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## FOR A SEMITIC FEDERATION

BECAUSE THE ACCENT IN ARAB-ISRAELI RELATIONS is so often placed upon the notion of conflict, because for the third time in twenty years there has been bitter warfare, the profound similarity and complementary nature of Arab and Jew is generally overlooked. Yet this similarity and complementariness are present beneath the surface of their entire relationship—even in their hatred—like the greater part of an iceberg. But Arab-Israeli relations have become so frozen that only the emergent part of the iceberg is considered as real.

Beneath apparently irreconcilable positions are a number of deep and potentially uniting realities. Above all, there is the fact that, propaganda aside, the Jews and the Arabs are struggling for the same goal—freedom in their own land. The Arabs are re-conquering their ancient land from imperialism and colonial exploitation, and the Jews are re-conquering their ancient land from historical exploitation (and Roman imperialism). In similarly different manners, both have the task of resurrecting their economy, their language, and their culture. Both are attempting to create the terrain necessary for the growth of materially and spiritually healthy people.

The fundamental goal of Israel and of the Arab States is the creation of a land in which their citizens can enjoy all human opportunities, and in which they can be themselves fully in their natural national moulds and contribute their specific nature to the world. It is an obvious truism that the attainment of this could be facilitated if they shared their experience rather than hindered each other.

In their present state of development, the Jews and the Arabs have a precious and vital gift to offer each other. The Arabs can help the Jews to re-discover and re-adapt themselves to their old new land; they can teach the Jews a necessary Oriental way of life which the majority of them forgot in the Diaspora. Such an adaptation to the natural milieu is of essential importance, and the lack of it probably goes a long way to explain the emigration, *kiboutz*, and even the economic crises which plagued Israel before the war and may

again arise after the euphoria of victory fades and the consequences of continued armed and psychological confrontation with the Arabs become once again apparent.

The Israelis have something equally important to offer to the Arab countries: the vast scientific, technical, and generally modern skills which they acquired in the Diaspora. This modern outlook, this undefinable quality which permits some nations to be technically modern and the lack of which requires others to painstakingly improvise, the Israelis have in abundance and in exportable quantities (as for example, in their African and Asian technical assistance programmes).

Other positive factors are the similarity of Arabic and Hebrew, the experience of living together which goes back thousands of years and which was broken, brutally, only with Israel's new political independence. Still another uniting element is the political tendency of both Arabs and Jews towards social democracy. As to alliances, today Israel is forced, for security reasons, to be disproportionately identified with the United States, but in aspiration she is far closer—as are the Arab nations—to France and to the developing “third world”.

In religion, also, Islam and Judaism are very close to each other—both in theology and in rites—and religion has played, and still plays, a prime role for both peoples. This basic importance of religion for both Arab and Jew has resulted in two peoples with highly similar psychologies. For the Jew exiled in the Diaspora and for the Arab exploited by colonialism, religion has been the sustaining and central element. This is still true today, even for the Jew who *claims* to be agnostic, but who has, in fact, subconsciously transformed his religious life into moralism; and for the Arab, who has transformed his religion into social idealism.

On the surface, it would not seem that religion has had the same effect on Jew and on Arab, or the same present meaning; but appearances here are deceiving. There is only a difference in form between the Jews of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, or New York, and the Arabs in Hebron, Damascus, or Tangier. The deep pious acceptance, the rich tribal customs, and the closeness to a reality which is concrete and mystic at the same time, is the major content of the life of these people. For the more “evolved” Arabs and Jews, the transposition of religion has occurred in a similar manner—the search for knowledge and for individual fulfilment being the dominant characteristic of the Jewish artist and scientist as it is of the Arab social idealist and writer. Where classical religion has remained a vital force among the “evolved” Arabs and Jews, the

resulting view of life is much the same. And the spiritual crisis of the masses—the feeling that their religions do not lead to a better life in the modern world—is a phenomenon common to both peoples.

