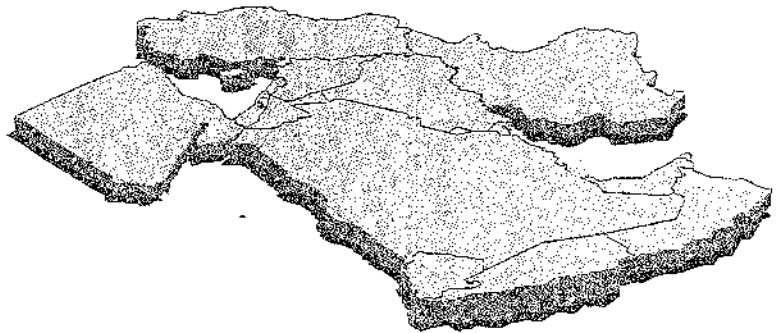




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*The Middle East  
Towards the Year 2000 -  
Patterns of Change*

by Prof. Bernard Lewis

In memory of Menaché H. Eliachar

February 18, 1996

NINTH B'NAI B'RITH WORLD CENTER  
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PROF. BERNARD LEWIS

PROFESSOR BERNARD LEWIS: Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. Let me begin by saying what an extraordinary sense of privilege I have in having been invited to address this distinguished audience in this distinguished place. Having looked at the list of my predecessors at this lectern, I feel I must begin with a word or two of disclaimer. I am not employed by any government, neither as a politician nor as a civil servant. I am therefore unable to offer you any inner secrets of state, any revelations of hitherto undisclosed events, agreements, disagreements or the like. Equally, I am not a journalist and therefore I am unable to offer you anything fresh and piping hot, something new, previously unknown, or even a new spin on something previously known. What, you may ask, has he come for then? Let me be frank: I am a historian - that is to say, I am a person who deals with the past. Worse than that, I am a retired historian. However, I feel I may have something worth while to offer you, and that is the specific professional contribution of the historian: context, breadth, depth - in a word, perspective. I don't suppose I shall disclose any facts not already known to the overwhelming majority of the audience, if not all of you, but I may perhaps be able to put them in unfamiliar combinations, and thereby help to clarify them.

*The professional contribution of the historian - perspective.*

By using the word 'perspective' I mean to start with a wide lens and then gradually narrow it and zoom in on current-day Israel to conclude.

Let me begin with a global perspective. In this perspective, a really major change has taken place during the last few years. Whereas in the world of politics major changes occur approximately twice a week, that is not the kind of major change I have in mind. I am speaking, quite literally, of the end of an era. This era began in the year 1798 when a French general called Bonaparte landed in Egypt and stayed for several years. The arrival and departure of the French expedition to Egypt taught two sharp lessons to the peoples of this area. Their arrival demonstrated that a West European power, with even a small expeditionary force, could conquer, occupy and rule one of the central provinces of the Ottoman Empire without serious difficulty. Their departure, a few years later, demonstrated the second lesson: that only another European power could get them out. It was not the Egyptians, nor was it their suzerains, the Turks, who induced the French to leave. It was a squadron of the Royal Navy. That began a period during which ultimate power in this region resided elsewhere, when the basic theme

*An era, beginning with the French expedition to Egypt in 1798 has ended.*

*A pattern of external imperial powers contending for domination has ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union and ending of the Cold War.*

of international relations and of much else in this region was the rivalries of outside imperial powers. Sometimes, for a while, Britain and France; sometimes the West against Russia; then the Allies against the Axis; and in the most recent phase the United States against the Soviet Union - but always this pattern of external major powers contending for the domination of the area. This rivalry went through several phases: interference, intervention, penetration, domination, and then the final phase of reluctant departure.

That phase has ended. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War we are, in a sense, back to 1797. Of the two superpowers, neither will play an imperial role in this region, the one because it can't, the other because it won't. I have no doubt that Russia will be back some time. A country with the resources, the population and the ambitions of Russia will not indefinitely remain on the side lines of the great international game of politics. They will be back in force, but not for some time. And when they do, we don't know what kind of a Russia it will be, what kind of policies it will pursue, what kind of aims and objectives it will have. There are signs of some desire, perhaps 'velleities' would be the right word, to play a part again in Middle Eastern affairs, but quite manifestly they lack the capacity to do so.

