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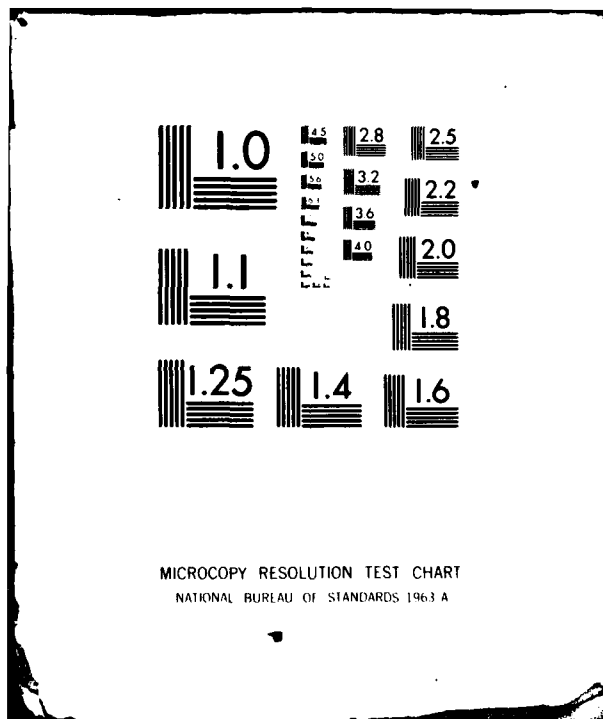
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Religion and Political Development  
In Israel and the Arab States

by

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

February 6, 1980

Mr. Harry Schrecengost  
Defense Technical Information  
Center  
Cameron Station  
Alexandria, Va. 22314

Dear Mr. Schrecengost:

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Sincerely,

Edward N. Lundstrom  
Research Documentation Officer  
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Although numerous scholars and journalists have focused on the "religious question" in Israel and the "modernization of Islam" in the Arab countries, only rarely have they compared these similar struggles over the social and political role of religion. This paper will make that attempt.

In Israel, the "religious question" is the most fundamental, unresolved social and political problem. The controversy rages around matters such as officially-enforced observance of the Sabbath, the consumption of the non-kosher food in the Defense Forces, and on El Al Airlines, civil religious marriage, and the question of who is to determine who is a Jew for the purposes of immigration. Basically, it is the question of whether the Israeli state shall enforce, through statute and the police power, the ancient precepts and laws of the Jewish faith. Israelis are divided on the issue, one-quarter to one-third favoring the religious position and the rest the secular position.

The Jewish Bible, stripped of its religion and interpreted in solely a national fashion is a bond that today unifies secular and religious Jews in Israel. The political elite, all secularists, have taken theological concepts such as redemption, the Messianic vision, and Israel as a "Light to the Nations," and applied them to the present in a secular-nationalist fashion. Where formerly God redeemed Jews from captivity in Egypt or Babylon, today, the Jewish state redeems them from captivity in the USSR. Whereas formerly, the vision was to return to the Holy Land, await the coming of the Messiah and live in His kingdom, today, the vision is to return to a prosperous, democratic, equalitarian state in which Jews live fully as Jews.

A

Letter on file

Per J. S. D.M.

In modern Israel, ancient religious precepts are secularized and integrated into the political culture. The religious Jew can give them a theological interpretation, the secular Jew a non-religious interpretation, but each in his own way believes in the same political myths, and this produces an element of unity between these otherwise disparate groups.

In the Arab countries since the latter part of the 19th century, the "modernization of Islam" has been a dominant social and political question. Living under European imperial control and confronted by the secular democratic ideals of the West and by its scientific and technical knowledge, Muslims have grappled with questions about the degree to which the state should be associated with Islam and the extent of religious influence over the social order. Questions that have been raised are: Is God or the people the highest authority in the state? Should the Head of State be a Muslim? Should laws passed by the legislative body in some way conform to the Koran? Is the Koran subject to analysis and research based on modern scholarly techniques that do not give it the reverence of revealed knowledge? What are the rights and freedoms of non-Muslim minorities?

Today, in most Arab countries, religion is associated with the state, and it influences the social order in many ways. Those in political power lean towards a religious as opposed to a secular position, and they maintain that modernization can take place without the destruction of religion. The states they rule are modern in the sense of having a written constitution, a parliament, a council of ministers, one or more political parties and elections.

However, these modern structures exist most often only in a formal sense, and traditional political behavior continues as before, producing a synthesis that is modern in appearance but traditional in operation. For example, the stress in the Koran and Hadith on the unity of the Community ( umma ) carries over today in the denial in constitutions and laws of a pluralistic political universe. The Islamic concept of the umma being divinely ordained has its modern manifestation in a "people-umma" Which carries out the divine will rather than the popular will.

Possibly, the reasons for these differences between religion and politics in Israel and the Arab state is that the Jewish religion has always been associated with the Islamic state. The structures of the traditional Jewish state were destroyed in 70 A.D., and only in 1948, was a new state erected. This break allowed the Jews to establish de novo a modern state and to integrate the ancient religious myths which are also national myths into the political culture of the state. However, for the Arabs, imperialism only weakened the structures of the Islamic state and did not destroy them. Thus, the political behavior that is associated with these traditional structures continues into the present, camouflaged but not altered by the forms of the modern democratic state.

#### The Jewish Nation and the Islamic State.

Since the time of Abraham, Judaism as a religion and the Jews as a people have been inextricably intertwined. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, and with him, God made a covenant that held for eternity. Moses was the leader of the Jews of his time, and to him, God delivered the Ten Commandments.

Eretz Israel has been the national home of the Jews and Jerusalem their spiritual and temporal capital, which they have only left when forced to. In exile, they have maintained their faith and their feeling of nationhood even though they temporarily did not possess a state of their own.

The centrality of the nation in Judaism means that today the stories and deeds of the ancient Jewish people and of their leaders can be used to enhance the national consciousness of Israelis, make them "feel Jewish." Though the ancient people were always acting in a religious context, today, the religion can be removed and the stories simply become a part of the Israeli national mythology.

