



## Israel at Seventy Statesmanship at the Crossroads of Existential Dilemmas

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### Beit Hatfutsot at Forty Celebration

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I wish to begin by thanking those who approached me with the request to address you here this evening – it is a great privilege for me to speak at an event dedicated to the Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfutsot in Israel. Thank you, Ambassador Moses, for your generous words – I shall try and live up to them this evening. I welcome many distinguished and close friends with whom I have crossed paths over so many years who are here tonight.

For me the diaspora has never been a subject studied at school or in the university; I was born there, grew up there and celebrated my Bar Mitzva there. When I reached the shores of Palestine in April 1948 I could never have imagined that I would end up as head of the Mossad where I served close to forty years. The indelible link between Israel and the diaspora is a major element in my DNA. I know that neither Israel nor the Jews of the world can flourish without the continued existence of the Gordian knot binding us.

A few weeks ago, a terrible tragedy happened not far from here in Flatbush on one Chanukah evening - a mother and two of her children were consumed by a fire that gutted their home. A few days later I attended the funeral in Israel and embraced the father and grandfather of the dead – Rabbi Avraham Chamra – the former chief Rabbi of Damascus - a fearless figure - a great hero of the Jewish People- who was personally responsible for the constant stream of young Damascene Jews in their hundreds who made their way on foot in the dead of night in the heart of Syria and ended up as free Jews in Israel. This miraculous operation could have never succeeded without a key role played by none other than a great American Jewish figure Ralph Goldman – the legendary Executive Vice President of the JDC.

This kind of threesome effort – has been key to so many rescue operations carried out during the seventy years of Israel's independence.

When we were in the midst of the Ethiopian Rescue operation close to forty years ago a necessity arose to position a professional in Sudan to deal with certain aspects of the activities. It was Ralph who provided the solution and an over seventy-year-old lady from this city whose name I will not mention was able to proceed to the capital Khartoum where she performed wonders in the sweltering heat of the desert capital. When it came to saving lives we all joined hands.

And as you know there have been other such activities of which you and we all can be justifiably proud. I wish to recall the decades long campaign for Soviet Jewry spearheaded by the Jews of the United

States and joined by all the Jewish communities in the free world as it gathered steam in the seventies and eighties. It was the public sustained pressure coupled with the growing domestic problems in Moscow that ultimately led President Gorbachev to open the gates of the Soviet Union and to agree to "let my people go." Within a very short time a million Jews flooded Israel – a truly miraculous event.

The Jewish Exodus from Russia to Israel was the greatest achievement of Prime Minister Shamir. Along the road he had to confront American Jewry and insist that those leaving Russia would not be free to travel to any destination of their choice; they were obliged, at least first, to emigrate only to Israel. Israel had negotiated very toughly with the Soviet Union and the demand was to allow the Jews to go to their land – their state, that was our condition, that was the Soviet condition, and we insisted it be honored. We differed with a few leaders of American Jewry on this but I hope that in the light of the threefold success story you here tonight will retroactively approve of what Shamir demanded.

Three mega aims had suddenly materialized –one- a major portion of the estimated five million Jews who had lived behind the iron curtain were saved –two- Israel had achieved the critical mass that had eluded it before and the million-strong infusion assured its existence as a sovereign state in the middle east and three- Arafat concluded that the armed battle he was waging against Jerusalem would never succeed so he opted for negotiation. These were three outstanding achievements in Jewish – Israeli strategy. All these existential targets were achieved through the efforts of Israel in tandem with the Jewish People.

One other point:

I wish to suggest to you this evening that there has come about a subtle change in your

"status," so to speak, as embodied in the code word used for centuries – for two thousand years.

In the past we have often alluded to the Jewish communities round the world as the "Galut"- "Exile ". As the prayer we cite on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur tells the story and I quote: -

"because of our sins we have been exiled from our Land."

מפני חטאינו גלינו מארצנו

We rarely speak today about the Galut – since Israel's founding nobody is really in Galut – a condition enforced on us. Israel has freed us all from the Galut syndrome.

You are the diaspora and every Jew wherever he or she is, has a virtual single share in Israel.

Those of us who live in Israel have redeemed it. Everyone who opts out has an unconditional share in the "bank."

That is why Beit Hatfutsot represents worldwide Jewish unity and that is why it is not only the Museum of the Jewish People but also the museum of every Israeli Jew – it is an ongoing concern and it speaks to each and every one of us. We must never forget this primary aspect of our historic bond – we are and shall remain inseparable.

But I now wish to turn to another aspect of this evening –coinciding with the closing week of the exhibition telling the story of "Operation Finale", the capture of Adolph Eichmann and his arrival in Israel.

So much has already been published about this outstanding operation of the Mossad and the Security Service – the Shabbak. At the time, Legendary Isser Harel was in charge of the two services – the Mossad and the Security Service – the Shabbak. The success was the cumulative result of action carried out by elements of the two services as stated by the Prime Minister in his revelatory statement to the Knesset to which I will soon refer.

