political factions:

1. The right-wing parties that Ben-Gurion defined as "verbal maximalists, devoid of willpower and action, that grab everything with only the vacuum of their mouths".[2]
2. The left-wing parties, that he charged, "ramble on and spread confusion in the name of 'brotherhood of nations'. They have replaced the struggle for a Jewish state with the mistaken ideal of a bi-nationalist one".[3]

The issues facing the electorate were justifiably considered fateful for the future of the state: "Only rarely," BG wrote in his diary, "is a nation called upon to decide questions as ponderous and complex as these – shaping the character of the state, determining its borders, voting for war or peace, building the army, initiating mass immigration and absorption, signing political agreements with the country's neighbours, with the United Nations and the Great Powers."[4]

The election handed Mapai a solid majority (34%) as compared with the Left (17%) and Right (11%). Mapai politicians, led by BG, were given a vote of confidence to carry out Israel's policy along the lines they had presented to the voters. However, the ambitious, tantalizing slogans about the possibility of peaceful relations with the Arab world that had attracted voters to Mapai, soon proved unrealistic when making tough political decisions.

The armistice negotiations focused on terminating military activity, but long-term issues were not discussed. The negotiators only succeeded in reaching an icy accord regarding the territorial status quo and the avoidance of future violence. The rest of the agreements dealt exhaustingly with military details.

On the other hand, the Lausanne talks took on a distinctly political character in their attempt to resolve the major issues: borders, refugees, and the status of Jerusalem. Israeli negotiators found themselves forced to clarify, as never before, their government's position on these critical issues. Consequently, Israel's political leadership had to decide on the directions their delegation should take: (1) foot-dragging, in order to stave off, or at least postpone, a situation whereby Israel would be pushed into a corner; (2) a concentrated effort at quickly resolving the issues; or (3) avoiding coming to a decision. Whatever the outcome, the multilateral talks at Lausanne required some sort of a decision. The dilemma facing Israel at the opening of the talks was vividly described by Moshe Sharett in May 1949:

> The question is whether it is sufficient to remain passive and merely react to the other delegations at the negotiations, or take the initiative? What do we really want? Do we want the talks to stretch out indefinitely? There are arguments to both sides. On one hand, what do we lose by stalling? Why should it bother us? A peace treaty signed with the Arab states is not in our vital interest. On the other hand, perhaps we should be serious about seeking a quick solution.[5]

Hopes for a political settlement resurfaced in various discussions after the Lausanne failure, when the Great Powers, especially the United States and Great Britain, tried to jumpstart negotiations. In the historical debate over this issue there is a tendency to compare BG's positions with Sharett's in order to dramatize the differences.

Advantages of a Settlement – Sharett's Position

The question of a political settlement occupied a major portion of Sharett's time and energy as Foreign Minister. In general, he was critical of other trends, especially BG's activist line, and he reproached their vacillation between cold indifference and outright rejection of peace efforts.

However, Sharett was in no way a partisan of pacifism. He took a "dry-eyed" view of the Middle East and emphasized his refusal to succumb to naivety by painting too rosy a picture of an Arab–Israeli settlement. On this point, his position and BG's were markedly similar. Both men believed that a political settlement would remain a distant dream. Nevertheless, at times Sharett lapsed into idealistic cogitations on future Arab–Israeli relations:

> The day will come when our ambassadors will be sent to Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Amman, and Beirut, and the Arabs will send their ambassadors to us. Then a new era in Israel's foreign relations will begin, and our image will be cast in a different light before the world.[6]

Despite his realization of the limitations and risks involved in a political settlement, Sharett dwelt almost obsessively on its advantages. Although some incongruity may be detected in his statements, it would be unfair to censure him for this. The issues at stake were so crucial to Israel's survival, and perhaps even that of the entire Jewish people, that it was natural that the burden of historical responsibility gave rise to occasional contradictions in his declarations.

Sharett claimed that a political settlement would strengthen Israel's security because the Arab states would be committed to keeping the peace according to the spirit and letter of the Armistice Agreements. He had no illusions about Israel's security needs changing overnight, but he believed that a marked improvement would quickly set in. He refuted the hard-liners' charge that peace would not have a positive influence on Israel's security:

> Peace is desirable simply because it is peace. In other words . . . even the Armistice Agreements hamper the Arabs' initiative to launch a new war. How much more so would a peace treaty! In the transition from war to cease-fire to Armistice Agreement, security belts have been added. The transition from Armistice to peace would have an enormous impact on strengthening our security.[7]

Sharett also felt that a peace treaty would improve Israel's political status, which despite the 1948 victory, and recognition by a majority of the member states in the United Nations, was far from stable. The insoluble

Middle East conflict bred violence that only weakened Israel's international support. For this reason, Sharett perceived, even a limited peace treaty would go far in strengthening Israel's image.

He went on to point out that Israel had to reconcile itself to the fact that other nations, especially the Great Powers, had a deep and lasting interest in the region that was rooted in political, economic and strategic considerations in addition to historical–religious ones. Israel had no control over this but should derive as much advantage as possible from it. The perpetuation of the Middle East conflict, he added, endangered the interests of the Western powers, especially the United States, by impeding their ability to develop friendly relations with the Arab world. Regarding international policy, he observed, there was a powerful desire on the part of the Great Powers to end the conflict before an uncontrolled flare-up led to a Superpower confrontation. Therefore Israel had to show its willingness to consider a political settlement at any price and to be sensitive towards the Great Powers' affairs in the region. If Israel was considered an obstacle to a peace agreement, Sharett warned, the inevitable result would be a worsening of its international status.

A resolution of the conflict could also have favourable consequences for Israel's economy. Sharett frequently made mention of this, reminding his listeners of the absence of commercial ties with neighbouring countries and the economic boycott Israel was forced to suffer. Sharett's view had nothing in common with certain statements made by BG that Israel actually profited from the boycott by being forced to develop its own meagre resources to the maximum.

Sharett was accustomed to back up his assertions with concrete examples. He described in glowing terms the potential of Arab–Israeli tourist projects; Israel's ability to purchase cheap oil from Arab countries; the eagerness of international companies to grant Israel credit; the development of transportation, air traffic, etc.[8]

He voiced these dreams at a time when Israel's nascent economy was on the verge of collapse because of its lack of resources, its enormous military expenses, and the waves of immigrants arriving at its shores. The economic advantages to be accrued from an Arab–Israeli settlement appeared extremely attractive. On another level, Sharett claimed, resolution of the conflict with the Arab world would probably allow Israel to break out of the ring of confinement. Since 1948, he claimed, Israel had been completely cut off from its neighbours and pushed to carry on its commercial activity with distant countries. This had grave implications for life in Israel.

> Today we are involved in malevolent isolation. We have no contact with neighbouring countries, no commercial relations with them; our existence is

> not even recognized . . . We cannot continue ignoring the pain that this isolation is causing the country.[9]

While Sharett agonized over his countrymen's oblivion to this anomaly and their indifference to its resolution, he blamed their natural myopia, *inter alia*, on the euphoria that engulfed the Jewish community following independence and battlefield victory. Pride at military and political triumph, he reproved, need not dull the sense of isolation.[10] He believed that only a termination of the conflict, accompanied by full Arab recognition of Israel, including the establishment of diplomatic relations and commercial and cultural ties, would put an end to Israel's insularity. Otherwise, "we will remain a foreign body in the Middle East, and our growth and development will be seriously limited".[11]

Additional fruits of peace would come in the form of Israel's improved international stature. According to Sharett the tragic fate of the Palestine Arabs had usurped the Jewish people's traditional monopoly on underdog status, and the world sympathy that was generally granted to this misfortune. Sharett reminded his listeners that Israel's image had been further tarnished by its refusal to adhere to United Nations decisions on the refugees and the internationalization of Jerusalem, and by its hard-line security policy.

In Sharett's opinion, the struggle for world opinion was not a "lost cause". The hostile reaction to Israel following its military operations was not a "Heavenly edict" as the activists, led by BG, believed. Sharett saw that Israel had the ability to change this view, but first it had to recognize the significance of international relations in planning its foreign and defence policies. It should, however, be stressed that notwithstanding his sensitivity to Israel's international status, Sharett did not overvalue world opinion when forming the country's policy.

> I am not saying that we have to always fear an unfavourable verdict of world opinion. We have no reason to be deterred by that verdict once we believe in the justice of our cause . . . or if our vital interests are at stake. But this does not imply we should disparage it. World opinion must be taken into consideration in all our political and military planning.[12]

Israel, he emphasized, should be aware that the absence of a settlement could lead to international pressure to force a solution. A deadlock, he believed, could not last long. The international community, and especially the Great Powers, had vital strategic and economic interests in the region, and would not allow the conflict to persist indefinitely and imperil their interests. A forced settlement by foreign states would not be good for Israel and would probably compromise the fruits of the 1948 victory. Regarding the Lausanne talks, Sharett stated:

> If we reach an impasse, then people would have cause to say: "There is no alternative to a forced solution on both sides." I assure you this will not be to our advantage.[13]

Finally, Sharett explained that Israel, more than any other state in the region, would suffer in the long run the consequences of the absence of a solution. He remained critical of BG's positions, especially his statements that the passage of time without a resolution actually worked in Israel's favour.

He believed that the formulation of an international alignment that rejected Israel's position on certain controversial issues was certainly undesirable. To make his point, Sharett pointed to Egypt's closure of the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping although this went against signed sections of the Armistice Agreements. Israel, he noted, made no serious move to exercise its maritime rights because of the political deadlock, and gradually the international community had come to accept what Egypt had done. This was certainly detrimental to Israel.

A similar condition existed in Israeli–Jordanian relations. The Armistice Agreements had granted Israel the right to visit Jewish holy sites in Jerusalem, especially the Western (Wailing) Wall. Jordan, however, revoked this right in flagrant violation of the treaty's terms. Here, too, political deadlock compelled Israel to remain silent and let Jordanian intransigence become a political *fait accompli* – to Israel's distinct disadvantage.