Moslems have always formed a "Community of Believers" (ummat al-mu'minin), a theoretical social unit that bound all of them together whatever the distance that separated them. The Community was ruled over by God and created by Him. Its purpose was to insure that man lives a righteous life in the Hereafter. Every aspect of the Community's life was ordained and regulated by God, and it was man's religious duty to conform to these social and political rules. The rulers performed spiritual and temporal functions, and they could not conceive that one might divide the two.

For Islam, the state has been of central importance. The "Community of Believers" which Muhammad established in Medina in 622 A.S. was the first Islamic state, and from that time to the present, Muslims have never been without one. Sometimes, the state was united; most of the time it was divided. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it was manipulated and controlled by the



Europeans, but Muslims have always lived in a political order that has been Islamic in inspiration and has had Muslims in leadership positions.

#### Viewpoints of the Founders of Israel

The "founding Fathers" of Israel, those who came to Palestine between 1905 and 1914, came not simply because of discrimination and persecution in Europe--migration to America was an easier way to escape that--but because they believed that the establishment of a Jewish state in its ancient homeland was essential for the survival of the Jewish nation. They wanted to build a new Jewish state that in its political structures, social life and economy was as modern as any the world knew and that in its national consciousness was as ancient as Jewish history.

They felt that Jewish society in Europe was sick, with its over-intellualism, its absence of a working class and of a class of farmers. It was riddled with injustice, many Jews possessing great wealth and privildge, others living in abysmal poverty. They left and came back to their homeland where they would build a new Zion based on equality, democracy and co-operative economic enterprise. No other Afro-Asian society has been founded by immigrants who, in the act of migration, left behind the "cld world" and were determined to build a "new world." In Europe, the immigrants had experienced or become familiar with the values and structures of democracy and socialism. In Eretz Israel, they established institutions that conformed to the broad values and purpose of these movements but that were specifically adapted to the conditions of Palestine. The communal settlements, kibbutzim and moshavim, were

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democratic and egalitarian, but they could also enable the Jews to become independent of Arab food producers, and spread Jewish settlement over the land so the Jews could claim Eretz Israel as their own, because they lived on it and they farmed it.

The Jewish immigrants looked to their past, to their ancient past, prior to the expulsion in 70 A. D. , when they lived in their homeland, fought to protect its soil and controlled its destiny. They did not intend to re-establish the laws and society of those days; for they were long since dead. Rather, they drew from it, the strength to persevere through the hardships of the present and a vision for the future. In the words of David Ben Gurion, one of these settler-pioneers:

We are not a new nation appearing suddenly upon the world's stage. We are a nation of great antiquity, resurrecting its youth, As we are rooted in our native soil, so we are rooted in the soil of the past. We shall not be as we ought to be unless we drink to the tendrils of our past. Yet, just as we should not now go forth to war with the arms of the hosts of Joshua, son of Nun, or of the Hasmoneans, so we will not now order our sovereign life only by the laws of King Saul or the prescripts of Hehemiah. . . . The national revolution commits us to a code of Laws and justice which will blend the moral claims of Israel eternal, the imperial requirements of our era and the historic purpose of the vision of the last days.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Bible as a Unifying Bond of Israeli Society

The ancient Jewish past, in which religion was inseparable from the nation and from every act and institution of daily life, is today a source of inspiration for Israelis and the glue that holds together the fragments of Israeli society. . The Israeli schools, the Army, and the leaders of the state, men such as Ben-Gurion, Moshe Dayan, Teddy Kollek and Abba Eban.<sup>2</sup>

interpret Jewish history from a national perspective only. God is thought of vaguely as the "Rock of Israel",<sup>3</sup> or the "Eternal of Israel"<sup>4</sup>, and the Bible — is something that will "infuse into the heart of every Jew the meaning of his Jewishness." <sup>5</sup>

In national institutions, when the Bible is studied, the focus is on the Jewish nation, not on God. Since the Old Testament is the history of the Jews and their relation with God, this can easily be done. Leaving God aside, the Bible is replete with stories about the jealousies, treacheries and heroic deeds of kings, descriptions of the clash of armies in battle, panegyrics in the form of romantic-nationalist poetry, reflections on the "nation's destiny," descriptions of the grandeur of the nation's ancient cities, and recordings of the folk wisdom of the common people. It is a history book, anthology of poetry, collection of folk sayings, source of wisdom, and books of laws, put together in one compact volume.

In Israel today, the religious Jew finds in the Bible the "radiant source of his faith" while the Jew who is not religious discovers in it the "source of the emergence of his nation, the saga of its struggle with the idolatrous world, heroic and glorious deeds, the loftiness of Israel's prophecy, precious treasures of peesy and wisdom, vision and meditation which are beyond compare for moral brilliance, emotional purity, and power of expression." <sup>6</sup> It unites both factions, and infuses in every Jew the "meaning of his Jewishness." <sup>7</sup>

### Redemption

Throughout Jewish history, redemption has been a concept of immense power, capable of sustaining the Jews in adversity and of moving them to action.

For Israelis, religious and non-religious, it is not some abstract theological doctrine from the past but is as powerful and as alive today as ever.

The settlement of Palestine and the establishment of the structures of the Israeli state have been referred to as the "Jewish people's movement for redemption." <sup>8</sup> In Israel, one reads and hears about "redeeming the soil from barrenness," "redeeming the Land from its Arab invaders", "redeeming Jews from captivity in Russia" and "redeeming oneself from the afflictions and sicknesses of Jews in the Diaspora." These activities could be spoken of mundanely as "land reclamation," "settlement and conquest of the Land", "action to free the Jews in Russia" and "Israelization." However, if they are spoken of in terms of redemption, they are lifted out of the ordinary to a high moral-ethical-spiritual-religious plane. Ben Gurion employs the concept often, and in speaking of the migration of diverse communities of Jews to Israel and of the establishment of the state, he says:

This was not a revolution involving a change of regime or a seizure of power by the "forces of tomorrow"--but the personal revolution of every Jewish individual, a revolution in his way of life, vocation and language, in his emergence from bondage to freedom, in his firm foothold on the soil of the Homeland, in everything that is comprised in the Hebrew concept to which there is no parallel in any other language: geula-redemption. <sup>9</sup>

One of the fundamental and unchangeable precepts of Israel is the "Ingathering of the Exiles..." In 1950, the Knesset made this into law by passing the "Law of the Return." Upon arrival in Israel, and upon his request, a Jewish immigrant is given citizenship immediately without a required period of residency, time-consuming bureaucratic procedures or a lengthy "Israelization" process. In most cases, the Jewish Agency helps him to get out of

the country where he had lived, and pays for his transportation to Israel. Once in the country, the government aids him to find a job commensurate with his education, experience and abilities, and a home. Sometimes, whole communities of Jews are brought to Israel, as was the case with the Yemenis and the Iraqis who were flown to Israel en masse in the years 1949 through 1951.

