

David Ben-Gurion, Moses Mendelssohn, and the Peace Process: A Lesson in Statecraft

by Steven P. Meyer

The original architect of the Middle East “peace process” was David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister. In the spirit of the Seventeenth-Century Treaty of Westphalia, he initiated the peace process by launching discussions with leaders of the Arab world as early as 1933. His proposals included the creation of an independent Jewish state conjoining with independent Arab states to form an integrated economic federation for the entire Middle East, free of colonial rule. In addition, on two specific occasions, in the British Peel Commission report of 1937, and the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommendation of 1947, he supported and brought majority backing for partition proposals that would have created a separate Palestinian state.

His statecraft was modelled on sections of the Old Testament, Plato’s *Republic*, and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, and during the two decades following World War II, he would become one of the world leaders in the fight against colonialism, and a champion of the scientific and economic development of the new nations of Africa, Asia, and Ibero-America.

Ben-Gurion’s dream for Israel was for it to become a “light among nations,” and, after a dozen years of building a new nation itself, Israel held an historic conference, in 1960, on how mankind’s most advanced scientific knowledge must be used for the development of the new nations of the world. Forty countries attended; although the Arab states were invited, none came, and the only country that attended from the Middle East was Iran. Israel’s commitment to these nations was soon concretized in two programs. It provided a corps of technicians who travelled abroad to help them establish modern agriculture and infrastructure programs, while it also hosted thousands of their countrymen and -women in Israel’s universities and collective farms. Ben-Gurion’s mission for Israel was being realized.

His most bitter enemies then, as they are to Israel today, were the racist Jewish fascists, led by Vladimir Jabotinsky and his Revisionist Party. Jabotinsky and many of his associates in the leadership of the party were outspoken supporters of Hitler and Mussolini, the latter endorsing the “fascist Jabotinsky,” in 1933, as the most able person to create a Jewish nation in Palestine.

The Revisionists maintained a “blood and soil” ideology like that of the Nazis, and they believed that the Jews had the

right to establish a nation occupying all of old Palestine, that which is synonymous today with “Greater Israel.” Partition or a Palestinian state was vehemently rejected by them. In 1937, Jabotinsky sent Sir Winston Churchill a personal letter saying that he would never accept the partition policy set forth in the Peel Commission proposal. The World Zionist Congress, under Ben-Gurion’s leadership, did. Unfortunately, 400 Arabs representing all the Arab states as well as Palestine met in Damascus and rejected partition altogether. They passed their own resolution, that Palestine was “an integral part of the Arabian homeland.”¹

Former Prime Minister Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu, who did all he could to destroy the peace process, and is trying to get back into office today to finish the job, is a follower of Jabotinsky, through his father, who was devoted to the Revisionist cause. The late Meir Kahane of New York, who created the terrorist Jewish Defense League and Israel’s Kach Party, was trained by his father, a radical Revisionist who also was an intimate of Jabotinsky.

David Ben-Gurion was not a flawless individual. He personally found it difficult to deal with the Arabs, and with what he considered was their cultural backwardness, but he always sought to find a just solution to the problems of the region. He was very much influenced by certain teachings of the Old Testament, and his passion to return to the land of his teachers was a personal legacy for him as for many of his associates. They were not by any means religious fanatics; rather, their view of themselves tended toward Biblical socialists.

His most unique quality was his thirst for knowledge, and no matter what might preoccupy him at any moment, he always sought out new and profound knowledge to guide him forward. He learned Greek to read Plato, studied the Buddha

1. Though the purpose of this article is to focus on Ben-Gurion, and his fight for peace in the Middle East, and against the fascist tendency among Zionists allied with Jabotinsky, it is essential to note that this battle took place in an arena of British imperial manipulation of both Jews and Arabs. British operations against the Arabs, going back to efforts launched in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century, included building up a British-controlled Zionist movement, under Theodor Herzl, to advance British geopolitical interests in the region, with creating competing claims for the same land. Arab distrust of Jewish settlement in Palestine, and later rejection of Ben-Gurion’s proposals for mutual development, must be seen in light of their suspicion of these dirty British imperial designs.



