

ISRAEL AND THE QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

Speech by Robert Morgan
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Israel Bond Dinner
New York--Waldorf Astoria
March 19, 1977

It is the particular genius of the American political system that every four years we have the opportunity to renew our optimism, and to make something of a fresh start. To see a new President riding down Pennsylvania Avenue-- or this time, walking down it --- always renews our hopes, and gives us the chance to reaffirm our ideals and aspirations.

This ceremony combines in equal measure the symbolism of stability and of orderly change, -- both of which have had much to do with the survival of our nation.

Such symbolism is refreshing to the American people. To the rest of the world, it is probably a cause of mystification,

or of envy, or even of great concern.

One of the nations which must watch us with concern is Israel. I do not think Israel needs to worry about American sympathy and support in general. But it does have legitimate reason to watch for the details of our relationship with all the Middle Eastern countries anytime American foreign policy is taken up by new hands. Particularly, Israel must watch to see what the new administration shall attempt to do in the cause of a long-term peace. The details are crucial. They are crucial to Israel's very survival.

One of the by-products of America's renewal of optimism is new hope for what the press calls, in its headlines, a "Mid-East Settlement."

That's the way we Americans are: we want to get the matter settled "once and for all." We become impatient with the hard-liners on both sides of the conflict. We want to create an atmosphere of conciliation and compromise, and to get all parties to the negotiating table. This is admirable, even if a little naive. This sort of optimism will, in the long run, get the world a lot farther than cynicism and despair.

But I believe we make a mistake if we expect other nations to share automatically in America's new-found optimism, and enthusiasm for change. Israel, particularly, must be allowed the privilege of caution. I do not think most Americans understand the nature of daily life in Israel, and why the Israelis worry so.

In Israel, the people's determination and spirit live--
somehow--in an atmosphere of terrorism and threat. It takes
someone who understands the nature of that threat, to comprehend
what a miracle the Israeli spirit really is. And someone who
knows that the threat is one of annihilation, or at the very
least continued terrorism, will define that word "settlement"
most carefully.

The American Nobel Prize winner Saul Bellow wrote a
fine little book in 1975 called To Jerusalem and Back. In it,
he reports on being at a cocktail party in Jerusalem, at which
the Israeli national pastime is being enjoyed to the full.
Everybody's talking. And let me quote Bellow for a moment.

"The subject of all this talk is, ultimately,

survival," says Bellow. "At first this is hard to grasp because the setting is so civilized...You shop in supermarkets, you say good morning to friends on the telephone, you hear symphony orchestras on the radio. But suddenly the music stops and a terrorist bomb is reported...six young people killed and thirty-eight more wounded. Pained, you put down your civilized drink.

"You sit at dinner with charming people in a dining room like any other. You know the hostess has lost a son; that her sister lost children in the 1973 war... But in the domestic ceremony of passed dishes and filled glasses thoughts of a destructive enemy are hard to grasp. What you do know is that there is one fact of Jewish life unchanged by the creation of a Jewish state: you cannot take your right to live for granted. Others can; you cannot."

The point Bellow makes is clear. The creation of Israel, after World War II, was itself supposed to be a settlement, and instead, the once-and-for-all settlement turned out to be no more than a fighting chance for survival. Bellow points

out that Israel's survival remains very much in doubt,
and that the fact is illustrated, with tragic regularity by
by terrorist bombs.

I have had the kind of experience Bellow relates.

As a Senator having some part in American foreign policy,
I considered it my duty to go to the troubled areas of the
world, which my votes would surely affect. One of the first
places I went was Israel. And I must say it is an eerie feeling,
watching people go about the routines of a highly civilized life,
facing, at any moment, the possibility of death by terrorism.

And this is terrorism which carries a message which the
bomb thrown in London or San Francisco does not carry. Nobody,
says Saul Bellow, is questioning London's right to exist.

The western world thought it had a settlement of the Jews' right to exist in 1947, with the Partition of Palestine. Israel is still fighting for that settlement. It is still fighting danger and death, so close at hand as to touch almost every household. It is still fighting for the right to live.

Therefore, Americans would do well to understand that Israelis may be slow to share the new optimism brought on by a change of administrations in Washington. Americans should understand Israel's quickness to worry about America's intentions. And while we can let no reasonable chance to negotiate escape us, we should keep in mind what kind of "settlement" is really needed in the long run.

We will soon know whether the initial flurry of talk about a return to Geneva will amount to anything. The primary threat to such a conference, of course, is the issue of Palestinian representation. Their representation by the PLO is abhorrent to Israel. Their representation by Jordan has been suggested, but, this in turn becomes immediately involved with the question of whether there shall be a Palestinian state linked to Jordan.

The Palestinian movement has not revised its so-called "Covenant" to exclude language calling for the extermination of Israel.

The Palestinians continue to take a hard line, despite hopes there would be some accomodation on their part. According to the PLO's Farouk al Kaddoumi, the organization still insists,

first, on retreat to the 1967 borders, second, on retreat to the 1948 lines, and, third, on the creation of a "State of Palestine." Kaddoumi recently insisted that any mini-state for Palestinians would not be looked upon as a substitute for this.

Therefore, a Geneva conference must continue to be viewed as a fragile possibility. The Israeli elections could change the picture, and so could any worsening of the Palestinian situation. We shall just have to wait and see.