Many memoirs have appeared; major figures who participated in it have given wide ranging interviews – I want to draw attention to a different angle related to the Eichmann file which has benefitted from much less prominence.

On the 23rd of May 1960 Prime Minister Ben Gurion made the following statement in the Knesset "I need to inform you that some time ago the Israeli security services discovered one of the greatest Nazi criminals – Adolph Eichmann who is responsible together with Nazi leaders for what is known as "the solution of the Jewish Problem" that is the extermination of six million Jews. Adolph Eichmann is already under arrest here and will shortly stand trial in Israel under "The Law of meting Justice to Nazis and their collaborators 1950."

Earlier that day the Israeli cabinet had been informed and ministers suggested that the statement include a warm tribute to those who had carried out the operation; Ben Gurion forcefully rejected this idea. Subsequently Argentina – an aggrieved state appealed to the United Nations' Security council and at an appearance there, Israel's Foreign Minister, Golda Meir, said that the act had been perpetrated by a number of Jews including Israelis. For those of you who have the time I suggest you google this appearance of Golda – her impressive oratory will warm your hearts as you listen to this grand Diaspora lady from Milwaukee.

Why this distancing of Israel from such a noble and daring deed? I will now sketch out the fateful issues that lay so heavily on the shoulders of our founding Prime Minister. I will hint to aspects that are relevant even today. They go to the very heart of Israel's defense and security interests.

Several weeks before the Eichmann operation Prime Minister Ben Gurion and German Chancellor Adenauer met for the first time in public in this city- in New York –in the latter's suite in the Waldorf Astoria. During their meeting the two leaders joked about the number of hidden microphones that might have been planted in the room. At that time Israel and Holocaust victims had already been benefitting under the reparation agreements and there was an Israel Reparations Mission in Bonn- the capital of what was then West Germany.

But diplomatic relations were still far ahead and were only established five years later.

The German issue was still a subject of intense emotional and political pressures and for these and other reasons the exact content of the conversation could not be made public.

During the conversation, Ben Gurion also alluded to his meeting with President Eisenhower a few days previously.

He couched his comments in positive terms although it is difficult to assume that the two really hit it off.

This was 1960 and The Israeli Prime Minister had had a difficult relationship with Washington DC. Four years previously, the American President had teamed up with the Soviet leadership in a stern ultimatum to force Israel to withdraw forthwith from the Sinai Peninsula after the Sinai campaign in 1956. Ben Gurion felt he had no choice but to comply.

This was the one and only time that the two super powers had ever had or ever would act together until the end of the cold war.

This came as a seismic shock to every Israeli and certainly to Prime Minister Ben Gurion.

Can such a joint American-Russian move ever repeat itself?

Indeed, simultaneously, drama was being played out inside the Soviet Bloc. The peoples of Poznan in Poland and Budapest in Hungary had taken to the streets in order to call the Russians to leave and give them their freedom. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, exhorted them to carry on and they assumed this signified that America would come in and help them to achieve their aims. Nothing like

this happened – they were left to their fate and the pictures of Russian tanks mowing down defenseless protesters in the streets of Budapest are deeply embedded in my mind.

Tweets never determine battlefield results.

Think of Iran today, will it end like it ended then in Budapest?

But back to the Meeting at the Waldorf Astoria. Following a broad review of world affairs Ben Gurion spoke at length about the enormous need of Israel for military and financial aid.

Although grateful for the reparations, Israel's requirements transcended these by far; he mentioned the urgent necessity of arms like missiles and submarines and the pressing need of a financial infusion to allow rapid development of the arid south – the Negev – a pet theme of his.

These were very grave times – the fledgling State of Israel had received no aid from the United States Government and the financial support of American Jewry however vital could never reach the sums required by Israel at that point in time. Israel also required military support that would guarantee it at a time that the Soviet Union was supplying large quantities of arms to its neighbors whereas Washington had not yet approved even a first supply of Hawk defensive surface to air missiles. France did not have the capacity to help and might sell weaponry but not grant it for free. Germany was Israel's last resort.

As the time for capturing Eichmann drew near Ben Gurion was finalizing the outlines of critical German aid for Israel. He did not breathe a word to Chancellor Adenauer or to the hidden microphones but he must have thought how this operation and his requests from Germany could be reconciled.

The day after his Knesset announcement BG, as he was commonly called, had to contend with the possible fall-out in Germany. As of the end of World War Two, the United States had decided to rehabilitate West Germany rather than exact war reparations from it. This was a major American strategic decision – the Marshall plan of those days also focused on Germany and its rehabilitation. The cold war was already under way and the allies of yesterday who had joined hands against Nazi Germany, now, returned to be deadly foes. The struggle for the domination of Europe took center stage alongside events in south east Asia – the Korean War for one.

The United States had concluded that its strategic magna requirements dictated a policy to put Germany on its feet as rapidly as possible and this could only be done by recruiting existing assets in both the security and scientific fields. The denazification process had to be attuned to this supreme strategic interest – hence for instance the rapid transfer of a missile German expert named Wernher von Braun from being German head of rocket technology in his native country during world war two to lead the United States effort to be number one in rocket technology and space science. Similarly, Reinhard Gehlen who had led the intelligence arm of the German Army in the East – on the critical " eastern front " in world war two became the future founder and head of the newly constructed BND – the German CIA. The latter brought many of his former staff with him including those who could be termed "war criminals."