Ben-Gurion and the Arab–Israeli Settlement: Criticism of the "Lost Peace"

As far as Israel's leaders were concerned, there was no need to elaborate on the benefits of a peace settlement. It was obvious that a cease-fire was preferable to flying bullets; an armistice agreement to a cease-fire; and a political settlement to an armistice. Genuine lasting peace was the highest goal. These truisms were self-evident, and Sharett realized he was not coining anything new. Nevertheless he repeated them so often that it appeared to his listeners that he alone among the Israeli leaders laboured for an Arab–Israeli settlement.

In his repeated calls for a settlement, Sharett portrayed the national leadership as politicians deaf to the urgent need for an agreement, and worse, as a group hostile to the idea of peace with its Arab neighbours. His statements convey the image that Sharett was the lone Cabinet member blessed with the ability to envision the benefits of a political settlement with the

Arab world. "We must make an effort," he declared in March 1953, "to open the eyes of party members to the complex condition we are stuck in as long as peace eludes us. Party members live in a shell and are blind to the outside."[14]

These statements do not seem to have been made incidentally, in the frustrated yearning for peace, nor do they seem the natural expression of sorrow by a leading Israeli figure. Whatever his intention, he implied that a settlement was attainable, but was being evaded through Israeli intransigence and unwillingness to compromise with the Arabs. He took careful aim at his colleagues in the highest posts in the national leadership, and also perhaps against the entire Israeli public who, he lamented, "had lost interest in peace".[15]

Out of deep respect, and perhaps for tactical reasons too, Sharett in general declined to mention BG by name when delivering his broadsides. Rather than reproaching BG head-on, he preferred to list the advantages of a peace settlement (which, he seemed to imply, had been completely overlooked by the state's leaders). His criticism was frequently directed at people close to BG, mainly Moshe Dayan after he had been appointed Chief-of-Staff. But despite Sharett's dissembling, no one in the "game" had any doubt that BG alone was being referred to.

Ben-Gurion also understood the "practical" meaning of Sharett's charges of lack of progress in the peace process. In fact, BG occasionally felt the need to express his concept of peace more defensively. In exceptionally self-justificatory style he reiterated that his desire for peace was honest to the core, and not merely an exercise in verbal tactics. "We long for peace with all our hearts . . . This is not a manoeuvre for foreign consumption . . . but the way we feel most deeply."[16]

On another occasion, during a Cabinet meeting called to discuss the Arab policy, he admitted:

> The Foreign Minister has widened the scope of his inquiry . . . whether our words are really intended for peace or only a ploy. As for myself, I answer unhesitatingly that our statements on peace are not a trick, and no one can claim that our behaviour reflects otherwise.[17]

At this point Sharett rudely interrupted and spat out two words: "Not always."[18] Sharett could credit himself with a remarkable achievement in forcing BG to be defensive about the honesty of his intent to reach a settlement. One may speculate that Sharett was subconsciously trying to push BG into a thorny historical corner. On comparing the two men and their political concepts, Sharett emerges as a statesman whose firm and genuine desire for peace is undeniable. He comes across as a man of vision and broad understanding, in contrast to his colleagues in the national leadership.

On the other hand, BG is presented in an unfavourable light, warding

off attacks on his reputation by the second leading figure in the national hierarchy. The Prime Minister had to prove repeatedly that his desire for peace did not fall short of that of his critics and that his endless entreaties for an Arab–Israeli settlement were not mere lip-service. The historian is left with the task of examining the degree of honesty in BG's desire for peace with the Arabs.

War and Peace in Ben-Gurion's Thinking

Ben-Gurion viewed an Arab–Israeli peace settlement as a question of the highest moral order, reflecting the national leadership's duty to realize Jewish values. If the government failed to strive towards this goal, then it was unworthy of serving the Jewish people. BG also understood that the alternative to peace was war. His statements express his abhorrence of armed conflict, which he described as futile, destructive and corrupt.

Particular statements, made at the height of the War of Independence, are worth citing because of their timing and fervour. At the moment in history when a people is engaged in a life and death struggle, their leader will magnify and glorify the national identity by the constant use of militant slogans. Yet the majority of BG's declarations sound unpredictably mild in this period of ultimate trial.

1. Clarifying his position in the first phases of the war, BG declared: "Never have I been as opposed to militarism and war as much as this year. I see the tremendous corruption and disaster [it has caused] not just to the defeated, but also to the victors. War is absolutely wasteful and destructive in the best of circumstances. It devastates material property and human lives. It ruins spiritual values."[19]
2. In the later stages of the war, when the winds of victory were blowing on Israel's side, he still refused to lapse into "victory euphoria": "We are not experienced in war . . . but if we do not quickly learn fighting skills, the most cursed, evil craft in the world, inhuman, destructive, wasteful, and demoralizing . . . then woe be to us. There will be no national revival."[20]
3. Later BG bitterly attacked the idea common in states governed by military rule that warfare encompassed inherently positive elements. At the outset of hostilities, he declared: "There is a philosophy of history that claims that warfare is man's highest realization, his highest glory, the pinnacle of power and justice. This view regards war as a matter of free choice and man's highest goal. This philosophy is the antithesis of Judaism."[21]
4. Years later, in attempting to outline the causes that led to his rejection

> of a preventative war, he repeated the same view: "There is a philosophy that claims there is something beneficial in war, something of 'glory' to it. I believe this concept to be totally foreign to our movement [Zionism] and our people."[22]

Alongside anti-militaristic statements delivered during the fighting, BG had no qualms at criticizing the army as a social institution that was a direct product of war. Here too, the timing of his words was symbolic. During combat, when an army is expected to garner uninhibited admiration, BG referred to the military as a dangerous, negative creation: "The very existence of the army," he stated, "is anti-democratic, inhuman, anti-Zionist and anti-socialist because it functions in order to kill and destroy."[23]

In a State Council meeting he listed the reasons behind his fear of the army as a social organization. After the meeting one of the council members expressed astonishment at what BG had just uttered. BG replied:

> I do not count myself among the biggest cowards in Israel, but I am afraid of armed people. What is a weapon? Every object has a particular purpose. A weapon is meant to kill people. It has no other purpose . . . Woe to us that mankind must produce such implements.[24]

Ben-Gurion believed that the army's monopoly on weapons, and the legitimacy granted it in using them, could backfire on society and threaten its freedom, equality and,democracy. He was troubled that the power given exclusively to military people was liable to implant in them ideas for exploiting their strength for evil intent. The military's occupation with killing could beget an insensitivity, or even immunity, towards the sanctity of life.

> The role of a professional soldier is to kill or be killed . . . For this person the value of life goes through a transformation – sometimes for the better, generally for the worse . . . There is a sense of lawlessness regarding human life; now it is directed towards non-Jews, tomorrow it could be directed towards Jews.[25]

Israel's moral obligation to reach a peace settlement, BG felt, stemmed first and foremost from the sanctity of life. He reiterated this view by revealing his concern that coming generations would blame him for not working harder to achieve an Arab–Israeli peace settlement.

> All my life, as a Zionist and a Jew, I have regarded peace and reconciliation with the Arabs as a basic virtue . . . It would be the gravest crime, not just for this generation, but also for the following ones, if we did not make every effort to reach a mutual understanding with our Arab neighbours. The next generations would accuse the Government of Israel of negligence in the peace effort.[26]

Beyond this moral commitment, Israel's desire for peace was also grounded in realism and pragmatism, whose source, according to BG, lay in a sober perspective on regional politics. Two nations exist on the same land, and this reality would not be changed within the foreseeable future. Israel had to accept the fact that in the landscape to which they claimed historic rights, the Arabs would remain a permanent feature.

> We cannot deny the Arab people's connection to Eretz Israel. They are our neighbours; it is a historical fact, and we must sit down with them [to negotiations].[27]

It was in Israel's vital interest, he asserted, that the national leadership negotiate a peace settlement. Israel's agenda was overflowing with projects of enormous historic importance each of which would have a far-reaching influence on the existence of the state. They included the absorption of mass immigration, the development of an industrial and agricultural infrastructure, the establishment of scores of settlements in border areas, and the creation of an educational system and scientific research programmes.

Defence requirements naturally focused on military–security issues. But by the end of the war BG presented another set of national priorities – heading the list were the country's social and economic needs: "The main goal now," he stressed, "is peace. There is far too much victory euphoria. Immigration demands an end to the war. Our future calls for peace and friendship with the Arabs."[28]

But the picture unveiled at the end of the fighting called for an evaluation entirely different from the one BG expected to realize. The Armistice Agreements between Israel and the Arab states did not bring an end to tension or a decline in the danger of another war. Infiltration began to take on menacing proportions, and at the same time it became obvious that the Arab world was preparing for a second round of fighting. At this point, the Israeli leadership realized that an Arab–Israeli peace settlement would not be attained in the near future.

A limited agreement was viewed as a more realistic option than permanent peace, although the price demanded of Israel in the form of concessions (land, refugees, monetary compensation, etc.) appeared intolerably heavy. Israel would have to surrender the main fruits of its victory, that had been bought at such a high price in terms of human life, for gains that seemed negligible.

The main rationale "against" a peace settlement was based on the assumption that it would include sections that were already part of the original Armistice Agreements. A peace settlement, it was argued, would probably lead to the creation of an Arab–Israeli framework similar to that following the Armistice Agreements. Therefore, the discussions over a political settlement would require Israel's leaders to deal with its meagre

benefits. The question before them remained: Was a second agreement worth its exorbitant price?

Ben-Gurion and his colleagues were filled with doubt and apprehension over the long-term prospects of a political agreement. The fluctuations within the Arab regimes pointed to the endemic instability that was characteristic of the entire Arab world and which ultimately influenced the Zionist leaders' assessment of the viability of an Arab–Israeli agreement. Habitual Arab violation of the Armistice Agreements did not bode well, and shattered the little trust that had been built up at the start of negotiations.

Finally, Israel's political leaders came to believe that a political agreement would be of minor benefit to national security. A heavy cloud of suspicion would linger that would prevent Israel from seriously reducing its military expenditure and channelling the funds to pressing social and economic projects. In this light, the proposal for an Arab–Israeli political agreement lost its attraction.