*Russia will return to the region but it lacks the capacity to do so now.*

The other great power, the United States, withdraws not through lack of ability, but through lack of will. The problem of American policy in this region - I am not saying that this is true of other regions - is not American involvement but American reluctance to become involved. There is, I think, a great deal of misunderstanding of what the role of the United States is or is likely to be in this area. As long as the Soviet Union existed and as long as the Cold War was the main theme, American presence in the Middle East was part of a global strategy designed to cope with a global confrontation. With the ending of the confrontation, such a strategy becomes unnecessary. What, we may ask, is left? Very little.

*The US chooses to withdraw from the region through lack of will to become involved.*

The term imperialist or imperialism is often used to describe American policies. I would suggest that this is based on a misunderstanding of the nature either of imperialism or of America, or more frequently of both. Let me take one or two other terms often misused. The accusation is often made, not only against the United States but against the West in general, that they have a double standard. To which I reply, this is a most unfair accusation. Why should they be limited to two standards? They don't have a double standard, but rather multiple standards, as we do, all of us, whoever "we" may be.

Another phrase often used is 'evenhandedness': the United States is accused of a lack of evenhandedness and urged to adopt a more evenhanded policy. This, I would suggest, is based on a total

misunderstanding of the situation. Evenhandedness is a desirable quality in judges, in juries, in police forces and other agencies of law enforcement, but is irrelevant to the policies of a power pursuing its interests as defined by its leadership. If 'evenhandedness' means treating all alike, that is a manifestly suicidal policy for any kind of government, American or other, to pursue. Here I would quote a mediaeval Arab moralist, Hazm of Cordoba, who wrote a magnificent essay on magnanimity. He says, "magnanimity does not mean that you treat your friends and enemies alike. It means after you have your enemy completely in your power, you treat him with generosity." He goes on to say, "if you treat your friends and enemies alike, you will arouse distaste for your friendship and contempt for your enmity". It is a complete misunderstanding shared by many in the United States, to attribute judicial or police functions to any one power. That is not what it's about.

*a power pursuing its interests and is suicidal for any government.*

As I said, the era which began two hundred years ago has come to an end, which means that for the first time in slightly less than 200 years the peoples of the Middle East are having to accept responsibility for their own affairs, reach their own decisions, formulate their own policies, make their own mistakes and accept the consequences. This is very difficult to understand, very difficult to accept and very difficult to internalize. We are dealing with a region where for almost 200 years - that is to say the entire life times of all those who formulate and conduct policy at the present time, and their predecessors' for many generations - the vital decisions were made elsewhere, overwhelming power lay elsewhere, and the principal task of statesmanship and diplomacy was to avoid the dangers and, as far as possible, exploit the opportunities presented by this situation. It is very difficult to forsake the habits not just of a lifetime, but of a whole era.

*In a reversion of history, the Middle East is free of superpower domination for the first time in 200 years.*

*Peoples of the region are now responsible for their own affairs.*

If I am right that the era of great power domination in the region has come to an end, then in this important sense the new Middle East is a return to a very old Middle East. It is a Middle East in which regional powers acquire an importance which they had previously lacked.

*In the new ME, regional powers have importance they lacked.*

It might be useful therefore to consider what the situation is, now that the outside powers are really outside powers. There are several changes which I would like to examine briefly one by one. The first one, obviously, is the existence of Israel. In 1798 there was no Israel - indeed there was no state in the area of modern-day Israel, no separate power between the Nile Valley and the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. That is an important change, one of far reaching consequences for all concerned.

