**A Gentile’s View of the History of Modern Israel; From 20 references in 20 questions & answers**

By Thomas P. Papageorgiou

My country’s (Greece’s) longing for a powerful ally that will help it crash its enemies is a typical characteristic of its modern history. First it was the Russians, during the War of Independence (1821) and then the French, the English, the Soviet-Russians (for the Communists during the 1946 – 1949 civil war), the Americans, the EU etc. This did not come without a price and Greece should eventually learn from its mistakes. In any case the latest trend is Israel. The small but powerful country that has repeatedly crashed its enemies, retains powerful connections to the superpowers and especially the US, has a strong economy with a high-tech defense industry at its core that seems to share with us a common view and common interests in the eastern Mediterranean region. Thus, following my recent interest in modern Greek history, it was a matter of time before I turned my attention to the study of this new ally. This first article summarizes my view of Israel’s modern history in 20 questions with their answers from 20 easy to obtain references. I hope you will enjoy it and, why not, correct me, if I am wrong. Let’s talk!

**1. Why did the Jews pursue the creation of the modern State of Israel?**

For almost 2,000 years, after their exile from Judea by the Romans in 70 CE, the Jews settled in the Mediterranean basin and elsewhere were often prosecuted as the crusifiers of Jesus Christ. It has been argued, though, that, however the Temple establishment prompted them to do so, it was the Romans that killed Jesus. But, at the time of their expansion, most Christians did not want to be enemies of the Roman Empire and sought to play down the role of the Romans in the story. (MacCulloch, 2009, p. 92) Nevertheless, the demonization of the Jews often had ulterior motives like the confiscation of their belongings or the relief of social tensions because of famine, plague, economic stagnation or other reasons. The last and worst massive prosecution, before the establishment of modern Israel, The Holocaust, was carried out by the Germans during the Second World War. They killed 6,000,000 Jews, one-third of the world’s Jewish population. (Gordis, 2016, p. 3)

Thus, the Jews needed a place, where they would not rely on others for their defence. A place, where the ΄΄new Jew΄΄ would take history in her/his own hands. The establishment of modern Israel is the result of the Jews’ refusal to remain passive, weak, fearful, and huddled over ancient, sacred texts. Of their refusal to be victims on call. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 4-5)

**2. What is Zionism?**

Zionism was the political movement whose central idea was the Jewish people needed a state, and they could create one. It was launched by Theodor Herzl, with the publication of his book *The Jewish State* in February 1896. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 22-23)

 The Zionist program, drafted during the First Zionist Congress opened in Basel on August 1, 1897, reads as follows:

Zionism seeks to secure for the Jewish people a publicly recognized, legally secured homeland in Palestine …

To achieve this goal, the Congress envisages the following methods:

1. By fostering the settlement of Palestine with farmers, laborers, and artisans.
2. By organizing the whole Jewry in suitable local and general bodies, in accordance with the laws of their respective countries.
3. By strengthening the national Jewish feeling and national consciousness.
4. By taking preparatory steps to attain any Governmental consent which may be necessary to reach the aim of Zionism. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 26-27)

**3. Who are the Israelis?**

As is evident from the first point of the Zionist program, Israel is built by waves of immigration. It is home to Jews of different colours, Jews of different ethnic backgrounds, Jews who speak different languages, Jews both secular and religious-and many non-Jews as well. (Gordis, 2016, p. 7) In any case, the entire Zionist discourse is based on the idea that Jews are a nation. The difficulty is that when it comes to deciding who does and who does not belong to that nation, religion is the only possible criterion. From the late nineteenth century on, Jews and others have often tried to find some other criterion, whether based on the colour of the people’s hair or on their genes; so far all have failed. (Creveld, 2010, p. 79)

Israel’s Law of Return defined as Jewish anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent. This is a symbolic overturning of the Nazis’ Nuremberg Laws that used the same definition. (Gordis, 2016, p. 198) When Israel was established in 1948, merely 6 percent of the world’s Jews lived in it; by 2015 that number had grown to almost half of the world’s Jews. (Gordis, 2016, p. 199)