The Israelis want these immigrants, because they settle and farm the land, serve in the Army, work in the factories and in many cases, provide the country with valuable technical and managerial skills. However, the policy of the state is to allow every Jew to enter, without respect to his country of origin or the education and skills he has. Since independence, the immigrants have mostly been Oriental Jews.

They have not had the "pioneering spirit" of the men and women of the Second Aliya, nor education and skills acquired in Europe. They often believed that they were brought to Israel to live a life of piety waiting for the Messiah rather than to work hard in the building of a modern secular state. Other states would have established restrictions to keep out those who might become a burden, might be "disruptive" and threatened to drastically alter the patterns and life-styles of the existing society, but Israel allows all to enter.

This can only be explained in terms of the sense of purpose for which the state was founded and the emotions of the people already there. Hundreds of thousands of Jews in Israel have been saved from lives of fear and persecution. Certainly, they are not going to keep out some of their brothers in equally bad straits just because they can not provide the state with what it needs.

One of the reasons the state was founded was to enable individual Jews to come to it and be redeemed--to throw away the archaic and un-Jewish customs of the Diaspora and become a new Jew in the new Land. As Ben Gurion has said:

Security must be our first concern, but we shall not survive by security alone. We must redeem the Jewish people, conquer the desert, reform our system of democracy, build a model society, raise individual standards, serve mankind. " <sup>11</sup>

The Law of the Return is not like those immigration laws in force in other countries which lay down the conditions under which the State

accepts certain classes of immigrants from abroad. The Law of the Return is the law of the historic permanence and continuity of the bond between our people and the Land of Israel; it lays down the principle of state by virtue of which the State of Israel has been revived, and by virtue of which it will survive and grow and fulfill its mission of national redemption. <sup>12</sup>

The Jewish nation has been redeemed in the past, and the parallels with the present are powerful. It was redeemed from slavery in Egypt, from captivity in Babylon, and after each "return" a state was established. In the 20th century, a remnant was saved from death at the hands of Hitler, and then modern Israel was born. Millions of Jews are still held in captivity in the USSR, and since 1971, up to 50,000 a year are being redeemed. One need not quibble over who is the agent of redemption in each case: the Bible says that it was God in the first two; if you are religious, you will believe that He is also the force behind the third act of redemption; if you are not, you will say that it is the result of more worldly factors. But this question can be left unanswered and still the redemption of the Jews from the Holocaust and from Russian totalitarian rule has an element of the miraculous to it, an element that lifts it out of the ordinary tale of death, suffering and rebirth of a people.

### The Messianic Vision.

During the centuries in which the Jews lived in the midst of other nations and under their capricious rulers, they looked to the time when they would live in the beauty of the holy land under the rule of the Messiah. In the Jewish folk mythology Eretz Israel was the Navel of the Earth, a land of dreams and visions, a place partaking of the character of a lost paradise of piety. In it would take place a great miracle--expected and prayed for day by day--the coming of the Messiah and the return of the Jews to live in his glorious kingdom which would bring about the Judgment of the Universe and the End of Time.

However, in the 19th and 20th centuries, this myth nearly died, under the onslaught of forces of Reason. Jews in Western Europe no longer believed and no longer awaited the Second Coming of Christ. Palestine was not their mythological dreamland but just another barren impoverished country in the "uncivilized" East which sensible Europeans living amidst Progress, Learning and Culture would not dream of settling in. The Jewish religion and the Jewish nation lost its sense of purpose, its direction, and began to slowly wither away through assimilation and intermarriage. Many Jews became non-believers, which in the context of the Diaspora meant abandoning the Jewish nation and its culture and joining with the Germans and Frenchman who no longer believed in Christianity. The magic power which had kept the far-straying flock of Jews together was lost.

But, as the Talmud says, "The Holy One, blessed be He, provides the remedy before the malady." <sup>13</sup> Just as the vision of a Messianic Zion

was about to flicker out, that of a national Zion lit up the Jewish world, illuminating the hearts, soul and minds of the Jews as the old Zion had. Towards the end of the 19th century, political Zionism began its growth. It brought a new vision of the Return, a new sense of hope, a new expectation of a life amidst beauty and comfort in the Holy Land--the vision of all the Jews returning to their sovereign and independent nation-state, located on the ancient soil, of all the Jews living in a society equal in regard to material abundance, cultural attainment and scientific achievement to those of the great nations of the world. The energy which was formerly devoted to the study of the Talmud, to the creation of a life which lived every day in expectation of the Messiah was now flung into the fulfillment of this new dream. The far-flung Jewish people again began to experience a sense of unity; settlement in the Homeland promised to stop the disappearance of the nation through assimilation; the new Zion was a haven for all Jews fleeing persecution; the Jews again had a sense of destiny, a feeling of purpose.

It was this vision that distinguished the 70,000 Jewish immigrants who went to Palestine between 1882 and 1914 from the three million who went to America in the same period. The latter were caught up in the "American Dream," a non-Jewish dream, but one that could include them; the former had their own dream. In 1883, one of these pioneers, Zeev Dubnov, writing to his brother in Europe, completely yet exhaustively defined this new Jewish dream:

Do you think the purpose of my coming here is to adjust myself?  
And that if I do, I attain my object, and if not, I am to be pitied? No!  
My ultimate purpose, the purpose of so many besides, is magnificent,



far-reaching and sublime, but not unattainable. It is to possess the Land of Israel in the course of time and give the Jews back the National independence they were robbed of two thousand years ago. Do not laugh! This is not fancy.