*The establishment of Israel represents a change with far reaching consequences for the region.*

The Middle East has come back to the earlier period in another very important respect. That is, it is enlarged beyond its 1991 boundaries, back to its 1798 boundaries. We are accustomed to think of the Middle



*With the collapse of the USSR and ensuing independence of its Moslim and Trans-Caucasian states, the boundaries of the New Middle East are expanding back to its earlier size.*

*The independence of a new group of Turkish-speaking states harbingers the emergence of a 'Turkic World.'*

East as a vaguely defined area in the east, west and south but with a precisely defined northern limit, the Soviet frontier. That of course is no longer true: there is no Soviet frontier and the various Middle Eastern countries which were conquered by the Russians in the late 18th and mid-19th centuries and incorporated into the Russian Empire are now again becoming part of the Middle East to which historically they belong. I am speaking of the three Trans-Caucasian republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and the five central-Asian republics, nowadays popularly known in Washington circles as the 'Stans' - Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan, Tadzhikistan, Kazakhstan. These are culturally, religiously, historically, traditionally, even geographically, part of the Middle East, artificially separated by Russian conquest and now in the process of rejoining the Middle East. This is a very interesting process. It offers many parallels with what happened in the more familiar Middle East. For example, the ending of the Russian Empire in these lands repeats in many ways the ending of British and French Empire in the Arab lands: the reluctant withdrawal, the intermediate stage of bases and garrisons, unequal treaties, experts and advisors and the like. There are remarkable parallels between what is happening in Trans-Caucasia and the 'Stans' of the present time, and what happened in the former British and French dependencies in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa. One may hope, perhaps expect, that the peoples of Trans-Caucasia and Central Asia will complete their disentanglement from Russia in the same way that the Arabs completed their disentanglement from Britain and France. They may succeed and they may not; they are not dealing with London or Paris but with Moscow. That is a major difference, and will have important consequences which I would not venture to predict. But if things go as anticipated, there will be a new group of independent states with ever closer links with what we might call the older Middle East. Of these eight republics, two are Christian - Armenia and Georgia - and the other six are Muslim. Of those six, one, Tadzhikistan speaks a language closely related to Persian. The other five speak languages related to Turkish and there are already many links between these five Turkic republics and the Republic of Turkey. That means that we are seeing the emergence of a 'Turkish World' in the sense in which we used to speak of the 'Arab World'; a world partly independent, partly semi-independent and partly would-be independent, groping its way towards some sort of new unity. And it seems to me that the emergence of this Turkic world could be one of the most interesting phenomena of this region at the present time. Wandering around the streets of Tel Aviv I have noticed odd things like the Consulate of Uzbekistan or Azerbaijan Airlines and other indications of contacts between Israel and these republics.

Of the older states of the region two stand out as particularly important - Turkey and Iran. These are in many ways the strongest, certainly the most dynamic of the states of the Middle East. They are, moreover, two

states which represent contrasting models for future development. Here again in a sense we go back to where it was before Napoleon Bonaparte arrived. In 1798 when the French expedition came to Egypt, there were only two important states, two sovereign states of any consequence in the region, the Ottoman Empire and Iran. They had been rivals for centuries for the domination of the region. Now, suddenly, with the departure of the outside powers, Turkey and Iran again present the most important, most dynamic, powers of the region; and again, they represent competing models for the future: Kemalist Turkey a model of secular democracy, and post-revolutionary Iran a model of Islamic theocracy. These, in many ways, represent the two most likely alternative futures for the whole region, both with their attractions, both with their disciples. Both at the present time are manifestly under strain. As you know, in the general election which was held in Turkey on the 24th of December 1995 a religious party won 21% of the vote. That means that 21% of the voting citizens of the secular republic of Turkey will at the very least contemplate some form of Islamic state and others are willing to go into partnership with them.

*Turkey and Iran are the most dynamic states in the region, rivals again for domination.*

*Turkey and Iran represent competing models for the future of the Middle East.*

As to where all this will lead and to what extent it will succeed is at this stage impossible to venture even the wildest prediction. We do not know what percentage of the population of Iran would prefer a secular republic. It is the nature of the democracies that they allow oppositions to express their views. In the Islamic theocracy of Iran this is not the case, so we have no reliable indication how many Iranians would prefer a secular democratic form of government. We do have a number of indications of strain.