**4. How was the Zionism program implemented?**

Apart from immigration, Zionism itself had nurtured civil institutions from the period of the Balfour Declaration for ‘… the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, …’ in 1917 (Gordis, 2016, pp. 97-98) to the establishment of Israel in May 1948. The movement had built universities, hospitals, trade unions, banks, a sick fund, a pension system and a proto government, The Jewish Agency. Thus, when the Zionists declared the state, they had already built it. (Ross & Makovsky, 2019, pp. Chapter 1 / 2:26:00 - 2:27:00) Some institutions like the Zionist Organization (1897) or the Jewish National Fund (1901) in charge of buying and developing land in Palestine for Jewish settlement date even before that period. A self-defence force, the *Haganah* (The Defence), was also created in 1921. (Gordis, 2016, p. 104)

Thanks to the single-minded efforts of one man, Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922), a common language was established (Creveld, 2010, p. 27) and an early focus on education helped strengthen a national feeling and consciousness, with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem being established in 1925 on land purchased especially for that purpose during World War I. (Creveld, 2010, p. 38) Indeed, at the time of the British Mandate in Palestine six times as many adult Jewish males as Arab ones could read with the Jewish literacy in Palestine being higher than that of several European countries. The number of new Hebrew-language books on the market exceeded that of Arabic ones by a hundred to one, no less. All of the above would be impossible without the moral, political, and economic support of millions of the diaspora Jews (Creveld, 2010, p. 37) among which some of the most respected Jewish families from the Rothschilds down. (Creveld, 2010, p. 32)

As far as international relations are concerned, the Jewish leaders proved much more flexible during the process that led to the establishment of Israel compared to their Arab counterparts, even if that meant giving up land that they thought was rightfully theirs. (Gordis, 2016, p. see notes in Map 4 & Map 5) This did not mean that they hesitated to take up arms against the British, when deemed necessary, or the armies of their Arab neighbours during the 1947-1949 War of Independence.

**5. How was the situation in Israel during the first years after its establishment?**

The living standards in Israel, after its establishment in 1948 were low. (Creveld, 2010, p. 88) Hundreds of thousands of Jews from Europe, Africa and the Middle East immigrated to the new state and its population more than doubled by the end of 1951. These were practically penniless Jews (Creveld, 2010, p. 87) in dangerous places or in places where they could not stay. Those who were comfortable did not come. Ben-Gurion was disgusted by the fact that fewer than two thousand came from the United States which had a Jewish population of over five million. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 216-217)

Thus, it is almost impossible to exaggerate Israel’s economic difficulties during its first years. It did not only have to pay for the recent War of Independence, but to somehow finance feeding, housing, and finding employment for hundreds of thousands of mostly penniless, often unskilled, not seldom sick immigrants. A rationing system of twenty-six hundred calories per person per day was instituted (Creveld, 2010, p. 102), much of which was abolished in 1953, although some rationing remained in force until 1959. (Creveld, 2010, p. 104) Large families were squeezed into one bed-room prefabricated flats or into tiny houses that dotted the countryside. Schools, public transport, and medical services were rudimentary. (Creveld, 2010, p. 88) Anything with an electric motor in it, such as cars, was defined as luxury. The same applied to electronic equipment, such as television sets (that remained rare until the late 1960s), radios, record players tape recorders, and even telephones. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 109-110)

**6. How did Israel overcome the initial difficulties?**

Reparations payments from West Germany (from 1953 to 1964), that did not come without raising controversy in Israel, played an important role in overcoming the financial difficulties of the newly founded state. By the best available calculations, individual survivors of the Holocaust received about 1.75 billion U.S. dollars and the state received about half as much. The reparations provided significant help in developing shipping, power systems, railways, fishing, and several major industrial plants. They financed 26 percent of all imported Israeli capital goods, 11 percent of imported production factors (mainly fuel) but only 3 percent of consumer goods.