President Harry Truman (left) receives a gift from Prime Minister of Israel David Ben-Gurion (right), Washington, May 1951. Ambassador to the United States Abba Eban looks on.

to understand the Asians, learned Spanish to read *Don Quixote*, and read George Washington to prepare himself to fight a war of independence against the British. In all, he spoke and read Russian, Polish, Yiddish, German, French, Spanish, Turkish, and English.

Through the first decade and a half of Israel's existence, he personally guided the physical building of a nation that stood as a model for many around the world. He worked closely on various matters with Gen. Charles de Gaulle of France and Konrad Adenauer of Germany, holding lengthy discussions with the latter on African economic development. He shunned the Socialist International, although many of his closest friends were active participants, because he thought they were condescending toward the Africans and Asians with whom he felt a special kinship. On his desk proudly stood a bust of Mahatma Gandhi and a bust of Plato.

Ben-Gurion was born in 1866, in Plonsk, Poland, a small town which lay less than 50 miles from Warsaw. At the time, Poland was a part of Russia. Unlike most Jews of Plonsk, his grandfather and father were both well educated and steeped in European culture. They spent much of their time in Warsaw. The two played a major role in educating the young Ben-Gurion.

His grandfather was a lover of Plato, and was fluent in not only Polish and Yiddish, but also Hebrew, Russian, and German. His father was a lawyer of sorts, who considered himself a member of the *Haskalah*, those who inherited the philosophical tradition of Moses Mendelssohn. After the pogroms in Poland and Russia in 1884, his father became active in the Lovers of Zion movement. Young Ben-Gurion was brought up in his father's tradition of Classical European cul-

ture and the young Zionist movement.

He went to Warsaw to study for his matriculation certificate and became involved in radical politics. After the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, he became a labor Zionist, joining a youth movement called *Paolei Zion* (Workmen of Zion) in Warsaw. He soon started a cell in Plonsk, which was the beginning of a long life of organizing. He was arrested by the Tsarist police on two occasions, and, but for the intercession of his father, would have been sent to Siberia.

In August 1906, not yet 20 years old, he set off for his first trip to Palestine. The intervening years are not significant for this report. He spent numerous years "pioneering" on agricultural settlements in Palestine, attended university in Constantinople, and was deported from Palestine to the United States as an undesirable during World War I. Returning to Palestine after the war, he became a political and trade union leader. In 1920, he founded the *Histadrut* (General Federation of Jewish Labor), which was his real labor of love. The *Haganah*, the first clandestine self-defense organization for the agricultural settlements, was created inside the *Histadrut*. In 1930, Ben-Gurion founded the political party *Mapai* (Party of the Workers of Israel). Both organizations became the bedrock of Israel's existence in its early years while Ben-Gurion was Prime Minister.

Ben-Gurion soon became one of the leading three spokesmen in the World Zionist Movement, travelling all over Europe and to numbers of U.S. cities in the ensuing decades. When he was not organizing in Europe, the United States, or Palestine, he spent his time in London, where he diplomatically attempted to move the British government toward creating an independent Jewish state.

Battling Jewish Fascists

Opposing Ben-Gurion in the 1930s was the racist, fascist Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky, whose Revisionist Party following was always a minority. Jabotinsky, a Russian Jew from Odessa, was a young follower of Friedrich Nietzsche, and on a trip to Italy, he came under the spell of the Mazziniites, whom he credited with giving him his view of Zionism. He was profoundly influenced by Benito Mussolini, and Jabotinsky's youth movement, the Betar, paraded in the streets in paramilitary uniforms modelled upon the *squadristi* of Mussolini and the youth corps of Hitler.

Many of Jabotinsky's allies among the Revisionists were open backers of the Nazis. Elyahu Zvi Cohen, an attorney with the Revisionists, spoke for this faction when he said, "Were the Hitlerites to remove their hatred of the Jews from their program, we would stand by their side." The newspaper of the Revisionists, *National Front*, defended Hitler in a March 30, 1933 editorial. "The various socialists and democrats are of the opinion that Hitler's movement is just a shell, but we believe it has both shell and substance. The anti-Semitic shell must be disposed of, but not the anti-Marxist substance."