Another important uniting factor is race. Abraham is the father of both nations, and despite other racial influences in both peoples, the Semitic racial atavism remains very strong—stronger and deeper than the differences which have, for the most part, been intellectually formulated.

There is even the additional point that a large majority of Israel's citizens (including those born in Israel) are now oriental, and that about sixty-five per cent of the children in the primary schools are oriental. So that, even if one wants to give credit to the notion of European intruders in the Middle East, this becomes less and less true. In the long run, with climate and natural background aiding, it will continue to diminish in truth no matter how many non-oriental Jews may immigrate to Israel. It is already evident—despite the objections of some Israelis—that Jerusalem and even Tel Aviv are cities which are as oriental as Istanbul or Teheran.

It is also only fair to note that the words "European intruders" applied to the Israelis is highly unjust. An obvious reference could be made to the need for a Jewish homeland for those Jews displaced and traumatized by Nazi Germany and an indifferent world—and it would be to the glory of the Arabs not to refer to such unfortunate people as "intruders". But more important is that Jewish history, culture, and blood have always been irrevocably tied to Israel; the focal point of Jewish life has always been Israel. One might even add, what are eighteen centuries of Diaspora—during which the Jews were never entirely driven out of Israel—compared with three thousand years of life in a country? And in modern times, the Jews won Israel—as other countries have been established—by hard work on the land, by natural immigration, and by the force of arms beginning one and a half centuries ago.

Who then can reasonably deny that the homeland of the Jews is Israel? Nothing, of course, can be taken away from the tragedy of the 500,000 Arabs who were expelled, or fled, from Palestine in 1948, and who today probably number about one million. Nobody can reasonably deny that Israel—or Palestine—is their blood and historical homeland as well. It is a question of two rights, but in persisting in maintaining the entirety of their rights, both have become wrong, both have betrayed their humanistic heritage. The Jews could have done, and can still do, more to resettle many of these refugees in their former homes, and the Arabs could have resettled, and still can resettle, many of these unfortunate pawns on Arab lands.

Israel fears, however, that any massive return of the Arabs under present conditions would mean the welcoming of a fifth column in their midst, and thus national suicide. For the Arabs, on the other hand, the refugees mean a constant pressure on Israel's existence, an emotional reminder that Arab homes have been violated, and thus the permanent re-enforcing of the desire to conquer Israel. And here the problem stagnates and freezes despite possibilities for its solution.

But is it possible for the Arabs to conquer Israel? The Six Day War has proved that, over the short run, the technical and military superiority of Israel makes this rather unlikely. The fact that Israel has a nuclear capacity and that the Diaspora Jews would throw their last physical, moral, and financial energies into a battle to prevent the defeat of Israel, makes this unlikely over the long run as well. The Arab threat and boycott have had, however, and will continue to have a definite effect, above all psychologically, in that the insecurity they create has been too much for many Jews who have chosen to emigrate, and that Israel's economic and cultural development has been seriously hampered (or at least canalized) by massive arms purchases and a militarized way of life.

Such a frozen situation can continue indefinitely, with both sides focussed on hostility rather than on the more important problems of development, with both sides feeding their hatred and scorn without ever having reasonably examined the question—the natural result of all this being the continuation of periodic outbursts of violence.

To further complicate the matter there is an almost irresistible urge for many Israelis to keep the conquered Palestinian territory which bulges into Israel from Afula to Jerusalem and which is difficult to defend. The people have lived in the fear that an Arab blitzkrieg action from this region, where Israel is less than twenty miles wide, could cut the country in two. There is also the deep mystic urge contained in the words that the Jews have pronounced for nineteen hundred years: "Next year in Jerusalem"—and of course, Old Jerusalem, the Jerusalem of Solomon's Temple. One must be Jewish to fully grasp the power and attraction of this. One must attempt to understand what Jerusalem, Hebron, and the Jordan River mean to the Jewish heart.