The priority Israel placed on social and economic issues may be seen more as an expression of the national leaders' aspirations than as a sober estimate of political reality. Conventional wisdom inside Israel at the time linked social and economic needs to security and military issues, and claimed that the two spheres were inseparable.

This was the background of BG's position on a political settlement. His views were well known, especially his stubborn insistence that a final peace settlement would have to be based on the status quo, regarding borders, refugees and control over Jerusalem, that was created at the end of the war. The status quo had established borders containing a larger area than had been proposed in the Partition Plan, a decisive Jewish majority in the new state, and a Jewish Jerusalem as the country's capital under full Israeli sovereignty.

The heavy casualties that the Yishuv suffered in the course of the fighting, in both human lives (1% of the population) and material, seemed to be "justified" only as the unavoidable price for these achievements. A decision by Israel to enter serious negotiations (read: compromise) with the Arab countries would oblige it to weigh the danger of surrendering its hard-won war booty. At the same time, Zionist leaders harboured grave doubts about the prospects of attaining a stable, final agreement.

When historians "judge" BG and evaluate his earnestness in working towards a peace settlement, they must consider the prevailing conditions under which he laboured and his expectations of the negotiations should they be put into "high gear". It appears that BG was facing three key elements: scepticism over the chances for a settlement; the need to concede a huge chunk of Israel's war gains; and doubt whether an arrangement would go far in reducing the Arabs' hatred of Israel.

His conclusion was unequivocal: whatever the outcome of a peace settlement, it would not substantially lessen the danger of a second round of fighting. Thus, the agreement would not allow Israel to realize its main goals: a massive reduction of security costs and redirection of its material and human resources to urgent economic and social enterprises. Along these lines, it may be assumed that a start of negotiations would create a broad international consensus on programmes that could endanger Israel's basic interests. The crystallization of such a coalition would almost certainly lead to anti-Israeli resolutions in the United Nations and other international organizations, which would be approved by the Great Powers, and eventually put into effect. These worst-case scenarios were likely to be acted out even before the final agreement's viability could be ascertained. In sum, this was not the type of peace that BG was praying for.

From the outset, the negotiations were seen by Israel as a "no-win game". The participation of international organizations within the framework of the settlement would create a situation that lessened the prospects of a peace settlement. Arab states would be prevented from taking a more moderate stand towards Israel than that of the international community.

Furthermore, Israel estimated that in the course of the negotiations its military superiority, proven in the War of Independence and over the following years, would be neutralized by the presence of international organizations. The presence of the Great Powers, Israel was convinced, would block it from flexing its muscles to win larger concessions from the Arab states.

For the most part BG and Sharett saw eye to eye on Israel's policy in the conflict; nevertheless, a careful reading of their respective positions reveals numerous differences. While BG was generally blunt and forceful in his manner of expression, Sharett tended to display more accommodation and flexibility. Though standing firm on Israel's retention of the status quo, at the same time Sharett raised intriguing ideas for attracting Arab countries towards a political settlement. In colourful language, he proposed "dressing the image of peace with frills and bells".[29]

What was he suggesting? Sharett dangled the carrot of strong commercial and economic relations between Israel and the Arab states, regional partnership, free use of Israeli ports, compensation to the refugees, etc. At one point, he also expressed support of limited territorial changes, but it appears that aside from these minor concessions, he was careful not to go too far. When concrete proposals were being broached that involved territorial surrender, his position suddenly became hard-line.

Sharett had no illusions that the Arabs would consider the paltry concessions he was extending (in private talks and with great reservation) alluring enough to create a breakthrough. Although Sharett was closer, perhaps, than anyone else in the Israeli leadership to the Great Powers' positions on

conditions for a settlement, it is difficult to imagine that he seriously believed any of the Arab states would be inclined to adopt a policy more moderate than that of the international community.

It may be safely concluded that nobody inside the Israeli hierarchy had any doubt that an Arab–Israeli settlement could be reached only if Israel was willing "to cut into its living flesh", i.e., surrender some of its most strategic national interests. On this issue, Israeli leaders were unanimous.

One could claim, for the record, that Sharett demonstrated rare sensitivity towards the Arabs and was even ready to consider certain concessions on issues vital to Israel's survival. It may further be asserted that Sharett's statements played a key role in framing relations between Israel and the Arab world. It should be kept in mind, though, that this political outlook was not unique to Sharett. BG too, in contrast to the tough, recalcitrant persona he projected, displayed a profound understanding of conditions in the Arab countries, and the position that Israel should adopt towards a peace settlement. On more than one occasion he insisted that Israel's goal was not to humiliate the Arabs but to obtain a peace settlement on the basis of mutual respect.

This side of his political personality failed to receive prominence. All too often it has been contrasted with Sharett's policies, giving the impression that the Foreign Minister's readiness for compromise reflected an Olympian struggle between him and BG.

The truth is that BG single-mindedly supported the view that, in principle, Israel should express greater willingness to make concessions and compromises during negotiations. He often asked his colleagues to sidestep procedural formalities in order to deal directly with essential issues in Israel's relations with the Arab world. He recorded in his diary a meeting with the United Nations mediator Ralph Bunche, at the opening of the armistice talks:

> I said to him [Bunche], that I would extend all the help I could to hasten a peace agreement, and that I believed that it was better to proceed slowly towards peace than rush headlong into war. We want peace not only for moral reasons, although this alone would be enough. We need our youth for building up the country. Building is our main concern . . . and we will not stand on formal procedures. Just because Egypt feels it has to express its opinion on the Galilee, does not mean we refuse to discuss peace with it.[30]

Another example of this trend can be seen in BG's statements concerning water allocation between Israel and Jordan. Facing stiff opposition from a number of his party colleagues, he revealed surprisingly moderate views, even though there was no assurance that Israeli concessions would lead to a respite between the two countries. In a closed party forum, he announced:

> There are certain questions about the allocation of water between the Arabs and us. I understand that everyone present is aware of the value water has for us . . . Nevertheless, it seems to me that even if, in some arrangement, we lose 20 million cubic metres of water, but by the same token gain a signed peace treaty, then it is in our interest . . . We must keep our faith in striving for an agreement with the Arabs. It might not be close at hand, but we cannot imagine that our grandchildren will have to face the same conflict that we face today. I am not certain that the water issue will lead to peace, but maybe it can free us from one of the causes of tension and hatred between the Arabs and us.[31]

Sharett's views show a higher degree of sensitivity than BG's to world opinion. This should not come as a surprise. Sharett and the Foreign Ministry in his charge were always in the "front lines", countering the adverse alignment of the international community and Israel's negative media image.

Israel had to meet the challenge of an international alignment hostile to its vital interests, and an Arab world bent on exploiting this hostility to win concrete concessions. It was unlikely that even the adoption of Sharett's "flexible" policy would have altered Israel's beleaguered status on the international level, or its relations with the Arabs. In sum, the attempt to present a dichotomy between BG and Sharett on the major issues surrounding a possible political settlement appears completely erroneous.

Ben-Gurion's frosty, reserved attitude towards the idea of a political settlement should be perceived *under the conditions and circumstances of the time*. BG weighed the idea of a peace agreement with the Arabs on the basis of "cost" and "gain". It seems that he eventually gave preference to its disadvantages and latent dangers for Israel's survival. From then on, a peace settlement was relegated to a secondary place on his list of national priorities. "Are we headed towards peace?" he asked rhetorically in a closed meeting in the presence of the Foreign Minister and Chief-of-Staff in October 1952:

> Our talk of peace is not a trick . . . But we must remember that there are limits to our desire for peace with the Arabs. Peace is one of our chief interests, but it does not take precedence above all others. Of primary importance are Israel's vital needs – whether they improve our relations with the Arab world or not.[32]

It appears, then, that BG's position on a political settlement was based chiefly on the desire to safeguard, at all costs, Israel's assets won in the war. This was regarded as the supreme national interest. Any line of action that endangered these gains, including negotiations for a peace settlement, *as they had been presented to Israel*, was considered injurious to the survival

of the state. Numerous critics have been mistaken, whether consciously or not, in creating the impression that BG was opposed to any form of political settlement with the Arab world.

A cut and dry evaluation of Israel's policy towards peace remains elusive. It is almost impossible to determine the influence of each factor on the formulation of Israel's foreign policy. This depended on many variables, including the others side's intentions, the balance of forces at any given time, events in the global arena, domestic political considerations, and so on. Out of all the parameters, however, a unified policy did emerge – but our ability to separate the parameters and evaluate their individual contribution to the final result has been extremely limited.

It has also been difficult to point to a dialogue between Israel and the Arab countries (excluding negotiations with Jordan) during this period that was conducive to convincing Israel to make concrete decisions on the final issues. The Arab countries, foremost among them Egypt, repeatedly rejected Israel's demand for direct negotiations without prior conditions, and dismissed the minimal conditions presented to them by the Great Powers regarding a possible settlement. For these empiric reasons, the "practical application" of the various positions that have been described in extensive detail can never be examined.

Notes

1 *Israel and the Arab World – Strengths and Weaknesses*

1 A. Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford, 1988), p. 464 [hereafter: A. Shlaim, *Collusion*]; W. Eytan, *The First Ten Years: A Diplomatic History of Israel* (London, 1958), pp. 12–13 [hereafter: Eytan, *Ten Years*].

2 *Knesset Proceedings*, 1, First Session of First Knesset, 4 April 1949, Sitting 20, p. 305 [hereafter: *Knesset*] [Hebrew].

3 *Ben-Gurion Diary*, 23 October 1950 [hereafter: *Diary*] Ben-Gurion Archives, Ben-Gurion Heritage Institute [hereafter: BGA] [Hebrew].

4 For further details on Za'im's initiative, see I. Rabinowitz, *The Road Not Taken: Early Arab–Israeli Negotiations* (New York, 1991).

5 *Diary*, 9 July 1949, BGA. On Syria's interests in pursuing the Za'im initiative, see M. Maoz, *Israel–Syria – The End of the Conflict?* (Or Yehuda, 1996) [Hebrew].