In the rest of the region there isn't very much likely to attract. It is remarkable, for example, that in the Arab world today there is not a single ruler or regime who commands any influence or prestige outside his own immediate area. There was a time when figures like Nasser could command enormously wide support and popularity. Muammar Qaddafi and Saddam Hussein managed it very briefly but neither was able to maintain this. Now all over the Arab World rulers and regimes can command obedience through repression at home or terror abroad, but do not have the kind of popularity that Nasser undoubtedly had. The regimes, with few exceptions, are basically of two kinds - old fashioned autocracies, some of which are showing signs of significant improvement through democratization, though they are not yet democracies; or new-style totalitarian dictatorships. These do not really present a very attractive model for the future, least of all to their own people.

*No Arab leader today commands influence outside his immediate area.*

*Arab regimes present no attractive model for the future, least of all for their own people.*

I started with global and I moved on to regional perspectives. I turn now to a still narrower view which, for want of a better word, I will call 'local'. The question which I think concerns all of us at the present time is what it has become customary to call 'the peace process'. Though

*The peace process is a consequence of the ending of the Cold War and global confrontation; so long as there was an alternative patron for war, countries could avoid peace.*

*For moderate Arab governments, Israel has become a secondary danger; primary danger is religious radicalism.*

*Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and agreement was made possible by the extremely disadvantageous situation of the Palestinians.*

*It was fortunate that the Israeli government saw Palestinian weakness as a chance for peace, not victory.*

*Many forces are still struggling against peace.*

some have questioned whether it is peace and others have questioned whether it is a process I think the term is convenient and I propose to retain it for this lecture. The fact that the peace process has begun at all and has achieved what it has achieved - and that is very considerable - is of course in itself a consequence of the ending of the Cold War and the ending of the global confrontation. Without that no peace process would have been possible. As long as there was an alternative patron, there was always some way of avoiding it. One could go to the British against the French, to the French against the British, to the Axis against the Allies, to the Soviets against the Americans. Now there is no such game in town. The only place to go to for those who determinedly reject peace is Iran - Iran and the Islamic fundamentalism, which is the state doctrine of Iran. Now that's a different matter: people in this region didn't really know very much about the Nazis or the Communists, still less about Nazism or Communism. They could delude themselves that in a world dominated by the Nazis or the Communists they would have a place, even an honored place. They have no such illusions about Iran or Islamic fundamentalism; that is something they do understand. And quite suddenly Israel finds itself elevated from a position of primary threat to secondary threat - the lesser evil. This represents an immense improvement on the previous status.

The change which made negotiation and ultimately peace possible is that one side found itself in an extremely disadvantageous situation. Let me put it this way: the leadership of the Palestinian organizations made a series of bad choices: during the Second World War they chose the Axis; during the Cold War they chose the Soviets; during the Gulf War they chose Saddam Hussein. After a series of miscalculations of such staggering magnitude there is a price to pay. And this was well understood by a leadership who knew where they were and for whom therefore Oslo, and all that is implied by that term, was a life belt. I think it very fortunate - and here I know I venture into party politics but nevertheless I'll say it - that there was at that time a government in Israel which saw in this an opportunity for peace rather than an opportunity for victory. It would have been easy to make the other choice, to take advantage of the situation of utter powerlessness on the part of the adversary. I think it was a statesmanlike choice and it has made what followed possible. Nevertheless, it continues to be difficult. There are still powerful forces working against peace. Not just forces but, shall we say, factors and circumstances.

Let me try to enumerate them. First there is the rejectionist camp; those who explicitly, avowedly, consciously oppose peace, oppose any accommodation with the other side, reject anything short of total victory. And here one must say that the outlook is remarkably similar on both sides of the divide, both sides claiming to have divine support for their policies. I am irresistibly reminded of the saying of a great

French Catholic philosopher Blaise Pascal who says in his 'Pensées': "Men never do evil more readily or more thoroughly than when inspired by religion." Pascal was a devoutly religious man. Since I quoted a Catholic I should also quote a Protestant: Kirkegaard in his 'Fear and Trembling' writes, "if you believe that God is speaking to you directly and personally, be careful; it's probably the devil." The rejectionists remain a powerful force. They certainly have the capacity to delay the peace; whether they have the capacity to prevent it, I don't know.