Ben-Gurion minced no words, publicly calling Jabotinsky a fascist. In 1933, Mussolini embraced Jabotinsky as the savior of the Jewish people, when he told the Italian Rabbi Prato, "For Zionism to succeed, you need to have a Jewish State with a Jewish flag and a Jewish language. The person who really understands that is your fascist, Jabotinsky."

With the crowning of Il Duce, Ben-Gurion lashed out, labelling Jabotinsky, "Vladimir Hitler." As the world leader of the Zionist movement, Ben-Gurion warned his associates not to "underrate the severity of the Hitleristic peril in the Jewish, Zionist street." In March 1933, he declared war against "our own Hitlerites," adding that it would be "a war of life and death."

In June 1933, Chaim Arlozoroff, Ben-Gurion's close friend and political associate, was assassinated, while walking with his wife on the beach in Tel Aviv. Ben-Gurion's personal security detail was immediately increased. Arlozoroff was a leading member of Mapai, which Ben-Gurion had founded three years earlier. He was also the director of the Political Department for the Jewish Agency. He had been denounced, along with Ben-Gurion, in the newspaper *Hazit Ha-am* (*The People's Front*). The paper was run by Abba Ahimeir, an extremist Zionist who had joined Jabotinsky's Revisionist movement in 1928. Two of his followers were identified by Arlozoroff's wife as the assassins. The Palestine police had arrested all three, who denied the charges, and whose defense was that the killing was part of a sexual attack on Mrs. Arlozoroff by two Arabs!

Leah Rabin, the widow of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, was at the time just a young girl who had immigrated to Palestine only days before the assassination. She remembered it always, and spoke of it with her husband in later years.



Vladimir Jabotinsky, whom Ben-Gurion denounced as "Vladimir Hitler." One of Jabotinsky's allies, the attorney Elyahu Zvi Cohen, said bluntly, "Were the Hitlerites to remove their hatred of the Jews from their program, we would stand by their side."

In the aftermath her own husband's assassination on Nov. 4, 1995 by Yigal Amir, she drew the obvious parallel, writing, "The Revisionists had created a climate that provoked his death. They spread vicious rumors and promoted articles contending he was a Nazi collaborator." During the Spring of 1933, after Hitler took power and anti-Jewish attacks were just beginning in Germany, Arlozoroff had travelled to Germany to negotiate the release and emigration to Palestine of thousands of German Jews, who would escape Hitler's "Final Solution."

Ben-Gurion was not deterred by these fascists and their violence, and it was during Fall 1933, that he began his secret negotiations with the leading Arabs, something the Jabotinskyite fascist vehemently opposed. In later years, he was equally hard on the fascist terrorist groups Etzel, Irgun, and the Stern gang, which he publicly branded as "cowards" who would destroy the moral fabric of Israel. He constantly deployed militarily, as well, in order to disarm and disband these gangs.

As Israel's first military commander and Prime Minister in 1948, he outlawed Jabotinsky's Revisionist Party. He also refused to allow Jabotinsky's remains to be brought to Israel for burial. (Jabotinsky had died in the United States in 1946.) For Ben-Gurion and his associates, Israel would not tolerate a fascist of any kind.

Today, the mantle of Jabotinsky is worn by Bibi Netanyahu, Ariel Sharon, and the religious fundamentalist followers of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hachohen Kook (see accompanying article). Rabbi Kook's father, as Chief Rabbi, had defended Jabotinsky and maintained the innocence of Arlozoroff's killers, denouncing the affair as a blood libel perpetrated by Jews against Jews.

These two political outlooks, that of Ben-Gurion and that of Jabotinsky, distinct as night and day, have fought for power in Israel to the present day.

Negotiating a Durable Peace

In September 1933, while still battling Jabotinsky and the Revisionists, Ben-Gurion held several meetings in Jerusalem with Moussa Alami, who had been chief public prosecutor, before becoming one of the leaders of the Palestinian Arabs. He was closely connected with the Mufti of Jerusalem and the leaders of Istiklal, the Arab Independence Party. Ben-Gurion and Moussa Alami took a liking to one another and talked freely. Ben-Gurion's proposal was that the Arabs accept the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine which would have a Jewish majority, but a large Arab minority. It would join a Middle East Federation, an economic bloc, in which all the Arabs of the region would participate. In addition, Ben-Gurion promised large-scale financial aid to improve the Arab economies. Alami was particularly interested in the idea of creating an economic federation for development and Jewish financial aid, and he secretly met with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who viewed the proposals positively. It was suggested that Ben-Gurion go to Geneva and secretly meet with the Committee of Syrian and Palestinian Arabs.