Whether or not a Geneva conference materializes, the developing American position toward the Middle East remains at issue. That position will color and influence the relationship between the two nations for years, even if Middle East stabilization does not move another inch.

It is my hope that the position the new administration adopts will do two things.

First, I hope no more "interim" settlements will be entertained. The only possible reason for adjusting the borders of Israel now would be to insure that Israel could live in secure peace, without the threat of terrorism and war. I believe it is time to regard any future Israeli frontiers as final, and to prepare to defend them from now on.

Second, I can see no point in making the Israelis pull back to positions which weaken them. I have been to the Golan, and I frankly see no possibility for an interim compromise here. Surely, there has been a soldier keeping watch on the Heights of Golan since military operations began in that part of the world.

I believe that if war is a possibility, that soldier had better be an Israeli.

As to the necessity of the passes at Gidi and Mitla, there seems to be a difference of opinion as to whether they are absolutely necessary. If they are, then there is no point in giving them up. And clearly, the Israelis cannot afford to have the oil port at Elat[̄] blocked again, so Israeli dominance at ("A-lat ") the Strait of Tiran must be assured. ("Tear-rah")

I do not know what the President's position on all the issues will be. I think we must give him credit for good will and concern for Israel's survival. And I think we must understand that his position is still being developed. He speaks now of a "homeland" for the Palestinians, a more specific-sounding

term than the traditional American concern for the Palestinians' "legitimate grievances." But what exactly he means---and what exactly would be possible within the context of events---these we will have to be patient to examine.

On one point, I feel the President has been somewhat misinterpreted. He has refused to allow the Israelis to have the ("K'feár") concussion bomb, and to sell the Kfir fighter abroad with the General Electric engine in it. Both of these things have been widely interpreted as signs the President intends to keep Israel "on a short leash."

I happen to disagree with the Administration about the fighter plane issue. Israel needs desperately to increase its exports, and it has been forced by its position to go into the arms business. For it to export its products is natural, and

my information about the proposed sales to Taiwan and Ecuador suggests the sale of defensive weapons may well be justified.

The concussion bomb is another matter. In its present state of development, it is unpredictable and dangerous for pilots to deliver. They have to come in low and slow. What the future holds for this kind of weapon, I cannot say.

But I do feel you have to listen to the President when he says he acted as he did because he is concerned about the world-wide spread of weapons, not because of any antagonism toward Israel. Honorable men may have differences of opinion, without the President's commitment to Israel being cast into doubt.

In the final analysis, such issues are important, but pale in significance beside the matter of helping Israel.

stay alive on a permanent basis. Let me pick up the thread I began with, and return to that matter of a "Middle East settlement." We must never forget how fragile such settlements have been throughout the area. For years, the so-called "gentleman's agreement" in Lebanon was looked upon as a masterpiece of statecraft and diplomacy. Today Lebanon is in ashes, and may face more civil war.

And when we talk about the formation of a Palestinian homeland, we must not be deluded that even this would automatically stop the terrorism. Radical Palestinian terrorist groups, led by George Habash and others, have pledged to increase the incidence of violence against Israel, and against Israeli supporters world-wide, if the PLO itself seeks a settlement with Israel.

Let me quote Saul Bellow once more for emphasis.

Taking a cab in Israel, he passes a little coffee shop, burned out by a bomb blast the night before. The driver, it turns out, lost a friend in the blast. They both had been in the coffee shop, but the cabby had walked out to speak to someone, just before the bomb exploded.

"So now my friend is dead," said the cabby. His voice, still adolescent, was cracking. "And this is how we live, mister! Okay? We live this way."

It is not okay. People cannot continue to live under such circumstances, and we in the United States should do nothing which would increase the threat under which Israelis have to live.

I think it is right to do what we can for a true settlement

but we should not underestimate what that means. It means, and will always mean, that Israel must have defensible borders and the ability to win in conflict. And I do not believe that means taking the 32,000 casualties, including the 9,000 dead, estimated by the CIA. Such "victory" would be to suffer the ultimate terrorism, in a small country like Israel.

The plain fact is that American support helped make the State of Israel a fact. That is a commitment we cannot go back on, and remain morally intact as a nation. And this is not a one-way street. We ought not to forget that Israel has been our friend. We must not be so blinded by the fact that Israel needs us, that we ignore how much we need Israel. Can America do without allies in this world? Can we afford to jeopardize what real and solid friendships remain to us? There is a continuity of history

and of values which binds us to Israel, and we would be rash to forget that.

Israel, in the eyes of some, is a troublemaker in a troubled region. But I see it differently. Israel brings to the Middle East the promise of stability and progress.

Israel has built a small but creative culture second to none in the world, and its presence in the Middle East can only be a source of more improvements in the long run, than all the oil money presently flowing into that part of the world can ever buy.

America and the world need Israel, for the contribution she can make to the cause of humanity. I say we must aid

Israel now. But in the long run, that role may be reversed, and we will benefit even more than we have ever helped.

In the United States, as we renew our admirable optimism, we must never forget how hard-won such optimism must be for the Israelis themselves. We Americans take our right to exist for granted. It would be wrong for us to forget that others cannot do so, and won't be able to for a long time to come. For as long as it takes, we owe them our friendship.