All of this must have been clear to BG when he had to face the enormous task of preventing the Eichmann trial from derailing the understandings reached on German aid for Israel on the one hand and also blocking the Russians from utilizing the consequent tremor in West Germany to undermine the regime on the other. This had the potential of bringing down the leadership of German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, of throwing Germany into turmoil and destroying the capability the United States had labored to build in Bonn.

A key figure on the German scene was the chancellor's personally-trusted chief of staff who also served as coordinator of the German intelligence community and a major power broker in the CDU the chancellor 's political arm in parliament and in the government – he was the true power behind the

throne. No less important was the fact that this man was the key asset of Washington in West Germany – he was the professional kingpin of the edifice that the United States had created after the fall of the third Reich.

He was also a key figure involved in the implementation of the understandings worked out between BG and Adenauer.

His name was Hans Globke whose career was launched in the thirties when as a young lawyer he served on the legal team that was responsible for drafting the first set of laws directed against the Jews of Germany and their properties – the infamous “Nuremberg Laws,” though he had not been a member of the Nazi Party.

The possible surfacing of his name -- in the context of the trial – the question if Eichmann had mentioned him during his interrogation, the possibility that his name would appear in some context in the American press – all these matters needed to be handled in utmost discretion. Globke had been sentenced to life imprisonment by an East German court in absentia and if and when his name would come up in the context of the Eichmann trial all hell might break loose.

Senior figures were involved in this matter both in Washington and in Bonn and creative steps were taken to avoid this happening.

And yet the trial went ahead and the entire story of the Shoah was revealed in all its horrendous details and intensity throughout the daily court hearings which lasted for several weeks. Hundreds of members of the press had gathered from all corners of the earth in Jerusalem to cover every aspect of the trial and no one had any inkling of what was happening outside the public eye.

Ben Gurion was carrying out his battle under the radar and he never ever divulged the extent of how far he went. The full story of this aspect of Operation "Finale" will await future generations. An excellent book by a doctoral student named Ora Herman published in Israel in 2017 tells important parts of this story but still leaves a few significant empty gaps. The English title reads "The Furnace and the Reactor: Behind the Scenes of the Eichmann Trial."

The final payment by West Germany in the context of the understanding reached by Ben Gurion and Adenauer reached Israel very shortly after the end of the Eichmann trial to the relief of all concerned.

Ben Gurion was able to protect and insulate the German leadership and by so doing was able to meet the strategic interests of the United States at a very crucial time.

Above all, this led to a situation wherein the crucial necessities of Israel were met. Ben Gurion had secured Israel's security.

This was grand strategy at its very best and in order to assure success he publicly subordinated his personal image to the vital requirements of the moment.

At the time, BG brushed off any attempt to get him to say anything about the Eichmann operation retorting that he had nothing to do with it “Ask Isser it was his operation.”

He simply left it at that.

But let you not be misled – an operation such as the Eichmann one could never have come about without the involvement of BG at many stages and without his sanction to carry it out.

I want to add one final comment; many of you may have seen the documentary "Epilogue"

which is an hour-long segment of a six-hour interview with BG that was discovered in recent years. In a somewhat uncharacteristic comment by Prime Minister Netanyahu he urged every Israeli to view this movie. I walk in his footsteps – on this particular point of course.

In the segment that was screened there was no mention of the Eichmann operation; I have spoken to the producer of the movie and she assured me that the subject was never mentioned at all by Ben Gurion in the interview.

I have brought this story to your attention not only because it coincides with the closure of the exhibition. I think it bears testimony to the quality of leadership that the Jewish People require in order to navigate safely in the troubled waters of the impossible region in which Israel has been destined to exist.

There are times and circumstances when Leaders need to take complex decisions with an eye to priorities; there are moments when they need to take action that appears on the surface unpalatable. They need to focus on the endgame and make sure they will get there. There is also a rare humility surrounding this figure of history reminding me of Proverbs chapter 27 verse two: -

"Let another man praise thee and not thine own mouth."

As I have gone through a chapter in the life of Israel's founding Prime Minister this evening, I have reached a few valuable conclusions:

Great leaders need to be both cautious and courageous – they need to inspire the public rather than court popularity and they need to be both wise and dedicated. They need to keep their eyes on both the essentials and their vision. And, they should be blessed with a shade of genuine modesty.

This evening is devoted to the museum - which is not only a symbol of our bond and continuity but also a real force in assuring that future generations will see it and support it as a vital hub – an up to date, active and inter active center; it is a museum that not only focuses on the past but also devotes special attention to the present and has more than an eye for the future. It does not leave you passive but moves you to ask questions and seek answers.

I have walked you through some profound dilemmas this evening. I have not been able to provide all the satisfactory answers. It remains for us to draw on history as we aim for the future.