The trip was a disaster; not only would the Arab interlocutors not accept the idea that the Jews become the majority in Israel, they publicly leaked a report on the secret talks between Ben-Gurion and Alami in their periodical *The Arab Nation*. That ended Ben-Gurion's contact with Alami and the Mufti. Ben-Gurion did not flinch, and he sought out and began holding further meetings in secret with other Arab leaders — Auni Bey, Abdul Haddi, and Moussa Hussein.

These initial talks ultimately fell apart. In 1935, a record 61,000 Jews arrived in Palestine, and the Palestinian response was to launch a wave of terrorism on the Jewish holiday of Passover in 1936, in which Ben-Gurion found the hand of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. The latter ultimately made his final thoughts on any possible agreement known, when he deployed to Berlin during the war to work for the Nazis. He was later arrested and held in France to be brought before a war crimes tribunal!

Nonetheless, this approach was to be the core of Ben-Gurion's outlook. He hoped that the entire Middle East could become nations which would be integrated into an economic bloc.

All other serious peace and economic development negotiations over the decades of Israel's existence have always been carried out by Ben-Gurion's closest allies including his personal protégés, who embodied the same outlook.

In 1947, when the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine put forward the creation of a Palestinian and Jewish State, which Ben-Gurion accepted, he sent the future Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir *incognito* to meet with King Abdullah of Jordan in secret, to secure his backing for the proposal. The latter's assassination, made possible by someone in his immediate entourage who knew of the secret talks, was seen by Ben-Gurion as a harbinger of what was in store for any Arab leader who was willing to talk to the Jewish leaders.

(Years later, Golda Meir was to meet in secret with Abdullah's grandson, King Hussein.)

Ben-Gurion sent overtures to Egypt's Naguib and tried several times to meet with President Gamal Abdel Nasser after he came to power, including through the "peace-loving" Soviets; but both turned their back on him. The real story of the first Camp David Accords in 1979, with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, is that Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres had been holding secret negotiations with Sadat for years, and the final accords were produced by Dayan, not the reformed terrorist Menachem Begin of the Likud, who was Israel's Prime Minister at the time. Shimon Peres was later the person behind the scenes who organized and orchestrated the Oslo Accords in secret.

Both Dayan and Peres were protégés of Ben-Gurion, going back at least to the 1946 Basel, Switzerland meeting of the World Zionist Congress. Dayan was then 31 years old, and Peres was 23. The three were intimate friends and colleagues, and worked together until Ben-Gurion's death in 1973. They formed the Rafi Party in 1967, when they thought that their Mapai party had lost its moral commitment to justice

Ending 30 Years of War: The Peace of Westphalia

On May 5, 1999, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, the founder of the Schiller Institute, delivered a speech to an EIR seminar entitled "After the NATO Summit, What Next? The Post-Balkan War Perspective," in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche, who is the wife of former U.S. Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., described the Peace of Westphalia, of 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War, as the model for what the United States must try to accomplish in the Balkans. More recently, she has emphasized the same point for the Middle East. Her speech appeared in the May 21, 1999 issue of EIR. The following are excerpts.

The end of the Thirty Years' War was in 1648; it was a war which rampaged in waves, like tornadoes, for 30 years, involving many European countries, including Germany, the Hapsburg Empire, France, Sweden, Bohemia, and Denmark.

After 30 years, there was enormous destruction — on average, 40% of the population and wealth, taken together, in Germany, were destroyed. Some areas were more than 66% wiped out. . . . This destruction had ravaged Europe for a long time. This was a so-called religious war, Reformation against Counter-Reformation. The hatred on both sides was enormous.

and the nation.

Peres gives a description of Ben-Gurion of the 1930s in his autobiography, *Battling for Peace*, which is worthy of including in this report.

Noting that Jabotinsky and Begin were influenced by the Poland of Pilsudski and by the Italy of Garibaldi and Musso- lini, Ben-Gurion was quite different.