Another difficulty which must be faced is the ignorance on both sides regarding the other side's point of view, outlook and case. Very few people in Israel or even elsewhere are aware of the sense of outrage that most Arabs feel towards the very existence of Israel in this place. One also has to bear in mind that Arab knowledge of Jewish history, ancient and modern, of the past connection with this country and of the nature of Zionism, is at best minimal. I say 'at best' because more often it is totally fictitious. If you wander around the book shops in Arab cities you will usually find a section on Israel and a section on Jews consisting almost entirely of warmed-over left-overs from the Third Reich. There are innumerable editions and translations into Arabic - nine at the last count - of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, constantly being reprinted and other books of the same kind based on it. What is bad about this is not so much that this material is available, but that it is the only thing available in those places. The reader of Arabic who honestly wants to know something about Jewish history, Jewish religion, the Jewish connection with the land of Israel will not find it. On Israel, though, there is a certain improvement: at one time the literature on Israel consisted very largely of lurid stories about espionage and sabotage and there is now a spate of translated works by such authors as Ostrovsky. There is also a fair proportion of translations of books by mainstream Israeli figures; the memoirs of Rabin, Peres, and Netanyahu have been published in Arabic translations, sometimes with quite large sales. What is discouraging is the introductions explaining these books to the unwary Arab reader who might be misled. For example, the fourth translation of Prime Minister Peres' 'The New Middle East', contains an introduction by the translator, which says: "The Jews claim that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion are a forgery. This book proves that they are the truth."

The mutual fear and distrust are therefore very considerable. The psychological barriers are immense and by no means easy to overcome. Sometimes I have been struck, even among well intentioned people, people who want to know, who want to be friendly, who want to engage in dialogue, and who say something or other disclosing a quite incredible lack of even elementary knowledge. The situation on the Israeli side is much better, but still by no means good.

*Ignorance on both sides must be addressed.*

*'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' are still an important text in Arab countries.*

*Mutual fear and distrust are very considerable.*



*Different perceptions of Israel.*

I think one should also mention the transformation of the mutual fears. When you are in Israel the perspective you acquire from Israelis is of a small country surrounded by overwhelmingly large, populous, nations armed to the teeth awaiting an opportunity to destroy it. If you talk to people in Arab countries, the picture is of a powerful, technologically advanced, economically dominant Israel awaiting an opportunity to extend its imperial rule over the whole Arab world. In my recent travels I have been told again and again by different people that the combined GNP of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians together is less than that of Israel; that the per capita output of Israelis is 21 times of that of Egyptians and other statistics of the kind. These cause genuine alarm. There is a real fear that the old military menace, as they saw it, has gone for the time being at least, to be replaced by an economic menace. A good deal of the over-enthusiastic response of Israelis to new opportunities has encouraged, rather than allayed, these fears.

*Arabs fear that Israel will replace its old military menace with a new economic menace.*

*Changed situation makes peace with Israel acceptable.*

I have just been speaking of factors against peace. What are the factors in favor of peace? Basically three things. One is the point I have already made - the changed regional and global situation, which for the first time make peace in Arab countries not only acceptable but even, in certain respects, desirable.

*Israel and Arabs realize that war is unwinnable and that the alternatives to peace are worse.*

The second is the realization by more rational elements on both sides that war is unwinnable. A series of wars demonstrated that the Arabs cannot conquer Israel. The Intifada demonstrated, if it needed demonstrating, that to continue indefinitely to rule over a resentful alien population could succeed only at an unacceptable cost involving the transformation of the very nature of this society. Linked with that is a third reason: a growing realization on both sides that the alternatives are worse. If one doesn't make peace, that is to say if one doesn't accept some compromises, what is the alternative? Unending war for both parties with no prospect of victory for either and no visible way of ending it. It seems to me that that is the ultimate reason for whatever optimism one may muster.