6 *Diary*, 26 April 1949, BGA. See letter from Eliyahu Sasson to Moshe Sharett, 29 April 1951, in Y. Rosenthal, *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, Vol. 6: 1951 (Jerusalem, 1991), p. 271 [hereafter: *Documents 1951*] [Hebrew and English].

7 Letter from Ben-Gurion to the Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, 27 October 1949, IDF Archives [hereafter: IDFA], 1340/93/12.

8 Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA.

9 Mapai Central Committee, 17 March 1949, Labour Party Historical Archives, Beit Berl [hereafter: LPA].

10 Speech at Histadrut Executive Committee, 5 January 1956, Executive Committee Archives, Lavon Archives [hereafter: LA].

11 Speeches File, 18 January 1957, BGA. For a comprehensive and lucid background of the Sinai campaign, see I. Troen, *The Suez–Sinai Crisis, 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal* (London, 1990).

12 Speeches File, 5 July 1955, BGA.

13 *Knesset*, 21, Second Session of Third Knesset, 12 December 1956, Sitting 203, p. 462.

14 Speeches File, 7 November 1948, BGA.

15 *Knesset*, 28, First Session of Fourth Knesset, 22 February 1960, Sitting 55, p. 667; see also, David Ben-Gurion, *My Talks with Arab Leaders* (New, York

1973); and S. Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (New York, 1985).

16 Speeches File, 15 May 1949 and 5 July 1955, BGA; *Diary*, 30 April 1953, BGA.

17 *Knesset*, 28, First Session of Fourth Knesset, 22 February 1960, Sitting 59, p. 721.

18 Cited in Y. Amitai, *The Brotherhood of Nations: Under Examination: Mapam 1948–1954: Positions of the Palestinian Arabs* (Tel Aviv, 1988), p. 291 [Hebrew].

19 *Knesset*, 1, First Session of First Knesset, 4 April 1949, Sitting 20, p. 291. On Mapam's views of Arab–Israeli relations, see Z. Tsahor, *Vision and Accountability: Ben-Gurion between Ideology and Politics* (Tel Aviv, 1994) [Hebrew].

20 Letter from A. Eban to W. Eytan, R. Shiloah and S. Divon, 10 January 1951, *Documents 1951*, p. 22.

21 Speeches File, 7 April 1948, BGA; see also, S. Teveth, "Ben-Gurion and the Arab Question", *Cathedra*, 43 (March 1987), pp. 52–68 [Hebrew]. For the views of various sectors in the Israeli political system on the Arab–Israeli conflict, see Z. Tsahor, *The Roots of Israeli Politics* (Tel Aviv, 1987) [Hebrew]. For Tabenkin's political views, see A. Shapira, "The Views of Berl, Tabenkin and Ben-Gurion on the October Revolution", in *Zmanim*, 27–8 (1988), pp. 80–97 [Hebrew].

22 Protocols File, 17 December 1969, BGA; see also Protocols File, 8 June 1970.

23 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA. On British policy in the Middle East after the War of Independence, see I. Pappé, *Britain and the Arab–Israel Conflict, 1948–1951* (New York, 1988). On Egypt's attitude towards Israel, see A. Sela, *The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order* (New York, 1988). See also, I. Rabinowitz, "Egypt and the Eretz Israel Question before and after the July Revolution", *Zmanim*, 32 (1989), pp. 78–87 [Hebrew].

24 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA. On the dialogue with Jordan prior to the War of Independence, see Y. Gelber, *Jewish-Transjordanian Relations, 1921–1948* (London, 1997).

25 *Diary*, 18 December 1948, BGA.

26 *Knesset*, 1, First Session of First Knesset, 4 April 1949, Sitting 20, p. 305.

27 Speeches File, 7 April 1948, BGA.

28 Correspndence File, 12 April 1949, BGA.

29 Protocols File, 5 January 1962, BGA.

30 Protocols File, 24 January 1962, BGA.

31 Political Committee, 24 July 1952, LPA.

32 *Knesset*, 28, First Session of Fourth Knesset, 22 February 1960, Sitting 55, p. 667.

33 Speeches File, 1962 (date missing), BGA.

34 Speeches File, 27 March 1953, BGA.

35 Political Committee, 24 January 1952, LPA.

36 Speeches File, 26 August 1955, BGA.

37 Speeches File, 16 May 1949, BGA.

38 Speeches File, 5 July 1955, BGA. On the Arabs' battlefield conduct in the 1948

war, see A. Kadish, *Arab Fighting in the War of Independence* (Efal, 1990) [Hebrew].

39 Speeches File, 5 April 1955, BGA.
40 *Diary*, 27 April 1949, BGA.
41 Mapai Central Committee, 15 December 1955, LPA.
42 Speeches File, 26 August 1956, BGA.
43 Speech at Histadrut Executive Committee, 5 January 1956, LA.
44 Ibid. On the Free Officers' revolution in Egypt, see S. Shamir, *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change* (Boulder, CO, 1995).
45 Speeches File, 20 June 1955, BGA.
46 Speeches File, 7 October 1959, BGA.
47 Mapai Council, 7 February 1948, LPA.
48 Speeches File, 29 January 1961, BGA.
49 Political Committee, 24 January 1952, LPA.
50 Speeches File, 26 August 1947, BGA.
51 *Knesset*, Third Session of First Knesset, 2 January 1951, Sitting 208, p. 655.
52 Speeches File, 16 December 1954, BGA.
53 Political Committee, 28 December 1955, LPA.
54 Letter from Ben-Gurion to Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, 27 October 1949, IDFA, 1340/93/12.
55 Speeches File, 18 January 1957, BGA.
56 Correspondence File, 28 March 1954, BGA.
57 Speeches File, 11 September 1948, BGA.
58 Speeches File, 5 May 1949, BGA.
59 *Knesset*, 10, First Session of Second Knesset, 5 November 1951, Sitting 15, p. 330.
60 Mapai Central Committee, 21 December 1957, LPA.
61 Speeches File, 15 May 1952, BGA.
62 Speech at the Histadrut Executive Committee, 5 January 1956, LA. On the difficulties in absorbing new immigrants, see Z. Zameret, *The Melting Pot: The Frumkin Commission and Education of Immigrant Children (1950)* (Kiryat Sde Boker, 1993) [Hebrew].
63 Speeches File, 4 December 1954, BGA.
64 Speeches File, 15 December 1955, BGA.
65 Speeches File, 20 June 1955, BGA.
66 Correspondence File, 8 July 1952, BGA
67 Speeches File, 11 September 1952, BGA.
68 Mapai Central Committee, 23 July 1949, BGA.
69 Speeches File, 3 December 1947, BGA.
70 Protocol File, 11 September 1952, BGA.
71 *Diary*, 22 January 1952, BGA.
72 Ibid. On the dialogue between Mapai and Mapam, see Z. Tsahor, "Mapam and the Establishment of the First Government of Israel", in *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, 4 (Kiryat Sde Boker, 1994), pp. 378–99 [Hebrew].
73 Mapai Secretariat, 7 July 1949, LPA.
74 Speeches File, 6 April 1948, BGA.
75 Speeches File, 15 January 1948, BGA.

76 Mapai Council, 7 February 1948, LPA.
77 Mapai Council, 19 June 1948, LPA.
78 *Diary*, 6 September 1948, BGA.
79 Correspondence File, 6 January 1951, BGA.
80 Correspondence File, 1 June 1970, BGA; *Diary*, 17 January 1952, BGA; *Knesset*, 7, Third Session of First Knesset, 2 January 1951, Sitting 208, p. 654.
81 Speeches File, 18 October 1951, BGA. On military operations during the War of Independence, see N. Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword: Israel's War of Independence, 1947–1949* (Jerusalem, 1968).
82 *Knesset*, 7, Third Session of First Knesset, 2 January 1951, Sitting 208, p. 657.
83 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA.
84 Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA.
85 Speeches File, 4 December 1954, BGA.
86 Speeches File, 11 September 1948, BGA.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Speeches File, 18 October 1951, BGA.
90 Speeches File, 19 April 1949, BGA.
91 Mapai Central Committee, 11 September 1958, LPA.

2 The Vision and Reality of an Arab–Israeli Peace Agreement

1 *Knesset*, First Session of First Knesset, 4 April 1949, Sitting 20, p. 307.
2 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA.
3 *Diary*, 18 January 1949, BGA.
4 Y. Reuveni, "The Concept of Peace in Ben-Gurion's Political Thinking", *Kivunim*, 33 (November 1986), p. 14 [Hebrew].
5 *Diary*, 27 November 1948, BGA.
6 *Knesset*, 10, First Session of Second Knesset, 5 November 1951, Sitting 15, p. 331.
7 Speeches File, 1 April 1947, BGA.
8 Speeches File, 7 April 1948, BGA.
9 Ibid.
10 Speeches File, 29 November 1948, BGA.
11 Y. Erez and E. Kafir, *Talks with Moshe Dayan* (Ramat Gan, 1981), p. 33, [hereafter: Y. Erez, *Talks*] [Hebrew].
12 Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA.
13 Speeches File, 7 January 1951, BGA.
14 M. Sharett, "Israel and the Arabs – War and Peace", in *Ot*, Year 1, Book 1 (September 1966), p. 8 [Hebrew].
15 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA. For details on Sharett's thinking, see G. Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate* (New York, 1996).
16 Political Department, 3 August 1952, LPA.
17 Consultation in the American Embassy, 14 April 1953, Israel State Archives (hereafter: ISA), 2382/22/A.
18 Mapai Central Committee, 13 May 1954, LPA.