“Opposing them stood the mainstream Zionist-socialist party, Mapai, led by David Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson, both of whom were firmly anti-Marxist, anti-Communist, and anti-Stalinist. They set out to fashion a new form of socialism that was neither imported from the outside nor translated from foreign sources. They believed that the original heralds of socialist morality had been the prophets of ancient Israel: Amos, who tongue-lashed those who ‘Swallow up the needy . . . [and] buy the poor for silver’ (Amos 8:4-6), and Isaiah, whose sublime vision of a peaceful and just society has rarely been surpassed in world literature. Ben-Gurion regarded the Biblical injunction, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’ (Leviticus 19:18), as the essence of Judaism.

“The political movement he headed for decades was pro-

elled by a genuine desire to turn the vision of the prophets into a modern-day reality. Its vision was of a revived Hebrew language and a revitalized Israeli homeland, in which the moral message of the prophets would once again mold the national ethos.

“Throughout his life, and regardless of the changing political circumstances, Ben-Gurion always remained, in my eyes, a statesman and leader of genius. He was one of those rare figures in history whose policy and personality were inseparably melded into one consistent whole. . . .

“Ben-Gurion sought political independence for the Jews not only so they could become a nation like any other, but also so they could fulfill their historic mission as an ‘eternal nation’ by setting a universal example to the whole of mankind. The Biblical phrases ‘a light unto the nations’ and ‘a precious people’ were his watchwords.”

Science and Liberation

In 1960, Israel organized and hosted the International Conference on Science in the Advancement of New States. The conference took place at the Weizmann Institute of Sci-

The Peace of Westphalia, when all the war parties came together, was the first time that a European community of sovereign states was established. And it was only possible because all of its members recognized each other as having equal legal standing, and guaranteed each other their independence. They had to recognize their international legal treaties as binding, if they wanted to be an international community of law.

It was clear that this not only required good will, but a minimum of efficient guarantees. Most important, was the idea that the *raison d’être*—the reason for its existence, the identity of this new alliance—of this community of states, could never be only its self-preservation. It would be morally justified only if it realized ideas and principles which had a higher unifying purpose than just the states themselves.

There is a precedent for this kind of thinking in American history; namely, the idea of John Quincy Adams, that the United States must work toward fostering a community of principle among nations of the world. . . .

Such principles exist in the treaties of 1648. Some were expressed for the first time in history. These negotiations lasted for four years, during 1644-48, and in the end, Protestants, Catholics, monarchies, and republican forms of government, were treated as having equal status in negotiations and in the treaty. . . .

I want to read you—and please forgive me for the somewhat awkward language, because I tried to translate it straight from German without going through an official editorial board. . . .

Article I of the peace treaty starts like this: “A Christian, general, and permanent peace, and true and honest friendship, must rule [among the many parties]. . . . And this Peace must be so honest and seriously guarded and nourished that each part furthers the advantage, honor, and benefit of the other, and that both form [a peace], from the side of the entire Roman Reich with the Kingdom of France, as well as the other way around, from the Kingdom of France with the Roman Reich. A faithful neighborhood should be renewed and flourish for peace and friendship, and flourish again.”

This is a very precious idea. It is essential to have peace. It is the idea of Nicholas of Cusa, which he had in the Fifteenth Century, that peace in the microcosm is only possible when you have the development of all microcosms. You can only have peace among different nations if each nation develops itself fully, and regards as its self-interest to develop the others fully, and vice-versa.

It is like the idea of a family, where each member of the family wants the other members of the family to have the best possible life.

You need to realize that the whole world wants President Clinton to be such a passionate lover of the international community of peoples. President Clinton could emerge to seize this historical moment, and do what all the poor, beaten-down countries in Africa and Ibero-America, and many parts of Asia, wish him to—to love the idea of an international community of peoples. And it needs passion. It needs passion for this, without which it will not be realized.

ence in Rehoveth. The chairman of the conference was Abba Eban, then Minister of Education and Culture in Ben-Gurion's government. who was also the president of the Weizmann Institute. Attending were representatives from 16 nations of Africa, 8 nations of Asia, 14 nations of Europe, plus Iran, Brazil, Australia, and the United States. Although the Arab world and the Soviets were invited, they refused to attend. There was added excitement to the conference, as many of the nations of Africa had just received their independence, while others were in the final moments of liberation.

Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's opening address to the conference stated the political reality the world then faced, and Israel's intended role:

"We regard this gathering as a historic event of inestimable importance, for it is closely bound up with the two most momentous revolutions in the annals of the human race, which are taking place in our day and have not yet come to an end. One of these is political, the second intellectual.

"The first of these revolutions to which I am referring is the ending of the rule of one people over another. We are witnessing a powerful and irresistible—though as yet unfinished—process in which all the peoples of the globe are winning their freedom. If this redeeming revolution is to succeed, we must realize that the gaining of independence is not the end of the redemption, but only the beginning. Up to now the difference between nations has been not only that some were rulers while others were subjects, but that some were rich and developed while some were poor and backward. The gravest and most dangerous problem of our days is not the clash between East and West that we call the Cold War, but the material and cultural gap between rich and poor nations. The peace of the human race will not be secure until this gap and these distinctions are wiped out—until all the peoples of the world are not only independent but more or less on a level in their status and their material and spiritual capacities. Mankind must not continue for long to be divided into rich and poor, progressive and backward. A house so divided cannot endure.

"The United States was the first power to recognize its duty to extend economic aid to the European nations which were crushed and impoverished in the Second World War, and wonders have been achieved through this aid. The center of gravity of world problems now passes to Asia and Africa—the homes of the great majority of the human race. Independence alone will not meet their needs. They require agricultural and industrial development, better education, housing, and health services, material and spiritual progress, for it is these alone that complement and complete newly regained independence. It is the duty of the rich and highly developed nations to assist their fellows, whose rights, status, and educational opportunities have been restricted by history, to overcome these limitations. They should offer this aid not as the charity of the rich to the poor or as the kindness of the strong, but as the obligation of fellow members of the same human family, out of a feeling of equality, comradeship, and univer-

sal human solidarity, to rectify a historic wrong and to establish throughout the globe a family of nations, founded on moral, social, and economic equality, mutual confidence, aid, and respect and sincere cooperation in the utilization of all the achievements of humanity and its scientific and technological discoveries.

"These discoveries are the second revolution that is taking place in our day—the intellectual, scientific revolution. The day is not far distant when the energy available to man will be multiplied, when scientists will succeed in achieving for peaceful purposes not only the fission of the atom but also the fusion of atoms. When we also succeed in utilizing solar energy more effectively and in desalinating sea water, wide horizons will open before mankind for the fructification of deserts and the worldwide realization of an almost unlimited supply of energy.

"If these two revolutions, which seem to be taking place independently in our day, are merged and combined, the entire character of the human race can be transformed. It can become a family of nations all of whose members enjoy equal access to all the resources of nature and the achievements of science and knowledge, in peace and cooperation. All the barriers and conflicts between blocs, colors, and races can be broken down, and human relationships can be established in all countries on foundations of freedom and dignity, mutual aid and creative initiative, without discrimination, denial of privileges, tyranny or exploitation by arrogant rulers.

"Perhaps it is no accident that this gathering is meeting in this country, whose geography is so poor and humble, but whose history is so rich and significant. Under a free and stable democratic regime, we aspire to make our little country, poor as it is in natural resources, into a land rich in the only natural resource with which we have been endowed—namely, moral qualities and intellectual capacity. Although we are still at the beginning of the road—only twelve years have passed since the day we succeeded in renewing our independence in our ancient homeland—the first steps we have taken, in fostering science and research and creating new social patterns in our economic life, are encouraging.

"We are well aware that in the realm of material resources, wealth, and power we shall remain a small and modest people, but we believe that in the realm of the spirit, in which it is quality that counts, our people will not lag behind the rest of the world in spiritual, social, and scientific contributions to the common treasury of mankind. In any case, we shall play out part, within our modest capacity, in the two great revolutions that are taking place in our day.

"For these reasons, we regard it as a privilege that this unique gathering should have assembled in our country. In the name of the entire people of Israel, I greet all the participants—from Asia and Africa, Europe, America and Australia—with the fervent wish that you may succeed in your deliberations."