*Those who were pessimistic about the endurance of the peace with Egypt have been proven wrong.*

Let me turn now to some of the specifics of the peace process. What I have been saying so far refers principally to the Palestinians and to the Jordanians. Let me say a word or two about the cold peace with Egypt and the possible peace with Syria. As far as Egypt is concerned there is good news and bad news. The good news is that the pessimists have so far been proved wrong every time. It was argued that the peace was Sadat's peace and that he just wanted Sinai back. Well, he got Sinai back, the peace didn't end; Sadat was murdered, the peace didn't end. It was argued that when there was another war between Israel and an Arab state the peace would break down. There was the war in Lebanon in '82, yet the peace continued. So that in spite of these phases - the recovery of Sinai, the argument over Taba, the murder of Sadat, the war

in Lebanon, the Intifada - nevertheless, the peace with Egypt was maintained by the Egyptians, who therefore obviously feel that it is of some significant value to them.

The negative side is the coldness of the peace. 'Cold' is perhaps the wrong term - 'arctic' may be better. One has to understand why there is this strong resentment in Egypt. Until Sadat's initiative Egypt was the accepted leader of the Arab world. In every capital - Washington, Moscow, London, Paris - wherever Arab ambassadors formed a group, the Egyptian ambassador was their leader. He convened the meetings, he set the agenda, he provided the guidelines. This came to be regarded as a perquisite of the Egyptian diplomatic corps. Then suddenly there was the initiation of the dialogue with Israel and the signing of the peace, followed by no other Arab country. The Egyptians, from being the leaders of the Arab world, became the outcasts of the Arab world, the pariahs of the Arab world and the Egyptian diplomatic corps were the primary victims of this change; it was they who suffered it immediately and obviously. When the new peace process began in Madrid and Oslo, there was a great surge of hope - that now at last the rest of the Arab world had realized that the Egyptians were right and were following the Egyptian lead and Egypt would resume its role of leadership and the road to peace would lead through Cairo. Well that didn't happen. The Egyptians found that the Palestinians, the Jordanians, and a lot of other people preferred to deal directly with Israel and the road to peace did not go through Cairo. The Egyptians found themselves being marginalized, as they saw it, for a second time; crowded out even from what they regarded as their own constituency; their own rightful role of leadership, not only of the Arab world but of the Middle East as a whole, curtailed. The turning point for Egyptians was the Casablanca Conference at which the Israeli presence, as described to me, could be likened to the arrival of an armored division encountering the local units of the Camel Corps. This was a terrifying experience, one which caused both resentment, which doesn't matter so much, and alarm, which matters much more.

One might add to this another point which is important: certain differences in culture and way of life, particularly noticeable where two peoples who have been hermetically sealed from each other for so long and whose only contacts were hostile are suddenly brought into close proximity and direct links. I don't need to explain to an audience in this mixed city the differences of culture, patterns of behavior, of social mores, which divide Israelis and Arabs.

Let me just mention one as an example: the Israeli concern with human rights, which for the most part is not greatly shared on the other side and the Arab concern for human dignity which doesn't appear to command much attention among Israelis. One might hope that each could learn from the other in this respect; although when cultures meet

*'Arctic' peace  
between Israel and  
Egypt.*

*Until Egypt-Israel  
peace, Egypt was  
the leader of the  
Arab world.*

*Egypt expected  
Arab-Israel peace  
process to lead  
through Cairo.*

*Egypt feels  
crowded out of its  
rightful role in the  
Middle East.*

*The size of the  
Israeli delegation to  
the Casablanca  
conference caused  
alarm among  
Arabs.*

*Cultural differences  
between Arabs and  
Israelis are  
noticeable due to  
long separation.*

there is always a danger that what will emerge is not a marriage of the best, but a cohabitation of the worst. One could envision a situation in which the Arabs adopt an Israeli attitude to dignity and the Israelis adopt an Arab attitude to human rights. I would hope though that it would be the other way around, which would be beneficial to both.