There is no shortage of Israeli extremists who are not only in favour of the annexation of the West Bank region and Gaza, but of the Syrian Golan Heights and even the Sinai Peninsula as well. They are the inheritors of the *Irgun Zwei Leumi* "terrorist" organization, today mainly regrouped in the right-wing *Herut* Party, and an essential part of their policy remains "the

restoration of Israel's historical and cultural integrity on both sides of the Jordan"—that is the re-conquering of the land of the twelve tribes, the land of David and Solomon. But the sentiment is also widely held by practically all the Israeli political parties, including the non-Communist left-wing parties, that the conquered territory must not be returned until the Arab States are willing to recognize Israel's existence and until there can be some assurance that this latest war was not fought in vain.

It is too simple to accuse all these people of expansionism without attempting to understand them. In strict terms of the historical processes of nation-building and of Jewish destiny, their goals represent a virile reality which must be englobed rather than opposed. If they are to sacrifice what amounts to a "holy goal", a legitimate solution to the entire Arab-Israeli problem must be offered.

The Six Day War provides an unfortunate supplementary proof of this analysis. The cause of the war was not freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, but the logical outcome of the refusal of both sides to compromise. In the final analysis it does not even matter who fired the first shot. The first shot was fired by the misery of one million Arab refugees who have been left to rot and by Israel's justified fear for its existence and by its mystic love of Jerusalem.

It is neither the return nor the holding of the conquered territories which can change anything over the long run. If this war has served any long-term purpose, it has been to put the promise and the fear of Arab-Israeli relations into patent relief. Both may finally realize that negotiation and compromise can be mutually beneficial; or both may stubbornly stick to their old positions. If both refuse to yield, another war will probably break out whether or not Israel keeps the conquered territories and probably even whether or not she succeeds in setting up an autonomous Arab State in the West Bank area.

And here we come to the key which can change the entirety of Arab-Israeli relations: sacrifice. If the Jews sacrificed that part of their destiny which calls for their return to a territorially fully-restored Israel and combined this sacrifice with the humanism which is equally present in their destiny; if they took positive—and if necessary, unilateral—action in favour of the refugees; if the Arabs sacrificed the obstinate pride which makes them oppose Israel's very right to exist and leads them to negate the fact that the viable future of the Jews can only be in Israel; if both realized that it is a question of two rights—then a solution that would be mutually beneficial and that would bring out the best in both peoples is not at all impossible. Then the

first steps towards a Semitic Federation will have been taken, a Semitic Federation which would not only safeguard the deep national aspirations of both peoples, but would also enhance the possibilities of bringing them to reality.

Certainly it would be naïve to expect such a turn of events for the immediate future, but it would be excessively pessimistic to believe that the situation can never be changed. "*C'est le premier pas qui coute*": only courageous humanistic leaders are needed to inaugurate a new adventurous policy of co-operation. In fact, the major opposition to such a change might well come from foreign countries interested in maintaining a certain pattern of world-power balance—which in reality benefits foreign interests more than it does either the Arab nations or Israel.

Such wise leadership would find an echo among the people, because contrary to what is too often proclaimed—and to such a point that even the Jews and the Arabs have come to believe it—there is no insurmountable basic hostility between Arab and Jew. There are times when one is even tempted to say that the Jews and the Arabs are not engaging in hate and in war, but in a bizarre love affair; that they are fighting with each other as only husband and wife and brothers can; that they are taking each other's measure to better respect each other; and that the spilt blood is the tragic cement of their future relationship.

The courageous leaders who can take these first steps towards peace exist on both sides. General Dayan's offer to Jordan of a corridor to the sea and the desire to negotiate of President Bourguiba and Mohammed Ali Jabari, the Mayor of Hebron, are the timid first seeds of new possibilities. These and other openings have found a revelatory echo among the people. Many Israelis realize that Israel's full flowering can only be ensured through co-operation with the Arabs, and many Arabs are opposed to the extremists who called for—and still crave—the literal extermination of the Jewish presence in Israel. There is an undercurrent of desire in both peoples for a more dignified goal than hatred.