The means of achieving the end are three: agricultural and artisan settlements; all kinds of workshops and factories; and the constant expansion of both. In short, a sustained effort to bring the Land and all its economy into Jewish ownership. Besides that, we must train our youth and the rising generation to use firearms (in wild and uncontrolled Turkey you can do anything!) and then--but here I drown in dreams--the glorious day will dawn that Isaiah foretold in his lambent sermons of comfort, and, armed if need be, with a clarion call we shall proclaim ourselves lords of our ancient Land. " 14

Israel as a "Light to the Nations. "

More than ever, Israel feels that it must be a "light to the nations", not in the Biblical sense of being a nation that shines outwardly and inwardly because it is the recipient of God's light, that witnesses to the power and majesty of God in every aspect of its national life, but in the modern secular sense of being a nation based on social, political and economic equality. As a contemporary model it should have universities and institutes famous the world over for the quality of their instructions and research, artists and musicians that rank among the best in the world, economic enterprises noted for the quality of their products and the equity of the relationship between employer and employee, and an army that can fight superbly but is not tinged with the traits of Prussian militarism. With these qualities, the world will come to it, to learn and to emulate. In the words of Ben-Gurion:

The stable, permanent and reliable foundation for our endeavors to win friends and allies is our creative, liberating and redemptive work; our being an example to other nations; our capacity to assist backward peoples with scientific, cultural and technical guidance, without any suspicion or danger of domination on our part. . . .<sup>15</sup>

From India and Burma, from Japan and Ceylon, from Cambodia, Ghana and Liberia, from Ethiopia and Uganda, from French Sudan and the Ivory Coast, from Turkey and Cyprus, from Nigeria and Liberia, came emissaries to study methods of cooperation and settlement, adult education and agricultural training in the army, and it seems as if in our day the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled: "And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that . . . many peoples shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths'. "

In the kingdom of the spirit quantity is not decisive, though it is not negligible, and even small nations endowed with the necessary qualities are capable of making their contribution to the sum-total of human values and the advancement of the human race. In ancient days, Jerusalem and Athens, when they were no more than moderately sized townships, bequeathed to the world an immortal heritage, which enriched the human race and left an imperishable mark on the culture of past generations and that of our own day. Even today, Israel and the Jewish people are continuing to do so.<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

The link between the Jewish religion and the Jewish nation has been unbreakable. Today, for many Israelis, the religion no longer has any meaning, but the nation very definitely does. The Bible, redemption, the Messianic Vision, Israel as a "Light to the Nations," take on a totally secular meaning and make the non-religious Israeli "feel Jewish." For the religious Israeli, these concepts still have their ancient meaning. Each can interpret them in his own way. Both adhere to myths that are a part of the common Israeli political culture.

### The First Islamic Community

Between 622 and 632 A. D., in the city of Medina, Muhammad erected a social and political system that conformed to God's will. It was called the "Community of Believers," and in it religion and politics were the threads of

one cloth, interweaving and supporting each other in such a tight fashion that their separate natures were hardly distinguishable. It has always been the Islamic social and political ideal.

God in Heaven was the absolute ruler of this community, but He ruled through His Messenger, Muhammad, to whom He constantly gave guidance and inspiration. Muhammad was "the Prophet," the bearer of divine revelations, and he was the "Commander of the Believers", the general who commanded the troops in battle. These two titles demonstrate that he had both spiritual and temporal powers, and that no activity in the Community was beyond his purview.

The common bond holding the "Community of Believers" together was the Islamic faith. By the simple affirmation of the basic creed, "There is no god at all except Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger", a person of any race or nationality became a full member of the "Community", enjoying its protection and entitled to participate in all of its affairs. Anyone who failed to profess the Islamic creed was excluded.

Certain Jewish and Christian groups, known as dhimmis were granted a half-way status, because they believed in some of God's revealed scriptures, the Torah and/or the Gospel, but they did not accept the final one, the Koran. At Medina, Muhammad forced the Jewish and Christian tribes to submit to his rule and to pay a tribute tax, whereupon he allowed them to practice their own faith and have some communal autonomy. They were protected from outside aggressors. They could teach their children the doctrines of their own faith,

but never were they to be allowed to forget that the "Community of Believers", to which they were subordinated, was founded on divine revelations transmitted to man by Muhammad, and that as long as they denied these revelations, they could not have complete access into all the affairs of the "Community."

#### The Assertion of Islamic Identity.

This "Community of Believers" has been the social and political ideal to which modern Muslim political leaders have looked for inspiration. Since about 1800, the Muslim nations have been ruled, directly or indirectly, by Russia, Britain or France. Their cultures have been eclipsed by the more creative and dynamic ones of Europe, and their religion has been on the defensive against expansive, self-confident, and modern Christianity. The West has labeled their politics "Oriental despotism": systems in which incompetent men, fattened on luxury and debauchery, ruled capriciously over masses of ignorant, fearful and impoverished human beings.

Upon achieving independence, the Muslim rulers affirmed and asserted the Islamic identity of their nations. They did not attempt to re-establish their old societies and systems of government as they were prior to the Western penetration, for they realized that their day had passed and that now the internationally acceptable form of government was one that had its origins in Europe and had spread throughout the world. The features of the system of government they adopted were: responsibility of the rulers to people, parliaments, parties, free elections, an independent judiciary and civil liberties. But while conforming to these international norms, the rulers of the newly independent Islamic nations also affirmed their attachment to Islam.

An examination of the constitutions of some of these countries gives ample evidence of these twin thrusts towards modernity and Islamic consciousness.

Often, the Constitution is prefaced by the traditional Islamic salutation:

"In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. " Islam is declared to be the religion of the state (Algeria, Art. 4; Jordan, Art. 2; UAR (1964), Art. 3; Iran, Art. 1). Sometimes, it is declared that the Shari'a is the main source of legislation (Syria [1964], Art. 3; Iran, Art. 2) or that it is the purpose of the state "to adhere to the teachings of Islam" (Tunisia Preamble). References are also made to the national identity of the state: "The Egyptian people are part of the Arab nation" (1964, Art. 1) or "[Algeria] is an integral part of the Arab Maghreb, of the Arab World, and of Africa" (Art. 2). And it is said that the state should "endeavor to bring up the rising generations on principles of the Arab and Islamic spirit" (Iraq [1964], Preamble).