And here lies the rub. Since 1945 numerous so-called developing countries have received foreign assistance, some of it fairly massive. However, too often it has been frittered away – either to buy consumer goods or ending up in rulers’ secret Swiss bank accounts. Several Israeli prime ministers though, died with hardly a penny in their names. Others were very well off, but none became a billionaire (as far as we know) or ended his or her career by having to flee abroad. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 104-105)

Although Israel has neither a written constitution nor a bill of rights (Gordis, 2016, p. 207), its democratic politics (proportional election system) faithfully reflect society and enable it to change without bloodshed (civil war). Not once has Israeli democracy been seriously challenged and no government was ousted by a coup d’ėtat, military or otherwise although retired officers, many of the battle hardened, occupy a large place in the upper echelons of government (Creveld, 2010, pp. 83-84)

In fact, the difficult financial situation of most immigrants and the fact that they were surrounded by hostile neighbours made them adopt socialist and collectivist ways of life. During the 1960s socialism made Israel into a complete welfare state, in many ways even more so than such countries as Labour Britain and Social Democratic Sweden. All this, plus heavy taxation, meant that gaps between rich and poor were smaller than in any other Western country, contributing to social solidarity. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 114-115)

The above helped Israel achieve a very high growth rate of 10 percent annually between 1954 and 1965, ahead even of Germany and Japan. (Creveld, 2010, p. 112) (Gordis, 2016, p. 245) Although most Israelis stuck to the centuries-old Jewish tradition of working in the service sector (Creveld, 2010, p. 106) as early as 1939 they were using more tractors per acre of land than their colleagues in other countries (except in the US) and Jewish yields per acre and per cow were much higher than among their Arab neighbours. (Creveld, 2010, p. 100) In 1960 – 1965 manufacturing also expanded at almost 14 percent annually, focusing on metal, electric, and electronic products as well as textiles. Whereas in 1950 agriculture had accounted for a third of all exports, fifteen years later its share had fallen to about one eighth. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Technion in Haifa, and the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot provided first-class higher education and research facilities to support this growth. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 112-113) Indeed, education has been important for Israel from the very beginning (also for the assimilation of the Jewish immigrants that flooded the new state) commanding the second largest budget after defence.

**7. Did the Israelis show flaws?**

The above does not mean that Israelis were perfect. In many ways ‘native Israelis’ treated immigrants by looking down on their culture, discriminating against them, exploiting them economically, and in general lording it over them. (Creveld, 2010, p. 88)

Things were especially difficult for Oriental Jews. Different though they were in many respects, these Jews often encountered a widespread condescending worldview on the part of the European immigrants who had been part of early immigration waves, who had developed the Yishuv (Wikipedia, 2022) and who were running the country. The issue was not racism. It was a matter of cultural elitism, a genuine belief that European culture was the more developed of the cultures, and that it would be best for the new-born country if that elite culture would be the one that was taught to all. (Gordis, 2016, p. 204)

In some ways the reception given to Holocaust survivors was even worse. One of the prime objectives of Zionism had been to create a new kind of ‘fighting Jew’ – ‘a proud and cruel race’. The very fact that immigrants from Europe had gone through the Holocaust proved that they did not correspond to this stereotype. ‘Why didn’t they fight?’ It was with the Eichmann trial that the Israeli society started to comprehend and understand. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 239-257) (Creveld, 2010, pp. 90-92)

 Other societal flaws include a culture of tax avoidance and evasion and a lively black market serving as a safety valve to heavy taxation and lack of consumer goods. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 109-111)

There is also evidence that corruption is a legitimate problem in Israel (Creveld, 2010, p. 94) although not to an extend that would significantly affect development and investment in the country. (Wikipedia, 2022) In any case, the judiciary is at low risk of corruption and has in several cases convicted public officials of crimes and misdemeanours. (Wikipedia, 2022)

**8. What happened to the Arabs in the state of Israel?**

Perhaps the hardest criticism against Israelis relates to their behaviour towards the Arab residents of the land that in 1948 was declared the state of Israel. Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, understood the demographic issue and the need to establish a (viable) Jewish state without a large Arab minority. Some seven hundred thousand Arabs left Israel during the War of Independence, for various reasons, including expulsion from the Israelis. (Gordis, 2016, p. 187)