Ben-Gurion's opening speech and the conference as a whole must have sent shivers down the spine of the London-

centered financier oligarchy, which has been committed, then and since, to keeping Third World countries in colonial backwardness. After welcoming remarks by Eban and a few others, presentations were made by international scientists on the most advanced breakthroughs in various fields and their promise for mankind and the developing nations. This included the promise of fusion power as an unlimited, cheap energy source. Then representatives of the developing nations presented short papers on their achievements and challenges.

When the floor was first opened for remarks, an agitated Jerrold R. Zacharias of MIT made a short and sharp intervention, which must have startled many. "I would like to say right now that it is irrelevant to discuss fission power or fusion power. We should not discuss the big accelerators, nor radio astronomy, nor space research, nor that foolishness called space travel, nor monster team researchers. They just have no relevance to the problems of the new states. . . ."

Warren O. Nelson, of the Population Council of the Rockefeller Institute, also addressed the conference and demanded that it was the responsibility of the leaders of the newly independent states to enforce population control policies. He was openly rebuffed by indignant and courageous African leaders.

A final communiqué was agreed upon for further work and collaboration. Israel's commitment to help these new nations was concretized with two programs. It established a full scholarship program to train students from the developing nations in agriculture, technology, and science, and it sent its own teams of technical advisers to these nations. By 1965, Israel had programs in 65 countries—30 in Africa, 13 in Asia, 18 in Ibero-America and the Caribbean, 3 in the Mediterranean and Iran. More than 2,000 foreign students a year underwent training in Israel and more than 400 Israeli experts were working abroad in these nations.

This was the outlook of Israel in its early years. It was the generation of Ben-Gurion and others who fought to make a better world in the aftermath of World War II, knowing full well the limitations that would be imposed by the Cold War. They forged ahead despite this, knowing it was the only moral outlook for a modern nation-state. They also knew the political benefits that would help ensure their security as a nation.

Plato, Cervantes, and Statecraft

Ben-Gurion had good teachers for the art of statecraft. He wrote: "I had long been interested in Plato, and had read him in various translations, in Russian, French, and English. I found that in several important passages, the translations differed, each offering a different meaning. It was therefore clear that to find the true Plato, I had to read him in the original. So I decided that I had to learn Greek. It was not, however, until 1940 that I found the time to do so. I was in London during the Battle of Britain and so had many hours of enforced idleness during the nightly bombing raids. Dr. Weizmann's secretary, Miss Doris May, who was a classics scholar, cheerfully under-



Two interlocutors of Ben-Gurion were German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (left) and French President Charles de Gaulle. In a discussion with Adenauer, Ben-Gurion laid out a vision of the development of Africa and other former colonial regions.

took to be my tutor, and my 'homework' I did mostly in the bomb shelter. Since the raids lasted quite a time, I managed to learn quite a lot of Greek, enough, anyway, to be able to continue on my own when I left London and to embark on my reading of the Greek classics.

"What a difference there is between the Plato original and the translation! Plato was a most profound thinker—unrivaled, to my mind; and he was also a master of literary style. A poet. He is complicated—Jowett's formidable translation makes him too smooth. . . . In his central work, *The Republic*, every sentence is a gem, full of wisdom and insight. It's silly for some people to have called him a fascist because of what he says about philosopher-kings. Plato's point was not that the ideal ruler was the philosopher-king who sought power. Plato set out the qualities of the ideal ruler, but added specifically that he would be a man who shied away from power, but who would, however, be forced by the people to rule. As for Plato's general works, I don't think anyone ever wrote quite like him. Both for content and style, what he said and the way he said it, he is matchless. And who could sketch a man's character as he does so brilliantly, in a couple of lines."

A decade later, after Ben-Gurion had assumed the posts of Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, he laboriously learned Spanish so he that could read Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Ben-Gurion thought that all the secrets of statecraft were contained therein, and he made it a point to try and reread this dear work every year!

He also made the time for an in-depth study of Buddhism, during long hours in his Tel Aviv office, so he could understand the Asian mind. He made close friends with U Nu, the Prime Minister of Burma, and he admired the culture and rapid development of the Chinese, whom he demanded should be accepted into the United Nations.

He traced modern science to the Greeks and Plato, and he read numbers of the great Greek scientific authors. He also

saw the Italian Renaissance, which he said was dependent on those same authors, as the greatest scientific period, which had made the world what it was today.