But there are also parts that proclaim universal standards of the 20th century. "The UAR is a democratic, socialist State based on the alliance of the working powers of the people" (1964, Art. 1). "The people shall be the source of all powers" (Jordan, Art. 24). "The Republic guarantees freedom of the press and the other formation media, freedom of association, freedom of speech and public address as well as freedom of assembly" (Algeria, Art. 19). "Citizens are equal before the law in rights and duties" (Syria [1964], Art. 7). "Freedom of religions shall be safe-guarded" (Iraq [1964] Art. 22). And there are the articles establishing a responsible executive, a legislature, one or more political parties, and providing for free elections.

The 1964 Interim Constitution of Iraq declares boldly and succinctly the harmony between Islam and modern political practices:

The Republic of Iraq is a democratic, socialist State, deriving the principles of her democracy and socialism from the Arab Heritage and the Islamic spirit (Art. 1).

Many Arabs, Iranians, and Turks feel that such a synthesis is morally superior to the Western liberal democracies and the communist "people's democracies", because it combines religion and politics, whereas in the former, religion is ignored, and in the latter, it is denied.

When a Westerner turns his eyes away from the constitutions of the Middle Eastern "social-democracies" and "liberal democracies", and looks at the actual political happenings in them, he discovers that each one is run by a dictator, whether he be a king, a charismatic leader or a plain colonel. The parliament, if it exists at all, bends to the dictator's will, the judiciary openly sides with those in power and suppresses all opposition, free speech and peaceful assembly are capriciously suppressed, parties are controlled by the dictator, and elections only amount to a plebiscite in which people are given the opportunity to say yes or no to the dictator's policies. He is apt to conclude that "democracy" and "socialism" are nothing more than a sham to delude the people and to cover up the dictator's lust for power. Such a conclusion is much too quick and simple. An examination of the Islamic Community (umma) will reveal a truer, if more complex, explanation.

#### Importance of the State in Islam.

There is no religion in which the state plays a more important role than in Islam. The Community of Believers, (the Islamic State), which God

has established, is a social and political order that God has intended for man's everyday existence and preparation for the life to come. Only by participating in its activities can one be happy and be able to achieve salvation.

This Community existed in its perfect form only while Muhammad was alive. But because it was divinely-ordained, Muslims have always felt that it was the ideal social and political system that they should try incessantly to re-establish. They have not succeeded in this, but the "perfect" Community of Believers has definitely influenced their thinking and actions.

#### Unity.

The Community of Believers, which Muhammad established in Medina under God's guidance, united all who accepted Islam, whatever their races, tribe, kinship group, or previous religion. It superceded all previous loyalties, and it brought unprecedented peace to the Arabian Peninsula.

In this new Community, Muslims were one. God in the Koran said:  
"your umma is but one umma, and I am your Lord. Therefore serve Me"

(21:92)<sup>18</sup>

A frequently quoted hadith is:

The believers in their friendly relations, mutual understanding and mutual assistance are like a body, which, should a part of it have pain, the rest of it will respond with sleeplessness and fever.

Every Friday at noon, all adult male Muslims go to the Mosque for the weekly worship service. They all face Mecca in serried rows. They listen to a sermon. They say the prayer and perform its movements in perfect unison, all to symbolize the absolute unity of the believers.

Islam denies pluralism. Divisions within the Community can only be factions dividing and weakening it, making it prone to the assaults of the unbelievers. Truth can not be found outside it. For the believers to achieve strength through diversity is inconceivable. To arrive at the Truth by walking down separate paths is unthinkable. E pluribus unum ("Out of many, one") is impossible.

In the Islamic world today, individual liberty is only conceived in relation to the community. Rather than the statement: "Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press" (U.S. Constitution, Amendment I), the norm is "Freedom of the press, printing and publication is guaranteed within the limits of the law" (UAR Constitution [1964], Art. 36), or the concluding article in the section on Fundamental Rights of the Algerian Constitution:

No person shall make use of the rights and freedoms enumerated above to impair the independence of the nation, the integrity of its territory, the national unity, the institutions of the Republic, the socialist aspirations of the people and the principle of the singleness of the Front of National Liberation. (Art. 22).

#### The Source of Power.

The People do not exist in the traditional Islamic political system; on the other hand, the umma, a term which is generally translated "community", plays a very important role. On the surface the difference is not apparent, but in reality it is fundamental. While the People is composed of all citizens who have the right to vote, the umma can only be defined by reference to God.<sup>19</sup>

The members of the Community, the Muslims, are the part of a well-integrated religious, social and political system, in which the individual has little importance. He has no "inalienable rights"; and his rulers are not



responsible to him. Rather, the Community is created by God, the rulers are responsible to God, and the individual's "rights"--the more appropriate term is "duties"--are prescribed by the Almighty.

The 1964 Interim Constitution of Iraq states that the Permanent Constitution will be drawn up by the "people's seeking all the help of the most High Almighty God, following His Almighty saying, 'and consult them on the matter' " (Preamble). The latter is a verse from the Koran (3:159, Dawood translation, p. 408) admonishing Muhammad to consult with his subjects about the affairs of state. It does not grant to the people the power to organize and run their own affairs. The implication is clear that God, not the people, will draw up the new constitution for Republican Iraq.

Thus, the umma tends to live on, re-incarnated in the contemporary concept of the people. The latter is not a diverse group of sovereign independent citizens who regulate their own lives, promote their own interests, and somehow reconcile the differences for the common good, as in the liberal democracies. Likewise, the people are not a unified sovereign entity whose will only has to be carried out by the one Party, as in the "people's democracies." Rather, there exists a "people-umma",<sup>20</sup> which has as its mission the carrying-out of the divine will. This conception of the political nature of society results in a system of representation that is completely different from that of the liberal-democratic West and of the popular-democratic Communist World.

#### Representation.

In the traditional Islamic political system, the concept of popular

representation is unknown. Power goes from high to low in a cascade of delegations: from God, to the Caliph, to the believers. Although the Caliph is the most important person and the delegate of God on earth, he must consult with the believers. "No one consulted more with his companions than the Prophet." <sup>21</sup> Through the course of time, this has come to mean consultation (shūrā) with the community, not to discover its will, but through it to discover the divine will.