19 Meeting of Israeli Ambassadors, Jerusalem, 17-23 July 1950, ISA.
20 Meeting of General Staff, April 1950, ISA, 2446/6.
21 Ibid.
22 Speeches File, 26 August 1947, BGA.
23 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
24 Speeches File, 5 July 1955, BGA.
25 Speeches File, 7 April 1948, BGA.
26 Speeches File, 13 September 1959, BGA.
27 Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA; on the number of Palestinian Arabs who became refugees after the War of Independence, see B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 297–8.
28 Mapai Central Committee, 15 December 1955, LPA; Speeches File, 7 January 1951, BGA.
29 Speeches File, 20 January 1949, BGA.
30 Protocols File, 27 September 1959, BGA.
31 Mapai Central Committee, 11 September 1958, LPA.
32 Mapai Central Committee, 3 January 1957, LPA.
33 Mapai Central Committee, 11 September 1958, LPA.
34 Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA.
35 Mapai Central Committee, 11 September 1958, LPA; Speeches File, 11 September 1948, BGA.
36 On Bernadotte's mediation, see Z. Zameret, "The Mediation of Count Folke Bernadotte", in M. Naor (ed.), *The First Year of Independence 1948–1949: Sources, Documents, Selected Issues and Supplementary Material* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 143–56 [Hebrew].
37 Speeches File, 11 September 1948, BGA.
38 Speeches File, 6 April 1948, BGA.
39 Speeches File, 19 January 1952, BGA.
40 Speeches File, 11 September 1948, BGA.
41 Ibid.
42 Speeches File, 26 August 1956. On the perplexities of launching a preventative war prior to the Sinai War, see M. Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza* (New York, 1995). For further details on the background of the Sinai campaign, see M. Golani, *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East* (Portland, OR, 1998).
43 6 March 1956, Division 15, Galilee Papers, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Archives [hereafter: KMA–GP].
44 Ibid.
45 Telegram from the Director of the Foreign Ministry to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, 31 July 1949, ISA, 2447/5. On American policy at the Lausanne Conference, see N. Caplan, *The Lausanne Conference, 1949: A Case Study in Middle East Peacemaking* (Tel Aviv, 1993).
46 Knesset, 20, First Session of Third Knesset, 19 June 1956, Sitting 140, p. 2070.
47 21 October 1953, Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter: FRUS), 9 (1952–4), pp. 1371–2.
48 M. Kidron, memorandum to the Director of the Foreign Ministry, 2 March 1956, ISA, 2403/10.

49 E. Sasson, Political Consultation, 13 July 1949, ISA, 2458/6.
50 Meeting Sharett–Dulles, 6 December 1955, FRUS, 14 (1955–7), p. 828.
51 Protocols File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
52 Ibid.
53 Political Committee, 27 January 1955, LPA.
54 Protocols File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
55 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA.
56 Speeches File, 3 February 1948, BGA.
57 Correspondence File, 3 April 1954, BGA.
58 Mapai Central Committee, 22 July 1949. For a discussion on this issue, see, U. Bialer, "Ben-Gurion and the Question of International Orientation", in *Cathedra*, 43 (March 1987), pp. 145–72 [Hebrew].
59 *Diary*, 28 March 1953, BGA. On the Korean issues, see M. Breecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (London, 1974), pp. 111–72.
60 *Knesset*, 11, First Session of Second Knesset, 4 February 1952, Sitting 50, p. 1187.
61 Political Committee, 2 June 1955, LPA.
62 *Diary*, 28 March 1953, BGA.
63 Conversation between Ben-Gurion and the United States Ambassador to Israel, 31 July 1950, *FRUS*, 5 (1948), p. 961.
64 See Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA.
65 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA.
66 Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA. On Israel's identification with the Western bloc, see S. Golan, *The Crystallization of Israel's Security Concept in the Background of the Cold War, 1949–1953* (Haifa, 1995) [Hebrew].
67 Speeches File, 26 August 1947, BGA.
68 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA.
69 Correspondence File, 10 October 1955, BGA. For a larger discussion on this issue see U. Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation, 1948–1956* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 235–75.
70 18 February 1955, FO 371/115825 VR 1051/4/A, PRO.
71 Mapai Secretariat, 25 May 1957, LPA.
72 M. Sharett, *Making of Policy: The Diaries of Moshe Sharett* (Tel Aviv, 1978) 26 May 1955, p. 1021 [hereafter: *Sharett Diaries*] [Hebrew].
73 *Diary*, 20 August 1954, BGA.
74 *Diary*, 27 January 1951, BGA.
75 Ibid.
76 Political Committee, 2 June 1955, LPA.
77 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA.
78 Mapai Central Committee, 22 August 1955, LPA.
79 Ibid.
80 For a detailed discussion on this issue, see M. Gazit, "Ben-Gurion's Efforts at Forging a Military Alliance with the United States", in *Gesher*, 115 (Winter 1987), pp. 57–63 [Hebrew].
81 Political Committee, 28 December 1955, LPA.
82 See Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA.
83 Speeches File, 22 July 1950, BGA.

84 Mapai Central Committee, 8 August 1955, LPA.
85 Mapai Council, 19 June 1948, LPA.
86 *Diary*, 27 November 1948, BGA.
87 *Diary*, 18 January 1949, BGA; Mapai Central Committee, 22 July 1949, LPA.
88 Mapai Council, 7 February 1948, LPA.
89 *Knesset*, 11, First Session of Second Knesset, 4 February 1952, Sitting 50, p. 1186.
90 Debates in the State Council, 17 June 1948, BGA.
91 *Knesset*, 20, First Session of Third Knesset, 19 June 1956, Sitting 40, p. 2069.
92 Speeches File, 6 April 1948, BGA.
93 6 March 1956, Division 15, KMA–GP.
94 Mapai Central Committee, 3 January 1957, LPA.
95 Mapai Central Committee, 11 September 1958, LPA.
96 *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel: December 1947–May 1948* (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 815 [hereafter: *Documents 1948*] [Hebrew and English].
97 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA.
98 *Knesset*, 3, Second Session of First Knesset, 2 January 1950, Sitting 101, p. 376.
99 Ibid., pp. 376–7.
100 See Sharett's briefing to the Israeli delegation on its departure to Lausanne (July 1949), in Y. Rosenthal (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, vol. 4: *May–December 1949* (Jerusalem, 1986), p. 246 [hereafter: *Documents 1949*].
101 Ibid., p. 675.
102 *Knesset*, 3, Second Session of First Knesset, 2 January 1950, Sitting 101, p. 377.
103 *Diary*, 14 December 1949, BGA.
104 On Weizmann's admission of his own error and Ben-Gurion's correct view of Jerusalem, see *Diary*, 16 December 1949, BGA.
105 Telegram from Eytan to Sharett, 13 December 1949, *Documents 1949*, pp. 710–11; *Knesset*, 11, First Session of Second Knesset, 4 February 1952, Sitting 50, p. 1186.
106 Ibid.; Mapai Central Committee, 12 December 1949, LPA.
107 *Diary*, 14 December 1949, BGA.
108 Ibid.
109 In this connection, see Correspondence File, 16 April 1954, BGA.
110 Mapai Central Committee, 12 December 1949, LPA.
111 *Diary*, 14 December 1949, BGA.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid. On Israel's dialogue with King Abdullah, see A. Shlaim, *Collusion*.
114 Ibid.
115 Protocols File, 27 September 1959, BGA.
116 See Moshe Sharett's statements in *Knesset*, 3, Second Session of First Knesset, 2 January 1950, Sitting 101, p. 375.
117 *Diary*, 14 December 1949, BGA.
118 Mapai Central Committee, 12 December 1949, LPA.
119 *Diary*, 14 December 1949, LPA.
120 Ibid.

121 See *Documents 1949*, p. 301, note 1, and letter from M. Sharett to R. Shiloah and E. Sasson, 9 August 1949, ibid., p. 306.
122 *Knesset*, 3, Second Session of the First Knesset, 2 January 1950, Sitting 96, p. 281.
123 See memorandum from the British Foreign Office, 15 November 1957, FO 371/128152 VR 10886/10/A, PRO.
124 On the roots of Ben-Gurion's "*faits accomplis*" and Sharett's replies, see I. Pappé, "The Lausanne Conference and the First Signs of the Debate on Israeli Foreign Policy", *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, 1 (1991), pp. 241–61 [Hebrew].
125 For a blunt expression of this, see British Foreign Office memorandum, 15 November 1957, FO 371/128152 VR 1086/10/A, PRO; see also, the British ambassador's telegram to the Foreign office, 1 August 1957, FO 371/128152 VR 1086/5, PRO.
126 *Davar* [newspaper], 24 January 1956.
127 Correspondence File, 2 March 1956, BGA.
128 See British Foreign Office memorandum, 4 December 1957, FO 371/128152 VR 1086/19 PRO and the memorandum from 26 November 1957, FO 371/128152 VR 1086/12/A, PRO. On IDF parades in Jerusalem, see, Z. Shalom, "The Tension over the IDF Parades in 1958 and 1961", in A. Bareli (ed.), *Divided Jerusalem, 1948–1967* (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 61–8, [Hebrew].
129 FO 371/142318 VR 1081/3, PRO, 22 April 1959; FO 371/142318 VR 1081/2, PRO, 2 February 1959.

3 The Limitations of a Political Arrangement

1 Mapai Central Committee, 8 January 1948, LPA.
2 W. Eytan, *Ten Years*, pp. 52–3.
3 Lecture at the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Knesset, 2 May 1949, ISA, 2391/2.
4 Briefing to the Lausanne delegation, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
5 *Diary*, 6 December 1948, BGA.
6 *Knesset*, 12, First Session of the Second Knesset, 18 August 1952, Sitting 122, p. 2985.
7 Protocols File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
8 Meeting of the Defence Minister with the Chief of Logistics, General Staff, 16 March 1949, IDFA, 1340/93/12.
9 A more pessimistic view was taken by E. Sasson, see 13 July 1949, ISA, 2456/6.
10 Political Consultation, 1 October 1952, ISA, 2446/7.
11 Meeting of the Defense Minister with the Chief of Logistics, General Staff, 16 March 1949, IDFA, 1340/93/12.
12 Speech at Histadrut Executive Committee, 5 January 1956, LA.
13 See *Diary*, 12 February 1951, BGA.
14 Protocols File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
15 General File, 18 August 1952, BGA.
16 Meeting of Israeli ambassadors, Jerusalem, 17–23 July 1950, ISA.
17 Y. Rosenthal (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, vol. 3: *Armistice Talks with Arab Countries, December 1948–July 1949* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 688 [hereafter: *Armistice Documents*] [Hebrew and English].