The Development of Africa

On March 14, 1960, Ben-Gurion met at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York with German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. The full transcript of their discussion was published, and it gives a further sense of Ben-Gurion's devotion to ending colonialism and to the best notion of the nature of man. Speaking about his recent experience, meeting African leaders at the Weitzmann Institute conference, he told Adenauer: "I belong to a race that has been persecuted more than others, but never lost its feeling of human dignity. I can understand these people. You have to educate in this direction the people you will send to Liberia and to Ghana and to Ethiopia. You have to teach them to know that there is one human race. As the Bible said: 'All men are made in God's image.' That is everything. Only if you go with that attitude, you may win them over."

He went on: "I did not go, myself, to Africa, but I met representatives of independent and non-independent coun-

tries. They were intelligent, nice people, people with ideas and vision. They want to elevate their people. Maybe they are primitive, but all of us have to know that the time for colonialism is over. Maybe in one more year, there won't be any colonies left and de Gaulle knows that . . . all the countries of black Africa will be independent. . . . If you go to Africa as a brother rather than as a benefactor, if you accept them as equal members of the human family, if they have that feeling, then they will trust you. Otherwise, they will think that this is just a new way of imperialism, as Khrushchev tells them."

Ben-Gurion also made it clear, in his dialogue with Adenauer, that he detested and rejected the notion of collective guilt, as it had been applied to Germany after the war. "Attacks have been made on me for meeting with you, and for differentiating between your Germany and the Germany of Hitler," he said. "I think it is not Jewish to levy collective responsibility upon a whole nation and to carry this on and on. My conscience is quiet. I am doing my duty as a Jew and as a human being. My conscience is clear."

The Legacy of Moses Mendelssohn

One of the greatest writings of Moses Mendelssohn, the Orthodox Jew and Platonic philosopher, is *Jerusalem*. It is a treatise that defines Mosaic law as coherent with the Platonic concept of Reason, and it defines the responsibilities of the state and the church to both man and God in modern society. It is written not only for Jew, but for Christian and Muslim alike.

Writes Mendelssohn: "The reasons which lead men to rational actions and convictions rest partly on the relations of men to each other, partly on the relations of men to their Creator and Keeper. The former are the province of the state, the latter that of religion. Insofar as men's actions and convictions can be made to serve the common weal through reasons arising from their relations to each other, they are a matter for the civil constitution; but insofar as the relations between man and God can be seen as their source, they belong to the church, the synagogue, or the mosque. . . .

" . . . Fear and hope are no criteria for truth. Knowledge, reasoning, and persuasion alone can bring forth principles, with the help of authority and example, can pass into morals. And it is here that religion should come to the aid of the state and the church should become a pillar of civil felicity. It is the business of the church . . . to show then that duties toward men are also duties toward God, the violation of which is the greatest misery; that serving the state is true service of God; that charity is his most sacred will, and that true knowledge of the Creator can not leave behind in the soul any hatred for men. To teach this is the business, duty, and vocation of religion; to preach it, the business and duty of its ministers. How, then, could it ever have occurred to men to permit religion to teach and its ministers to preach the opposite?"

That was the spirit in which David Ben-Gurion lived, and which must be revived, if the Mideast peace process is ever to achieve its goal.

Moses Mendelssohn, 'the Socrates of Berlin'

Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), the philosopher and Orthodox Jew, played a pivotal historical role in keeping alive the Platonic tradition in philosophy, music, the natural sciences, and statecraft. A scholar of Plato and Leibniz, he was known the world over as "the Socrates of Berlin." He collaborated his entire life with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the great German writer, in seeking an ecumenical solution to the problems of the day.

He wrote extensively on the coherence of Mosaic law with the Platonic idea of Reason, and was the pivotal individual in providing the educational pathway that emancipated and transformed the backward, hermetic majority of the Jewish community of Europe and Russia into modern citizens and leaders of the day.

His commitment to the music of J.S. Bach provided one of the avenues that led directly to the further development of Classical music by Mozart and Beethoven, as well as Moses' grandson Felix Mendelssohn, and to the establishment of Classical composition in European synagogue music a generation later. (See Steven P. Meyer, "Moses Mendelssohn and the Bach Tradition," *Fidelio*, Summer 1999.)