Practically, this has been carried out through the ulema. They are persons who by their fervent devotion to the faith, their regular practice of its rituals and their life-long study of the Koran and all the great religious works have demonstrated that they are closest to the divine will and can interpret it in the name of the community. Thus, they are not representatives in the Western sense of the word: they are not elected by the people, they do not reflect all the diversities of public opinion, nor do they express the one "popular will"; they reflect the divine will, of which they are the best interpreters. <sup>22</sup>

The institution in the West which bears the greatest resemblance is the Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church, such as Vatican II (1962). Here the bishops of the Church, who are ordained from on high and not elected by the church members, assemble to decide important questions of the faith. In the Council, they do not voice their own opinions nor those of anyone else; rather, they seek God's opinion through prayer, study of the Holy Scriptures and the doctrines that have been established by their predecessors. When ratified by the Pope, their decisions are infallible, because God protects them from error.

In the liberal-democracies, the concepts of pluralism and the sovereignty of the individual produce a representative form of government. Each Congressman, Member of Parliament or Deputy in the National Assembly is responsible to his constituency, and because constituencies vary in their make-up, the representatives in the national legislature are diverse. Through the rough-and-tumble of the legislative process, the differences are harmonized. But the Islamic system rests on the assumptions of popular unity and of sovereignty residing in God. Therefore, only consultation needs to be institutionalized.

Consulting the ulema has been discontinued in most Islamic countries, and today, there are elections and plebiscites on the basis of universal suffrage. The sole Party puts up one or more lists of approved candidates, and the voter chooses the one who will best serve the Community, not the one who most conforms to his preferences and interests. The representatives thereby elected do not feel that they have to carry out a popular mandate, that is to enact the legislative program that the people have demanded. Rather, their responsibility is to "concretize the pre-existent ideal of the Islamic Community." <sup>23</sup> They are consulted about the application of programs, but they do not create de novo new ones.

The legislature thus constituted are of secondary importance: their prestige is not very high; their sessions are not very long; the buildings and equipment they possess are modest; and the persons who sit in them are not of top rank. When they are dissolved, or do not meet for a long period of time, their absence is not noticed, because there are other institutions to carry out

the will of the Community: the one Party or the Leader (za'im).

### The Dominant Party.

The dominant pattern in the Arab world is for there to be no political parties, or any one party, representing all the people. Membership in it is easy and non-selective. A cross-section of the population is encouraged to join, and no attempt is made to fashion it into a "vanguard" of the people. It espouses no secular political ideology; it fights no "class enemy"; and it has no theoretician or prophet, such as Marx. "It is only the Community-Nation molded and unified by centuries of Islamic history."

Communist parties put into practice the point of view of the proletariat; fascist parties that of the bourgeoisie; the one Islamic Party reflects and translates the will of the Community. Communist and Fascist parties have a program of social revolution or reformation which they impose upon the people; the one Islamic Party "incarnates and puts into practice the pre-existing Islamic social ideals which contain the seeds of social renovation. A profound natural harmony exists between it and the People-umma." 25

### The Leader.

A unitary Community, one Party that embodies its will, leads logically to one Leader who heads the Party and speaks for the Community. Again, secular and religious concepts fuse, specifically, those of za'im and caliph.

Za'im (pl. zu'amā') is a word that has no equivalent in English. It denotes a person who is the leader and spokesman of a locally circumscribed community, such as a village, region or ethnic group. He often comes from a prominent family, but his position is not achieved automatically through

inheritance; he must prove that he can play the role of  $zā^{c}īm$  by effectively promoting and defending the interests of the community. Once he proves himself, it is accepted that there is a complete and natural harmony of will and sentiment between him and the community, and his leadership is not challenged, even though he may have personal foibles or make mistakes.

Several modern Middle Eastern leaders have had this identity with their communities. Mustafa Kemal was given the name Ataturk ("Father of the Turks") by the Turkish Parliament, and he was called gazi, a religious warrior or crusader. Abdel Karim Qassem (President of Iraq, 1958-1963) was styled the "Unique Leader" ( al-zā<sup>c</sup>īm al-awhad), Nasser was called by his admirers, the "Leader of the Arabs" ( $zā^{c}īm al-^{c}Arab$ ), and Bourguiba has been known for a long time as the "Supreme Combatant" (mujahid al-akbar).<sup>26</sup> These men know and express the will of their community. They have no need of a political party in the ordinary sense, and can communicate directly with the people through speeches before massed gatherings, or through the one party which is the "people organized." And they can survive some very serious set-backs, ones which would bring about the resignation of a Prime Minister in a parliamentary democracy.

Such was the case with Gamel Abdel Nasser after the disastrous defeat in 1967 at the hands of the Israelis. On June 9, at 7:43 p.m. over Radio Cairo, he announced his resignation and his intention "to return to the ranks of the masses and do my duty with them like every other citizen." But as soon as the broadcast ended, people poured into the streets of every major Egyptian city, shouting, "There is no substitute for Nasser," ; Nasser is our President",

"Nasser, do not leave us, we need you." In Cairo, the throngs reached a million, and the tumult was like the roar of a storm; "Women fell to the ground, like the weeping women of antiquity, or like the peasant women of Upper Egypt. Men burst into tears." At fifteen minutes after midnight, the National Assembly rejected his resignation, saying:

No, no, no, you are our leader and president, and you will remain our leader and president as long as you live.... Our people today need your leadership more than at any time.... As soon as the people heard what you announced, they immediately expressed that they do not agree with your decision. You have always accustomed us to you listening to the will of the people.<sup>27</sup>

The next day at noon, Nasser announced the withdrawal of his resignation, saying:

The voice of the masses of our people concerning me is something which cannot remain unheeded.... The people are the leader, the teacher and the eternal.... Join your hands with mine and let us begin our urgent task.<sup>28</sup>

What has been said about Bourguiba also applies to Nasser:

All rival forces are ... dislocated, subjugated, or eliminated: the judiciary, a deliberative assembly, trade unions, political parties, and the press... constitute nothing more than supporting instruments of the power, which addresses itself without intermediary to the people. Everything converges towards the holder of power, who alone, exists, decides, and in expressing himself, expresses the country and incarnates it.<sup>29</sup>

### Selection.

One problem remains. How is the Leader, who incarnates the Community, selected? How is he removed from office should he fail to serve the Community? Again, a study of traditional Islamic political practices increases our understanding of the present.