18 Ibid.
19 Y. Harkabi, cited in A. Shlaim, *Collusion*, p. 434.
20 *Knesset*, 1, First Session of First Knesset, 4 April 1949, Sitting 20, p. 287.
21 Briefing to Lausanne delegation, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
22 Speeches File, 5 July 1955, BGA.
23 Y. Harkabi, "The Armistice Agreements – in Retrospect", *Ma'arachot*, 294–5 (July 1984), p. 2 [Hebrew].
24 Mapai Central Committee, 28 July 1949, LPA.
25 *Armistice Documents*, p. 690.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 691.
28 Ibid., p. 697.
29 S. Rosenne, "The Armistice Agreements – Legal Aspects," *Ma'arachot*, 294–5 (July 1984), p. 6 [Hebrew].
30 Foreign Affairs Committee, 21 February 1950, ISA, 2446/6.
31 Briefing to Lausanne delegation, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
32 Ibid.
33 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
34 Speeches File, 5 July 1955, BGA.
35 See Meeting of Israeli ambassadors, Jerusalem, 17–23 July 1950, ISA.
36 Speeches File, 16 December 1954, BGA.
37 Speeches File, 20 June 1955, BGA.
38 *Diary*, 27 November 1948, BGA.
39 Protocol File, Zionist Executive Committee, 5 May 1949, BGA.
40 Speeches File, 13 November 1948 and 7 January 1951, BGA.
41 Mapai Central Committee, 28 July 1949, LPA.
42 Briefing to Lausanne Delegation, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
43 *Diary*, 5 June 1949, BGA.
44 Y. Freundlich (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, vol. 5: *1950* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 342 [hereafter: *Documents 1950*] [Hebrew and English].
45 Mapai Central Committee, 5 September 1954, LPA.
46 See telegram from British ambassador in Amman to Foreign Office, 1 May 1950, FO 371/82178 VR 15269, PRO.
47 Memorandum summarizing the points of agreement between the United States and Great Britain, 10 March 1950, *FRUS*, 14, p. 102. For a comprehensive treatment on various proposals, see, M. Oren, *The Origins of the Second Arab–Israel War: Egypt, Israel and the Great Powers, 1952–1956* (London, 1992).
48 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA. On the pressure of Western powers for an Israeli withdrawal from the Negev, see M. Oren, *Origins of the Second Arab–Israeli War*.
49 See memorandum from British Foreign Office, 10 December 1958, FO 371/134298 VR 10710/8/G, PRO.
50 Report from the British Embassy in the United States, 3 January 1956, FO 371/121708 VR 1071/4/G PRO.
51 Report of a meeting of the British and American ambassadors, 28 October 1955, *FRUS*, 14, p. 651.

52 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA.
53 Report of a conversation between Ben-Gurion and the American ambassador to Israel, 29 February 1956, *FRUS*, 15, p. 258.
54 *Diary*, 26 November 1949, BGA.
55 Letter from Ben-Gurion to Sharett, 16 October 1952 in Y. Freundlich (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, vol. 7: *1952* (Jerusalem, 1992), p. 573 [hereafter: *Documents 1952*] [Hebrew].
56 State Department memorandum, 16 December 1955, *FRUS*, 14, p. 872. See also, telegram from the British ambassador in Israel to the Foreign Office, 29 December 1955, FO 371/121771 VR 1091/5, PRO.
57 Report from the United States Embassy in Israel on Ben-Gurion–Anderson talk, 1 February 1956, *FRUS*, 15, pp. 123–4.
58 See memorandum on Sharett's talk with State Department officials, 8 April 1953, *FRUS*, 9, p. 1167.
59 Mapai Council, 19 June 1948, LPA.
60 Telegram from the United States Embassy in Israel to the State Department, 10 September 1955, *FRUS*, 14, p. 460. Briefing to the Israel delegation to Lausanne, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
61 Memorandum of British Foreign Office, 17 February 1956, FO 371/121709 VR, PRO.
62 W. Eytan, *Ten Years*, p. 128.
63 Mapai Central Committee, 28 July 1949, LPA.
64 See Correspondence File, 11 December 1970, BGA; and *FRUS*, 6, pp. 761–2.
65 Briefing to the Israel delegation to Lausanne, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
66 M. Gazit, "The Evolution of Ben-Gurion's Proposal in 1949 to Include the Gaza Strip and its Entire Population within Israel's Borders", *Haziyonut*, 12 (1987), p. 318 [Heberw].
67 *FRUS*, 6, (22 April 1949), p. 938.
68 *Diary*, 1 August 1949, BGA; for a detailed discussion, see I. Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1947–1951* (London, 1992), pp. 228–33.
69 See Sharett's speech at Mapai Secretariat, 28 July 1949, LPA.
70 *Knesset*, 8, Third Session of First Knesset, 30 January 1951, Sitting 220, p. 924.
71 Meeting of Israeli ambassadors, Jerusalem, 17–23 July 1950, ISA.
72 *FRUS*, 14 (10 March 1955), p. 103.
73 *FRUS*, 15 (11 January 1956), p. 21.
74 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA; see also *FRUS*, 14 (10 September 1955), p. 458.
75 *FRUS*, 14 (10 March 1955), p. 105.
76 Memorandum from the British ambassador to the United States to the British Foreign Office, 2 February 1955, PREM 11/941, PRO.
77 (5 November 1955), FO 371/115909 VR 1092/412, PRO.
78 Ibid.
79 Lausanne briefing, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
80 Meeting held in Israeli Embassy in Washington, 14 April 1953, ISA, 2382/22/A.
81 Consultation with ambassadors, 25 August 1953, ISA, 2446/7.

82 Consultation on the question of relations with Arab countries, 7 September 1953, ISA, 2384/14.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Consultation on peace negotiations with the Arab world, Protocol File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
86 Y. Harkabi, memorandum to Director of the Foreign Ministry, 26 October 1950, ISA, 2408/13.
87 Foreign Minister's memorandum, 29 October 1952, ISA, 2408/13.
88 Consultation on the question of relations with Arab countries, 7 September 1953, ISA, 2384/14.
89 See State Department memorandum, 16 December 1955, *FRUS*, 14, p. 872.
90 *Diary*, 30 April 1953, BGA.
91 Correspondence File, 26 October 1952, BGA.
92 *Knesset*, 8, Third Session of First Knesset, 30 January 1951, Sitting 220, p. 912.
93 See *FRUS*, 9 (7 November 1952), p. 1049.
94 Speeches File, 18 October 1951, BGA.
95 *Diary*, 27 November 1948, BGA.
96 *Diary*, 26 April 1949, BGA.
97 Letter from Ben-Gurion to Chief-of-Staff, 27 October 1949, IDFA, 1340/93/12.
98 Mapai Secretariat, 28 July 1949, LPA.
99 Mapai Central Committee, 11 September 1958, LPA.
100 Speeches File, 5 July 1955, BGA.
101 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
102 Correspondence File, 16 April 1954, BGA.

4 Israel's Perception of the Arab Threat – The Dilemma of Daily Security

1 See B. Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford, 1993), p. 39.
2 See Z. Shalom, "Ben-Gurion's and Sharett's Rejection of Territorial Demands from Israel, 1949–1956", *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, 2 (1992), pp. 197–213 [Hebrew].
3 Political Committee, 24 July 1952, LPA.
4 *FRUS*, 9 (20 February 1953), p. 1140.
5 Ambassadors' Consultation, 25 August 1953, ISA, 2446/7/B.
6 Speeches File, 5 July 1955, BGA.
7 See, Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
8 Speeches File, 17 June 1951, BGA.
9 M. Dayan, "Military Activity in Peacetime", *Ma'arachot*, 118-19 (Nisan, 1959), p. 54 [Hebrew].
10 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
11 M. Sharett, *Sharett Diaries*, 18 January 1955, p. 670 [Hebrew].
12 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
13 Speeches File 15 December 1955, BGA.
14 Speeches File, 4 December 1954, BGA.

15 Meeting of the Executive Committee, 5 January 1956, Histadrut Archives, LA.
16 S. Hillel, Political Committee, 27 December 1955, LPA.
17 Political Committee, 12 May 1954, LPA.
18 See, Political Consultation, 1 October 1952, ISA, 2446/7/B.
19 Political Consultation, 1 October 1952, ISA, 2446/7/B.
20 M. Dayan, "Military Activity in Peacetime".
21 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
22 Ibid.
23 Political Consultation, 1 October 1952, ISA, 2446/7/B.
24 Political Committee, LPA, 29 April 1952.
25 Political Committee, LPA, 15 April 1954.
26 Y. Erez, *Talks*, p. 30. On the deterrent effect of retaliation, see M. Bar-On, "Acts of Retaliation in the Struggle for Deterrence", in M. Golani (ed.), *Black Arrow* (Tel Aviv, 1994), pp. 91–126. [Hebrew].
27 M. Dayan, "Military Activity in Peacetime".
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Seventeenth Convention of Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Thirteenth Session, 1 March 1955, KMA.
31 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
32 Ibid.
33 Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Beit Oren, 10 June 1955, KMA, Division 5, File 16, File 2.
34 M. Dayan, *Autobiography* (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 122 [hereafter: Dayan, *Autobiography*] [Hebrew].
35 Ibid., p. 101.
36 As cited in M. Bar-On, *Challenge and Quarrel: The Road to Sinai – 1956* (Kiryat Sde Boker, 1991), p. 28 [hereafter: *Challenge and Quarrel*] [Hebrew].
37 *Bimahane*, 12 (30 November 1955), p. 3.
38 See Ben-Gurion's letter to President Eisenhower, 14 February 1956, *FRUS*, 15, p. 186.
39 M. Bar-On, *Challenge and Quarrel*, p. 47.
40 M. Dayan, "An Israeli Deal", *Bimahane*, 18 April 1956.
41 *Diary*, 18 August 1953, BGA.
42 See M. Golani, "Dayan Leads to War: The Place of the Chief-of-Staff in the Decision of the Israeli Government to Go to War in October 1956", in *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, 4 (1994), pp. 117–35, [Hebrew].
43 M. Dayan, *Autobiography*, p. 115.
44 M. Bar-On, *Challenge and Quarrel*, pp. 39–40.
45 *FRUS*, 15 (29 February 1956), p. 255.
46 Ibid., p. 256.
47 Protocols File, 12 December 1955, BGA.
48 *FRUS*, 14 (5 December 1955), pp. 821–2.
49 M. Dayan, *Autobiography*, 17 November 1955, p. 166.
50 M. Bar-On, *Challenge and Quarrel*, pp. 59–60.
51 Political Committee, 28 December 1955, BGA.
52 M. Dayan, *Autobiography*, 3 April 1956, p. 185.