*Israel's demand for normalization with Syria is either unreasonable or illogical.*

Regarding Syria, it seems to me that the Israeli demand for normalization is, depending how you look at it, either unreasonable or illogical. Normalization means becoming normal. What is normal for Syria? Asking for open frontiers, free movement of tourists and so on with Syria is not asking for normal treatment; rather it is asking for privileged treatment. None of Syria's other neighbors enjoy this. Syria is surrounded by countries which are at least suspicious and often openly hostile. The only exception, Lebanon, is an apparent, but not a real, exception. For a country in the situation of Syria to accept the kind of open frontiers Israel seeks, even to the degree that they exist and are developing with Jordan, seems to me totally unrealistic. I don't see how the Syrian regime could possibly accept such a thing. The Syrians must be worried that if the Israelis are granted these privileges everybody else will want them too, and where would Syria be then? I am amazed at the skill and astuteness with which the ruler of Syria has conducted this whole business. The late Sir Charles Webster, the great historian of diplomacy, used to hold up Chaim Weizmann as the ultimate perfect diplomat. His argument was this: Weizmann represented the non-existent government of a non-existent state, not representing anything by way of political or economic or military power. Yet he managed to move among the representatives of the world powers, negotiate with them almost on a footing of equality and achieved remarkable diplomatic results. This, said Sir Charles Webster, is diplomacy at its purest. He had a point. I was reminded of that looking at what is happening in Syria. The ruler of Syria is obviously in a much stronger position than the president of the Jewish Agency was in the inter-war period. But in the last couple of years he finds himself isolated, impoverished, deprived of his super-power patron, with his armament rusting and growing antiquated, with his economy in a shambles, and yet he has managed to parley himself into a position when he has interviews with two American presidents, has 17 visits from secretaries of state and is clearly setting the tone of the discussions. It is not as good as Weizmann, but he runs him a close second in diplomatic skill and astuteness.

*To expect Syria to accept open borders is unrealistic.*

*Assad has conducted himself with skill and astuteness and is clearly setting the tone of the negotiations.*

*At first glance, there is every reason democracy should not survive in Israel.*

I now come to my final theme and that is the domestic or internal situation inside Israel. I remarked earlier that the choices for the region seem to be coming down to democracy and theocracy. Here I would remind you that 'theocracy' was originally coined by Josephus, so it is a Jewish-made term. Josephus devised this term to describe the Jewish system of government as he saw it. At first sight one would say that there is every reason why democracy should not succeed in Israel and

very few reasons why it should. The overwhelming majority of the population have no democratic background or very little. They come from countries - Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa - in which democracy is either non-existent or gravely flawed. Only a small minority of Israelis come from western countries with a democratic background.

Another factor against democracy is the neighborhood, in which democracy generally does not flourish. The neighborhood is not conducive to the development of democratic institutions, nor are the circumstances. A country which has been in a perpetual state of either war or military alert inevitably gives a major role to soldiers and therefore to generals, the classical situation for a military takeover. Yet, there never has been a military takeover in Israel and it seems in the highest degree unlikely. At one time it was said that generals couldn't possibly take over, because they would have to go and consult their kibbutz committees first. That is no longer true, but it still seems highly unlikely.

I would add another impediment to democracy in Israel and that is the electoral system, which must surely be one of the worst in the free world. I would have thought it was as bad as it could be, but I was wrong, because the latest reform made it even worse than it was.

The point I am trying to make is that democracy not only survives, but flourishes in Israel in spite of a very unfavorable background, setting and situation. Why? One obvious reason is that it has been for the whole of its existence virtually quarantined in the region, isolated from the region, and therefore, for many practical purposes, part of western Europe. That was certainly conducive to the maintenance and development of democratic institutions here. But Israel, too, shares this regional problem of the relationship between religion and the state and the compatibility or incompatibility of religion and democracy.