According to Sunni theory, the Caliph was to be chosen by a council of leading members of the Community. Its size was never settled by the theorists,

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but it was to be no less than three. The council was to choose the Caliph from among men who possessed the following qualities: membership in Muhammad's tribe (the Quray sh) courage, soundness of mind and body, a sense of justice, and knowledge of the Shari'a. When they settled upon a person, they gave allegiance to him through the act of the bay<sup>C</sup>ah, the clap of the palm upon the palm, the normal token of the settling of a bargain in the Middle East. The council acted in the name of the Community, and the bay<sup>C</sup>ah symbolized: (1) the choice of the Community for the office of Caliph; (2) its allegiance to a specific person.

However, this procedure became a formality, and the office came to be acquired by heredity.

Apart from being of Qurashite birth, few ruling Caliphs fulfilled the conditions demanded by the theorists. Many of them, though holding office as heads of the Islamic state, were yet tyrannous despots who persecuted fellow-believers for the most godless reasons; and after Ma'mun, who died in 833, there was none amongst the degenerate line of Abbasids capable of the duties of defending the faith or administering the empire. <sup>30</sup>

The question the theorists then confronted was: What should a devout Muslim do when he is ruled by an unqualified, incompetent, and tyrannical caliph? They answered that any kind of stable government, even if accompanied by tyranny was better than civil war. Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'a (1241-1333), a Chief Judge said:

...Obedience is to be rendered to him [the Caliph], in order that the unity of the Muslims may be preserved. That he should be barbarous or evil-doing in no way invalidates this. <sup>31</sup>

However, civil strife has been more the norm than the exception in Islamic history. It started early with the Sunni-Shiite disputes over the succession



to Muhammad. Of the first four Caliphs, only one died a natural death.

Today, the method of installation and removal of a ruler is remarkably similar to that of the past. The constitutions of Morocco, Jordan and Iran state that the King shall be selected by primogeniture. Upon accession, he appears before the National Assembly and swears an oath of office. It represents the Community, and the ceremony has similarities with that of the bay'ah.

In the republics, all power resides in the hands of the President. Typically, after nomination by the one Party, he is voted into office by a plebiscite in which there is no opposing candidate and he always receives more than 90 % of the vote.

The Presidency is merely the constitutional office held by the Leader (za'im). Within the context of the Islamic political system, it is perfectly logical that he be chosen directly by the People through a process that insures near unanimity, "since by definition there is a remarkable likeness between the unified Community, the Party which is its spokesman, the Assembly that represents it and the za'im... who incarnates it." 32

But how do you get rid of some one who "incarnates the Community" if he should become tyrannical or prove incompetent? To this problem, the Islamic states have not produced a satisfactory answer. In recent years, only Saud Ibn Abdel Aziz al-Saud, King of Saudi Arabia (1953-1964), has been removed legally. King Hassan of Morocco, King Hussein of Jordan, and the Shah of Iran have survived several assassination attempts. The Imam of Yemen (1962) and the King of Libya (1969) have both been overthrown in the recent past.

But assassinations and coups are a threat not only to the "archaic" monarchs but also to the "progressive revolutionary" leaders. Abdel Karim Qassem, President of Iraq and a leader of the coup that overthrew the monarchy in 1958, was himself overthrown by a coup on February 8, 1963, and was killed the next day. Ahmed Ben Bella, President of Algeria, a leader of the revolutionary war against France, imprisoned by the French for six years, was deposed in a bloodless military coup in June 1965. And the most famous "progressive revolutionary" leader of them all, Gamel Abdel Nasser, foiled a plot against him right after the June 1967 war. It involved 150 to 250 persons, mostly military officers disgruntled because they were receiving the blame for the recent humiliation. The leaders were Abdel Hakim Amer, the former First Vice-President and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and Shams al-Din Badran, the former Minister of War.

It is safe to generalize that every government in the Arab World has confronted revolutionary opposition in some form. When the threat is serious, the regime becomes more tyrannical and often has to depend upon the support of a foreign power. Clearly, the Islamic form of government has not solved the problem of peacefully removing the King or Leader from power.

Conclusion: A Comparison of Israel and the Arab Countries.

Although the Islamic countries have modern universal structures (constitutions, parliaments, parties, etc.), the patterns of political behavior are traditionally Islamic. The officials, most of whom are practitioners of the faith, assert with pride and conviction that their government is in absolute harmony with the Islamic religion.

The political structures of Israel function in a thoroughly modern or Western fashion, and they are undergirded and re-enforced by a secular religion, de-deified Judaism. For the most part, the officials are non-believers. They proclaim with deep feeling and emotion that the social and political structures of Israel come from modern times and have been created by modern Israelis for their specific needs and purposes, but the inspiration, the values, the ideals come from ancient Israel, an ancient Israel whose life and history they have interpreted from an exclusively secular and national perspective.

In the first ten years of the Islamic era (622-632 A. D.), the bond was forged between the Islamic religion and the political community or state (umma); this bond was divinely-ordained, eternal and immutable. The Community was universal, and it accepted within its fold all nations and peoples so long as they professed the Faith. Since the dominion of Islam expanded at a faster pace and to a greater extent than the religion, Muslims always lived in an Islamic state under the Islamic law and under an Islamic government. They never had to confront the problem of what their life would be like living as a minority in a non-Islamic state, and their theology never dealt with this problem.