53 Political Consultation, 1 October 1952, ISA, 2446/7/B.
54 M. Sharett, *Sharett Diaries*, 25 May 1955, p. 1018.
55 Correspondence File, 19 December 1955, BGA.
56 Ibid.
57 Report on the Sharett–Dulles meeting, 26 October 1955, *FRUS*, 14, p. 658.
58 See M. Gur, "The Kineret Operation: Leadership in Battle", *Ma'arachot*, 172 (January 1966), p. 3 [Hebrew].
59 Political Committee, 27 December 1955, LPA.
60 Ibid.
61 M. Sharett, *Sharett Diaries*, 11 December 1955, p. 1307.
62 KMA–GP, Division 15.
63 Correspondence File, 19 December 1955, BGA.
64 Political Committee, 28 December 1955, BGA.
65 Correspondence File, 19 December 1955, BGA.
66 *Knesset*, 19, First Session of Third Knesset, 2 January 1956, Sitting 50, p. 674.
67 Political Committee, 28 December 1955, LPA.
68 Ibid.
69 Speeches File, 4 December 1954, BGA; *Knesset*, 19, First Session of Third Knesset, 2 January 1956, Sitting 50, p. 675.
70 Political Committee, 28 December 1955, LPA.
71 Correspondence File, 19 December 1955, BGA.
72 *FRUS*, 15 (19 January 1956), p. 19.
73 FO 371/128087 VR 1072/1/G (27 February 1957), PRO.
74 *FRUS*, 14 (23 December 1955), p. 883.
75 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
76 Ibid.
77 Political Committee, 12 May 1954, LPA.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Y. Poles, "The Sharett Era in the Foreign Ministry", *Ha'aretz*, 19 July 1956.
81 Political Committee, 15 April 1954, LPA.
82 See, M. Sharett, *Sharett Diaries*, 13 December 1953, p. 227.
83 Political Committee, 28 December 1955, LPA.
84 See Memorandum of an intelligence officer in the Negev, 29 June 1950, IDFA, Intelligence Branch, 50, File 31/1388/51.
85 *FRUS*, 9 (20 February 1953), p. 1141.
86 M. Sharett, *Sharett Diaries*, 26 October 1954, p. 591.
87 Ibid., p. 592.
88 Y. Erez, *Talks*, p. 30.
89 *RUS*, 9 (1 October 1954), p. 1661.
90 M. Sharett, *Sharett Diaries*, 26 May 1955, p. 1021.
91 M. Dayan, "From Stage to Stage", *Ma'arachot*, 118–19 (Nisan, 1959), p. 52. [Hebrew].
92 Y. Erez, *Talks*, p. 36.

5 The Territorial Status Quo and the Armistice Borders

1 Speeches File, 19 January 1952, BGA.
2 Mapai Central Committee, 13 December 1947, LPA.
3 Speeches File, 19 January 1952, BGA.
4 *Knesset*, 2, First Session of the First Knesset, 5 September 1949, Sitting 76, p. 1566.
5 *Ma'ariv* [newspaper], 12 May 1967.
6 Speeches File, 3 December 1947, BGA.
7 Discussions of the People's Administration (*Minhelet Ha'am*), 12 May 1948, BGA.
8 Discussions of the People's Council (*Moetzet Ha'am*), Protocols File, 14 May 1948, BGA.
9 Protocols File, 9 April 1962, BGA.
10 D. Ben-Gurion, "Concerning the Borders of Eretz Israel", in *Yalkut Achdut Ha'avoda*, I (Tel Aviv, 1929), p. 275 [Hebrew].
11 Correspondence File, 8 October 1957, BGA.
12 Correspondence File, 30 June 1955, BGA.
13 M. Sharett, *At the Gates of the Nations: 1946–1949* (Tel Aviv, 1958), p. 140 [Hebrew].
14 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA.
15 *Diary*, 18 January 1949, BGA.
16 Speeches File, 7 November 1948, BGA.
17 Protocols File, 18 June 1970, BGA.
18 Dayan's speech, 16 February 1973, KMA, Division 15, Box 90, File 2.
19 Speeches File, 3 February 1948, LPA.
20 Third Session of Provisional State Council, 17 June 1948, BGA.
21 Mapai Council, 18 June 1948, LPA.
22 Sharett–Abdullah meeting, 5 May 1949, ISA, 2408/13.
23 See Protocols File, 18 June 1970, BGA.
24 Third Session of the Provisional State Council, 17 June 1948, BGA.
25 Protocols File, 16 December 1969, BGA.
26 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA.
27 *Knesset*, 1, First Session of First Knesset, 4 April 1949, Sitting 20, p. 306.
28 M. Dayan, *Autobiography*, p. 213.
29 Protocols File, 19 May 1970, BGA.
30 Protocols File, 16 December 1969, BGA; Protocols File, 18 March 1971, BGA; Protocols File, 1971 (date missing), BGA; Correspondence File, 19 January 1971, BGA; Correspondence File, 10 April 1970, BGA.
31 Protocols File, 16 December 1969, BGA.
32 *Haboker* [newspaper], 6 March 1964.
33 In M. Oren's article "'A De-Facto Deal?' – Policy and Operations in the Centre of the Country in the Autumn of 1948", *Ma'arachot*, 311 (March 1988), p. 42 [Hebrew].
34 *Yidiot Ahronot* [newspaper], "7 Days" (supplement), 29 April 1977.
35 *Diary*, 18 June 1948, BGA.
36 *Yidiot Ahronot*, "7 Days" (supplement), 29 April 1977.

37 Protocols File, 1969 (date missing), BGA.
38 Protocols File, 19 May 1970, BGA.
39 Protocols File, 1969 (date missing), BGA.
40 Correspondence File, 27 June 1956, BGA.
41 Correspondence File, 28 June 1956.
42 *Diary*, 21 June 1949, BGA.
43 *Knesset*, 1, First Session of First Knesset, 4 April 1949, Sitting 20, p. 306.
44 Protocols File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
45 Political Committee, 4 June 1955, LPA.
46 Speeches File, 19 January 1952, BGA.
47 Correspondence File, 30 June 1955, BGA.
48 Speeches File, 19 January 1952, BGA.
49 Hakibbutz Hameuchad Council at Yagur, 9 April 1954, KMA, Division 5, Box 15, File 3.
50 See the document entitled "Prospects of Territorial Expansion by Israel", Report no. 5218, ISA.
51 Reuven Shiloah's statements in a confidential discussion on Arab–Israeli relations, July 1950, ISA, 2446/6.
52 *Diary*, 18 December 1948, BGA.
53 *Diary*, 7 February 1951, BGA.
54 *Diary*, 13 February 1951, BGA.
55 *Diary*, 20 August 1954, BGA.
56 Mapai Secretariat, 28 July 1949, LPA.
57 Meeting of Foreign Ministry department directors, 25 May 1949, ISA, 2446/7/A.
58 Protocols File, 13 July 1949, BGA.
59 *Diary*, 8 June 1949, BGA.
60 Speech at Staff Officers' Conference, April 1950, ISA, 2446/6.
61 *Documents 1950*, p. 140.
62 Ibid., p. 135 (notes).
63 Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, 9 February 1950, KMA, Division 1B, File 39A.
64 FO 371/82178 (8 March 1950), PRO; *FRUS*, 5 (6 March 1950), p. 781; FO 371/82178 (8 March 1950), PRO.
65 Hakibbutz Hameuchad Council at Yagur, 9 April 1954, KMA, Division 5, Box 15 File 3; Diary, 9 December 1948, BGA.
66 *Ma'ariv*, 5 September 1975.
67 *Diary*, 21 June 1949, BGA.
68 Lecture before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs Committee, 2 May 1949, ISA, 2392/12.
69 Protocols File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
70 *FRUS*, 6 (27 May 1949), pp. 926–7.
71 *FRUS*, 6 (27 May 1949), p. 1060.
72 Mapai Secretariat, 28 July 1949, LPA.
73 Ibid.
74 Briefing to the Lausanne delegation, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
75 Ibid.
76 FO 371/121709 VR 1071/31/G (17 February 1956), PRO.

77 FO 371/121771 VR 1091/5 (29 December 1955), PRO.
78 Protocols File, 6 January 1950, BGA.
79 *Diary*, 10 February 1957, BGA.
80 *Knesset*, 1, First Session of First Knesset, 10 March 1949, Sitting 12, p. 135.
81 *Diary*, 19 June 1949, BGA.
82 *Diary*, 21 June 1949, BGA.
83 Briefing to the Lausanne delegation, 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6.
84 Memorandum to Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, 26 December 1952, ISA, 2408/13.
85 *Diary*, 23 July 1951, BGA.
86 *Diary*, 21 July, BGA.
87 Political Consultation, 1 October 1952, ISA, 2446/7.
88 KMA, Division 15/Allon, Box 4, File 1.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Meeting of Israeli ambassadors, Jerusalem, 17–23 July 1950, ISA.
92 *Hayom Hazeh* [newspaper], 13 October 1976.
93 Protocols File, 12 April 1949, BGA.
94 Protocols File, 7 August 1955, BGA.
95 *Diary*, 20 August 1954, BGA.
96 Meeting of Israeli ambassadors, Jerusalem, 17–23 July 1950, ISA. On the Zionist view of the use of force, see A. Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881–1948* (New York, 1992).