In a first period, co-operation between the Arabs and the Jews could mean greater economic, political, and psychological independence. A beginning could be made with the rational sharing of the region's water supply, the bulk of which today flows uselessly into the sea. There could be trade and travel, and both nations would be able to make better use of the important sums which now go for arms purchases.

With the agreement of the other Arab States there could be formed in

the West Bank region an Arab Palestine which could have ties with both Jordan and Israel. This would mean that neither Israel nor Jordan would annex this part of Palestine and that the dignity of the Arab Palestinians and their right to a national existence would become the guiding principle. A new horizon, full of development possibilities, would be opened in the Middle East.

A further long-term goal could be a Federation of Semitic States similar to the "Europe of Nations" which General de Gaulle favours for Europe. Such a Federation could leave each member free to maintain its specific customs and ideals, but would be mutually enriching because of cooperation in all domains and the rational sharing of industrial and agricultural tasks. That Israel would be the only Jewish member in such a Federation would present no special problem if there were good will on all sides and consideration for what Israel has to offer geographically and technically.

But both sides remain trapped in a paralyzing chauvinism and fear for their security. Yet the paradox is that their legitimate need for a healthy national life and for security would be best served by the sacrificing of their present positions. In the framework of a Federation, the Arabs would no longer need to fear Israeli expansionism, and the Jews would no longer need to fear for their national existence. Instead of considering the refugees as a potential fifth column, Israel could begin to accept these Arabs in her territory, while the Arabs could progressively accept the principle that Israel's vocation is to become the major home for the Jews of the world, that two and a half million Jews in Israel and ten million outside is not reasonable, and that these figures need to be reversed. (With the use of modern techniques there need be no fear of over-population or a land shortage.)

If one considers only the surface of the iceberg of Arab-Israeli relations, then all is wild day-dreaming. Immediate objections are that both the Arabs and the Jews are divided amongst themselves: hatred and the feeling of having been violated dominate the Arab view of Israel and drown the minority who want to negotiate; there is no clear and dominant trend in Israel, and although the Diaspora Jews deeply realize the need for a return to Israel they are in no great rush to leave their adopted homes. The conclusion is that neither the Jews nor the Arabs could ever accept such a solution.

But such an attitude ignores the bulk of the iceberg that is hidden beneath the surface—the deep similarity and complementary nature of both peoples, their related history and blood, their common climate and geography, all of which work invisibly and inexorably towards their rapprochement, and

which like Nature are finally more powerful than any disagreement based on intellectual concepts. Despite all the spilt blood and hatred, it is this reality that can have the last word no matter how much time such a process requires. Similarly it is Arab unity and the return of the Jews to Israel that are the realities of tomorrow.

The direct confrontation which has just taken place between Arab and Jew has more clearly revealed this overall direction and may one day even be understood as having been a step forward towards its realization. Perhaps this is even the secular meaning of Isaiah's prophecy that

they shall beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more. . . .  
And out of Zion shall go forth the law  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

After all, would it really be surprising if the vicious circle of power politics and narrow aims is broken in this region, in Jerusalem, which has been fought over more than any other city in the history of the world, if for once plain common sense and the people's desire for peace finally win, if the thin dividing line between hatred and peace moves over to the positive side?

From Isaiah's Zion, which Arab and Jew revere in their common Father, Abraham, and in his sons Isaac and Ishmael; from Jerusalem where the Mosque of the Rock commemorates Mohammed's ascent to Heaven and is on the site where Abraham was prepared to *sacrifice* his son; from Jerusalem where the Wailing Wall of the Hebrew Temple still stands; from this Jerusalem become the symbol of Arab-Jewish reconciliation—both Arab and Jew can sacrifice, can assume their great heritage and destiny and send forth "the word of the law"—a new modern message of humanism.