In Judaism, there was an eternal bond between the religion and the nation. The faith was for the Jewish people alone, but their practice of it in joy and obedience would have universal ramifications, would make them a "light to the nations." The Jews were often in bondage, or under the dominion of a great power, and thus they developed the capacity to live, to survive, without a Jewish imperium. There is no divinely-ordained Jewish state nor Jewish

government. The monarchy of Saul, Solomon and David, the theocracy of Ezra are mere passing phenomena in Jewish history, a history in which the Covenant between God and Abraham is permanent. For the 1900 years immediately prior to the establishment of modern Israel, the Jews were living amidst other peoples, under foreign laws and foreign governments; when they immigrated to Eretz Israel, they left all this behind, and when they reestablished the state of Israel, they began de novo. The only bond the founders of the state accepted as permanent was between the religion, the nation and the soil, or for the secularists, between the nation and the soil. The Jewish religion has always been tied with the Jewish nation; the Islamic religion has always tied to the Islamic state.

The leaders of the Islamic countries have been deeply hurt by imperialism, but its conquest of almost all of their territory, by its manipulation of their economies, by its "planting" on "their land" the "Zionist-imperialist settler-state." They have been injured by the condescending attitude of the imperialists toward their culture and religion, towards their society and their form of government. These insults have caused them to defend what is theirs, to re-assert their Islamic identity, to practice their faith more diligently. But deep down inside, they have felt that something must be wrong with their political system, economy and society, and maybe, with their religion, otherwise they would not have succumbed so easily to imperialism and Zionism. This feeling produces the conviction that they must revolutionize their societies. Thus, there are the slogans, such as "Freedom, Socialism, Unity," the expulsion of the "imperialists" from their military bases, the nationalization of foreign economic enterprises, the inauguration of Five Year Plans, the establishment of

a "party of all the people." But all this "revolution" produces little change in social and political practices; new labels are attached to old institutions: the great nationalist hero is the age-old za'im, ghazi or mujāhid; the unity of the Arab nation is the modern form of the unity of the Community of Islam; rule by referendum replaces rule by consultation (shūrā); law made by executive decree takes over from God's law interpreted by the ulama. The impulse and the urge is to be modern, but the socio-political institutions and practices continue from the past. Modern structures disguise traditional practices.

Imperialism is not an obsession of the Israeli leaders. What has disturbed them are two threats, one malevolent, the other benign, against the survival of the Jewish people: (1) persecution and genocide, and (2) the assimilation of the Jews into the cultures in which they live. Therefore, Zionist leaders and the Israeli pioneers have felt the need to return to their Homeland, to sink their roots into its soil, to drink the water from the springs of their ancient past and to re-establish a state. They have come from Europe and have had no subconscious insecurity about being backward; in the past century and a half, the Jews have been in the forefront of Science, Progress, Culture and Industry; in Israel, they have continued this leading role and have added a new field; military science. What the Israelis do feel uneasy about is their Jewishness; therefore, the return to the Bible, the national obsession with archeology, the conviction that modern Israel must be a "light to the nations," that it should be the agent of redemption for the Jews still in the Diaspora, and that the modern Zion can be a substitute for the old Messianic Zion. To Israelis, ancient concepts have new meaning, and they are the primordial force behind their modern structure.

### Footnotes

1. Israel Government Yearbook (hereafter abbreviated as IGY), 5712 (1951-52), pp. xxiv-xxv.
2. See his book My People: The Story of the Jews (New York: Behrman House, 1968)
3. The concluding paragraph of the Israeli Declaration of Independence states: "With faith in the Rock of Israel, we affix our signatures to this proclamation. . . ." This is a literal translation of the Hebrew; in the widely published English translation, it has been rendered: "Placing our trust in the Almighty. . . ." This was the only paragraph that produced disagreement among the signers. The zealous rationalists did not want a reference to God however ambiguous. The representatives of the religious parties insisted that the absence of "Redeemer" after "Rock" was blatant heresy, but in the end, all signed.
4. Ben-Gurion: "The Eternal of Israel will not fail, for his truth is expressed in Israel's revival and its work of redemption." IGY 5718 (1957), p. 34.
5. IGY 5714 (1953-54), p. 50.
6. IGY 5714 (1953-54), p. 49.
7. Ibid. p. 50.
8. The Report of the Executive Committee of Histadrut to the Second Convention (1923): [Histadrut is the ]heart of the Jewish people's movement for redemption, the center of the circulation of the blood in the veins of our national and social revival. . . . Generations of yearning for redemption, the birth-pangs of the Messiah and the thirst for life and creativity are re-awakening in our movement. . . . No one unaware of our bonds with the grievous sufferings of our past, and with the great vision of resurrection, of redemption in our time, can understand what our labor movement means. It is our duty to hold fast to this truth, for thus alone shall we be able to grasp and prize the great, momentous and historic mission that rests upon the shoulders of the Jewish worker in the Land of Israel." IGY 5722 (1961-62), p. xxxvi.
9. IGY 5718 (1957), p. 30.
10. In Israel this term applies to the Jews who came from North Africa and the Middle East; Ashkenazi refers to those who came from Europe.
11. IGY 5722 (1961-62), p. lviii.

## Footnotes

12. IGY 5718 (1957), p. 31.
13. Quoted in Raphael Patai,  
Tents of Jacob: The Diaspora Yesterday and Today  
(Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 429.
14. Quoted in IGY 5723 (1962-63), p. 47.
15. IGY 5720 (1959-60), p. 83.
16. Ibid., p. 65. The Biblical passage is Isaiah 2:23. It portrays the End of Time and Final Judgment.
17. Ibid., pp. 66-67.
18. Dawood translation, p. 293. Virtually the same verse appears in 23:52, Dawood translation, pp. 216-217.
19. Maurice Flory and Robert Mantran,  
Les Regimes Politiques des Pays Arabes  
(Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), p. 136.
20. Ibid., p. 139.
21. Henri Laoust,  
Le Traité de Droit Public D'Ibn Taimiya: Traduction Annotée de la siyasa Sarciya (Beyrouth: 1948), Vol. 1, p. 168.
22. Flory and Mantran, op. cit., pp. 139-40.
23. Flory and Mantran, op. cit., p. 142.
24. Flory and Mantran, op. cit., p. 146.
25. Ibid., p. 147.
26. More specifically, this means " the greatest of the fighters."
27. All of the above are quoted in Middle East Record (published for the Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, by the Israel Universities Press, Jewusalem), Vol. 3 (1967), pp. 553-557. Hereafter, it is abbreviated MER.