6 Advantages of a Settlement and the "Lost" Peace

1 Mapai Council, 12 April 1948, LPA.
2 *Diary*, 8 January 1949, BGA.
3 Ibid.
4 *Diary*, 21 January 1949, BGA.
5 Political Consultation, 25 May 1949, ISA, 2440/7/A. For further details on the Lausanne Conference, see Y. Rosenthal, "The Lausanne Conference, 1949: Dispute and Agreement in the Crystallization of Israeli Policy," *Hatzionut*, 13 (1988), pp. 53–68 [Hebrew].
6 Mapai Central Committee, 1 August 1949, LPA. For differences of opinion between Ben-Gurion and Sharett in 1949, see Y. Rosenthal, "David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett Facing Israel's Foreign Policy Decisions, 1949", *Skira Hodsheet*, 35 (11) (1988), pp. 15–22 [Hebrew].
7 Staff Officers' Conference, April 1950, ISA, 2446/6.
8 25 July 1949, ISA, 2446/6. On the role of oil in Middle East politics, see U. Bialer, *Oil and the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1948–1963* (Oxford, 1999).
9 Mapai Central Committee, 28 July 1949, LPA.
10 Staff Officers' Conference, April 1950, ISA, 2446/6.
11 Mapai Secretariat, 28 July 1949, LPA.
12 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA.
13 Mapai Secretariat, 28 July 1949, LPA.
14 Political Committee, 28 March 1953, LPA.

15 Staff Officers Conference, April 1950, ISA, 2446/6.
16 Mapai Council, 12 January 1949, LPA.
17 Political Consultation, 1 October 1952, ISA, 2446/7/2.
18 Ibid.
19 Mapai Council, 7 February 1948, LPA.
20 Mapai Council, 19 June 1948, LPA.
21 Mapai Central Committee, 6 January 1948, LPA.
22 Speech at Histadrut Executive Committee, 5 January 1956, LA.
23 Mapai Council, 19 January 1948, LPA.
24 Debates in the Provisional Government Council, 23 June 1948, BGA.
25 Mapai Council, 7 February 1948, LPA.
26 General File, 18 August 1952, BGA.
27 Debates in Provisional Government Council, 17 June 1948, BGA.
28 *Diary*, 18 December 1948, BGA. On the immigration to Israel of the Jewish community in Iraq, see, M. Gat, *The Jewish Exodus from Iraq, 1948–1951* (Portland, OR, 1997).
29 Meeting at Israeli Embassy in Washington, 7 April 1953, ISA, 2446/6.
30 *Diary*, 6 December 1948, BGA.
31 Political Committee, 2 June 1955, LPA.
32 *FRUS*, 14 (10 March 1955), p. 105.

Bibliography

Amitai, Yossi, *The Brotherhood of Nations: Under Examination: Mapam 1948–1954: Positions of the Palestinian Arabs* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Tcherikover Press, 1988.

Bar-On, Mordechai, "Acts of Retaliation in the Struggle for Deterrence" [Hebrew], in M. Golani (ed.), *Black Arrow*, Tel Aviv: Haifa University Press, 1994.

——, *Challenge and Quarrel: The Road to Sinai – 1956* [Hebrew], Kiryat Sde Boker: The Ben-Gurion Research Centre, 1991.

——, *The Gates of Gaza*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Ben-Gurion, David, *My Talks with Arab Leaders*, New York: Keter Books, 1973.

Bialer, Uri, "Ben-Gurion and the Question of International Orientation" [Hebrew], *Cathedra*, vol. 43 (March 1987), pp. 145–172.

——, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation 1948–1956*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Breecher, Michael, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Caplan, Neil, *The Lausanne Conference, 1949: A Case Study in Middle East Peacemaking*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1993.

Dayan, Moshe, "From Stage to Stage" [Hebrew], *Ma'arachot*, vol. 118–19 (Nisan, 1959), pp. 51–3.

——, "Military Activity in Peacetime" [Hebrew], *Ma'arachot*, vol. 118–19 (Nisan, 1959), pp. 54–61.

——, *Autobiography* [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Idanim Dvir Press, 1976.

Erez, Yehuda and Kafir, E. *Talks with Moshe Dayan* [Hebrew], Ramat Gan: Massada Press, 1981.

Eytan, Walter, *The First Ten Years: A Diplomatic History of Israel*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1958.

Freundlich, Yehoshua (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel* [Hebrew], vol. 5 (*1950*), Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1988.

—— (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, [Hebrew]. vol. 7, (*1952*), Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1992.

Gat, Moshe, *The Jewish Exodus from Iraq, 1948–1951*, Portland, OR, 1997.

Gazit, Mordechai, "Ben-Gurion's Efforts at Forging a Military Alliance with the United States" [Hebrew], *Gesher*, vol. 115 (Winter 1987), pp. 57–63.

Gelber, Yoav, *Jewish–Transjordanian Relations, 1921–1948*, London: Frank Cass, 1997.

Golan, Shimon, *The Crystallization of Israel's Security Concept in the Background of the Cold War 1949–1953* [Hebrew], Haifa, 1995.

Golani, Motti, "Dayan Leads to War: The Place of the Chief-of-Staff in the Decision of the Israeli Government to Go to War in October 1956" [Hebrew], *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, vol. 4 (1994), pp. 117–35.

——, *Israel in Search of War 1955–1956*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998.

—— (ed.), *Black Arrow* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Haifa University Press, 1994.

——, *The 1956 War, Collision and Rivalry in the Middle East*, Portland, OR, 1998.

Gur, M., "The Kineret Operation: Leadership in Battle" [Hebrew], *Ma'arachot*, vol. 172 (January 1966), pp. 3–5.

Harkabi, Yehoshua, "The Armistice Agreements – In Retrospect" [Hebrew], *Ma'arachot*, vol. 294–5, (July 1984), pp. 2–5.

Kadish, Alon, et al., *Arab Fighting in the War of Independence* [Hebrew], Ramat Efal: Ramat Efal and Yad Tabenkin, 1990.

Lorch, Netanel, *The Edge of the Sword: Israel's War of Independence 1947–1949*, Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1968.

Maoz, Moshe, *Israel–Syria – The End of the Conflict?* [Hebrew], Or Yehuda: Sifriat Ma'ariv, 1996.

Morris, Benny, *Israel's Border Wars 1949–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

——, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947–1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Orren, Elchannan, "'A De-Facto Deal?' – Policy and Operations in the Center of the Country in the Autumn of 1948" [Hebrew], *Ma'arachot*, vol. 311 (March 1988), pp. 39–44, 53.

Oren, Michael, *The Origins of the Second Arab-Israel War: Egypt, Israel and the Great Powers, 1952–1956*, London: Frank Cass, 1992.

Pappé, Ilan, "The Lausanne Conference and the First Signs of the Debate on Israeli Foreign Policy" [Hebrew], *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, vol. 1 (1991), pp. 241–261.

——, *Britain and the Arab-Israel Conflict 1948–1951*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

——, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–1951*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1992.

Poles, Y. "The Sharett Era in the Foreign Ministry" [Hebrew], *Ha'aretz*, 19 July 1956.

Rabinowitz, Itamar, "Egypt and the Eretz Israel Question Before and After the July Revolution" [Hebrew], *Zmanim*, vol. 32 (1989), pp. 78–87.

——, *The Road Not Taken: Early Arab–Israeli Negotiations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Reuveni, Y. "The Concept of Peace in Ben-Gurion's Political Thinking" [Hebrew], *Kivunim*, vol. 33 (November 1986), pp. 11–23.

Rosenne, Shabtai, "The Armistice Agreements – Legal Aspects [Hebrew], *Ma'arachot*, vol. 294–5 (July 1984), pp. 6–11.

Rosenthal Yemima (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel* [Hebrew], vol. 3

(*Armistice Talks with Arab Countries December 1948–July 1949*), Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1983 .

—— (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel* [Hebrew], vol. 4 (*May–December 1949*), Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1986.

—— (ed.) *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel* [Hebrew], vol. 6 (*1951*), Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1991.

Sela, Avraham, *The Decline of the Arab–Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988.

Shalom, Zaki, "Ben-Gurion's and Sharett's Rejection of Territorial Demands from Israel, 1949–1956" [Hebrew], *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, vol. 2 (1992), pp. 197–213.

——, "The Tension over the IDF Parades in 1958 and 1961" [Hebrew], in Avi Bareli (ed.), *Divided Jerusalem 1948–1967*, Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1994.

Shamir, S. *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.

Shapira, Anita, "The Views of Berl, Tabenkin and Ben-Gurion on the October Revolution" [Hebrew], *Zmanim*, vol. 27–8 (1988), pp. 80–97.

Sharett, Moshe, "Israel and the Arabs – War and Peace" [Hebrew], *Ot*, vol. 1:1 (September 1966), p. 8.

——, *At the Gates of the Nations: 1946–1949* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1958.

——, *Making of Policy: The Diaries of Moshe Sharett* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma'ariv, 1978.

Sheffer, Gabriel, *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Shlaim, Avi *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine*, Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Teveth, Shabtai, "Ben-Gurion and the Arab Question" [Hebrew], *Cathedra*, vol. 43 (March 1987) pp. 52–68.

Teveth, Shabtai, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Troen, Ilan, *Suez–Sinai Crisis, 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal*, London: Frank Cass, 1990.

Tsahor, Zeev, "Mapam and the Establishment of the First Government of Israel" [Hebrew], *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael*, vol. 4 (1994), pp. 378–99.

——, *The Roots of Israeli Politics* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1987.

——, *Vision and Accountability: Ben-Gurion between Ideology and Politics* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim, 1994.

Zameret, Zvi, "The Mediation of Count Folke Bernadotte" [Hebrew], in M. Naor (ed.), *The First Year of Independence 1948–1949: Sources, Documents, Selected Issues and Supplementary Material*, Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1988, pp. 143–56.

——, *The Melting Pot: The Frumkin Commission and Education of Immigrant Children (1950)* [Hebrew], Kiryat Sde Boker: The Ben-Gurion Research Centre, 1993.

Index