Those who remained were under military administration for eighteen years until 1966. (Creveld, 2010, p. 94) Under the military government, Arabs were tried by military courts, they had to obtain permission to leave their villages, opportunities for higher (or even elementary) education or a career in politics were severely limited, and employment in the centre of the country was difficult to find. Very few Arabs were also allowed in the Israel Defence Force (IDF). (Gordis, 2016, p. 213)

The military administration over Israel’s Arabs was explained as a security measure (Israel was worried about an internal fifth column). During this period tragedies could not be avoided. In 1956, as Israel was preparing to launch the Sinai Campaign (Wikipedia, 2022), an IDF patrol massacred forty-seven Arabs from Kafr Kassem returning home after work beyond a five-p.m. imposed curfew. Ben-Gurion called the incident a ‘dreadful atrocity’, but though several officers were arrested and later convicted, all were released from jail shortly thereafter. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 231-232)

The Six-Day War of 1967 (Wikipedia, 2022) perplexed things once again as the seven hundred thousand Arabs that found their way to neighbouring countries during the War of Independence found themselves again under Israeli control. In fact, there were, in 1967, some 1.25 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved to this day. (Gordis, 2016, p. 280)

**9. How important is religion in Israel?**

The importance of religion for the definition of the Jewish identity has already been stated in the answer to question no. 3. At the same time though, as we saw in the answer to question no.6, at the beginning Israelis adopted a socialist and collectivist way of life. To the dominant socialists, a state controlled by religion was an abomination. To many Orthodox Jews (Haredim), a state not controlled by religion was a product of ‘Satan and all his hosts’. In fact, at any time there was at least one religious party that regarded the Zionist dream, if not outright apostasy, as essentially irrelevant to the real content of Jewish life, i.e., religion. (Creveld, 2010, p. 76)

Nevertheless, the system of proportional representation has often created situations where the religious parties with their shares of votes usually between 8 and 12 percent (Creveld, 2010, p. 76) held the balance in the parliament (Knesset). (Creveld, 2010, p. 78) The Haredim used their leverage (by leaving any coalition they could bring the government down and force elections) to gain a largely independent school system (in which students study virtually no non-religious subjects) and exception from military service to avoid exposure to the secular Jews in the army. (Gordis, 2016, p. 211) Furthermore, the rabbinate is in charge of marriages and divorces (and as Jewish law forbids marriage between Jews and non-Jews, Israel is the only country where a Jew cannot marry whomever he or she likes) and decides who is to become an Israeli citizen or not. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 80-81)

The above create interesting challenges for the future, (e.g., by 2010, the number of Haredim excused from military service reached 62,500 annually – an increase of 15,000 percent compared to the 400 exemptions at Ben-Gurion’s time, when Israel’s population grew only 1,200 percent in the same period) (Gordis, 2016, p. 212) considering also the fact that Israel is found in the top 20 of the most atheist countries, with only 39 percent of its population describing themselves as religious. (World population review, 2022)

**10. What was the situation in Israel after the Six-Day War of 1967?**

By 1967, Israel had survived an onslaught of unrelenting attacks, had absorbed over a million immigrants, had emerged as a player on the international stage, and was quickly cultivating national, political, and cultural traditions. It had fared far better than anyone might have dared to imagine after its establishment in 1948. (Gordis, 2016, p. 259)

After the war of 1967, and although Israel continued to fight the so called ‘War of Attrition’ until August 1970, (Creveld, 2010, pp. 139-140) the country started experiencing an unprecedented economic boom. First, the need for self-sufficiency in arms and mass spending in the defence sector (defence spending more than doubled compared to the 1957-1966 figures and rose to 21.6 percent of the GNP in the years following 1967 (Creveld, 2010, p. 141) to reach 28 percent in 1976-1980 (Creveld, 2010, p. 152)) did yield a powerful and highly innovative military-industrial complex. (Creveld, 2010, p. 179) By the late 1970s Israel was capable of designing many excellent weapons from scratch, producing them at reasonable cost, and exporting them to many countries around the world. By 1980 arms exports amounted to perhaps $1.3 billion a year and growing fast. (Creveld, 2010, p. 182)