Here I put on my historian's gown again and go back a little in history. The Jews who came to Israel came overwhelmingly from countries of two civilizations, from Christendom and the lands of Islam. Inevitably, they brought with them much of the civilization of the countries from which they came. There were small Jewish communities in other places, in India and in China, but they were numerically insignificant and they made no significant contributions to Jewish life, nor as far as I am aware, to the countries in which they lived. They were too few, isolated and did not flourish. We recognize the difference, shall we say, between Jews from Berlin and Jews from Baghdad, who are in many respects as different as any other two people from Berlin and Baghdad would be; the difference being due not to their Jewishness, but to the Germanness of one and to the Iraqiness of the others. What I don't think we adequately realize is that it is not just this country or that

*Despite conditions which form the classical situation for military takeover, it seems in the highest degree unlikely in Israel.*

*Israel's electoral system is one of the worst in the free world.*

*Democracy flourishes in Israel despite a very unfavorable setting.*

*The essence of the difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews is the difference in their civilizational backgrounds - between 'Christian' and 'Moslem' Jews.*

*One of the most encouraging developments in Israel is the easing of differences between Jews of different cultural backgrounds.*

*What is lacking in both Ashkenazi and Sephardi cultures is a Jewish political culture.*

*Ancient Jewish sovereignty is too old and modern sovereignty too young to provide guidance.*

country, but two civilizations which meet in this small country. The much discussed distinction between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews is not really about minor differences of ritual tradition or 'minhag'. That's not the point. Nor is it, as some modern ideologists would have it, a difference between Euro-American and Afro-Asian Jews. That's not the point either. The difference is between the 'Christian Jews' and the 'Moslim Jews', using these terms with a civilizational, rather than a religious connotation. They bring with them much from their countries of origin, from their cultures of origin, and it is therefore inevitable that there should have been clashes, even confrontations, between them. And one of the most encouraging and remarkable successes in this country is the easing of that difference and the steadily improving cohabitation of peoples of these very different, contrasting, cultural backgrounds in one small country. The pressure cooker effect of the neighborhood has certainly contributed to that.

Now turning from this to the specific question of religion and the state, this is a matter in which the Christian and Moslim backgrounds are particularly important. In virtually all other respects we can speak of a distinctively Jewish culture - if you like a Judeo-Christian and a Judeo-Islamic culture, but still a Jewish culture. We have got used to using the term Judeo-Christian in this century; it's a modern term. In previous generations it would have been found equally offensive on both sides of the hyphen, but we accept it now as normal. We could, with equal justification, talk about a Judeo-Islamic tradition going back to the great days of Muslim Spain, of Abbasid Baghdad, of Ottoman Istanbul and so on. What is lacking in both is a Jewish political culture, and that is natural, since Jews as Jews - not necessarily as individuals - have been cut off from the exercise of sovereignty and from the use of coercive power. Jewish communal authorities did at times have some authority, but it was always limited authority, it was always delegated authority. It was greater under Muslim rule, smaller under Christian rule, smaller still under secular rule, but always delegated, limited, revocable. There was no Jewish sovereign power. The memories of ancient Jewish sovereignty are too remote and the experience of modern Jewish sovereignty too brief to provide much in way of guidance. There is of course extensive discussion of the state and the business of the state in Jewish religious literature, but since they had no access to the power of the state, that discussion is overwhelmingly abstract and theoretical or, to put it in different terms, messianic. There is or has hitherto been no explicitly Jewish political culture. And that is why in political culture, more than in anything else, what one sees around us here is derivative. The outside world offers many examples. There are clergymen and ulema, bishops and muftis, archbishops and ayatollahs or, looking perhaps in a different direction, crusade and jihad, inquisitors and assassins: a wide range of good and also very unattractive models offered. These are, of course, not primarily Jewish but Christian and Muslim, for which Christians and Muslims, in their



various countries, have been seeking answers and some may have found them. A significant number of Christian countries did find an answer for the dilemma of the relations between religion and the state, between God and Caesar. It required centuries of bitter religious war and persecution before they arrived at that solution, but they did find it. It is a solution known as the separation of church and state - a device which achieves a double purpose. On the one hand, it prevents the state from interfering in affairs of religion; on the other, it prevents the exponents of religion from using the power of the state to enforce their doctrines or their rules. This, as I said, was a Christian solution to a Christian problem. The Muslims and the Jews are both still seeking a solution to their problems which, though not identical, are similar and in a sense parallel. I can only hope that they do not take too long to find it.

*The Christian response to the dilemma of church and state was separation.*

*Muslims and Jews still seek a solution to the church-state dilemma.*

Thank you.