The necessary talent for the boom came from immigration and especially that from the Soviet Union (although the Soviets at the time were the main supporters of the Arabs against Israel (Creveld, 2010, p. 136)) that brought skills that were often equal or even superior to those of the native population. (Creveld, 2010, p. 149)

Diaspora Jews contributed much of the necessary money as the war led to a dramatic rise in voluntary contributions as well as an increase in the purchase of bonds. (Creveld, 2010, p. 148) Especially the American Jews established a new relationship with Israel. Knowing that they had underreacted during the Holocaust, they were not prepared to make the same mistake again. They contributed money, organized rallies (a rally in New York in support of Israel attracted 150,000 people, the largest rally American Jews had ever staged), and applied political pressure in Washington. (Gordis, 2016, p. 269)

Thus, per capita GNP raised from $1,590 in 1965 to $2,410 in 1973. The Israelis were now living in larger apartments, owned more cars, electronic appliances and telephones, and enjoyed better health. (Creveld, 2010, p. 151)

Arab lives were improved too. In the years after the Six-Day War, between 1967 and the 1980s, annual per capita income in the Gaza Strip increased from $80 to $1,700. In the West Bank, the GNP tripled in the same period. The number of cars in the territories increased tenfold. In 1967, only 18 percent of households in Gaza had electricity. By 1981, when Gazan communities were connected to the Israeli electric grid, that number rose to 89 percent. Israel also encouraged higher education in the land it now controlled, and seven universities were established in the West Bank and Gaza compared to none prior to the Six-Day War. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 352-353)

**11. What happened after the Yom Kippur War of 1973?**

Whereas the Six-Day war had the character of a pre-emptive strike, the Yom Kippur War caught Israel by surprise. Although eventually the country prevailed militarily, this did not come without significant consequences.

The war cost the economy $238 million per day, bringing the total price tag to approximately $4.2 billion, which compared with a GNP of $6 to $6.5 billion at that time. (Creveld, 2010, p. 151) These were the years of the so-called energy shock, which got under way in 1973-1974 and lasted throughout the rest of the decade. Between 1973 and 1982 the cost of imported oil rose from 1.5 percent to 10 percent of the GNP. No wonder that, by 1978, the trade deficit was running at three times the 1972 figure. Growth came to a halt and by 1981 per capita income had only risen to $2,550. (Creveld, 2010, p. 153)

Between 1977 and 1979 inflation, which had been running at 35 percent, rose first to 50 and then to 80 percent. By the end of 1984 inflation was running at almost 1,000 percent. Already before that, in late March 1983 the stock market started declining as people put their money into foreign currency or index-linked government bonds. In the autumn the stock market collapsed. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 155-160)

To make things worse, the diplomatic assault on Israel was far from over. During this period, European countries, intimidated by the Arab oil embargo, succumbed to Arab and Palestinian pressure, to make the assault more effective. In November 1974, Yasser Arafat gave his ‘Olive Branch and Gun’ speech at the United Nations and merely a year later, the General Assembly granted the PLO observer status at the United Nations. The UN assault on Israel continued and in November 1975 the General Assembly approved Resolution 3379, which stated that ‘Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination’. (Gordis, 2016, p. 323) Israel had turned into a true pariah state. (Creveld, 2010, p. 146)

The growing economic difficulties, as well as Israel’s international isolation, led to a profound cultural crisis deeper than anything the country had experienced until that time. (Creveld, 2010, p. 162) There were growing doubts that surrounded the Zionist enterprise itself. Might Zionism, instead of leading to the gradual disappearance of anti-Semitism be producing the opposite effect? Had the establishment of the state, with all the tremendous sacrifices that it involved, in fact been the worst error ever committed by the Jewish people? After all, Israel was now the only place on earth where Jews, just for being Jews, were in real danger of losing their lives. As a result, more and more Jews leaving their countries chose the United States, Canada, Australia, or similar countries over Israel as their new homeland. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 177-178)

Furthermore, the Yom Kippur War, for many, was a test that should never had taken place, had military planning, military doctrine, military organization, and, above all, military intelligence done their job; and the country and its leaders passed only with mediocre grades, if at all. Thus, the positive feelings that had prevailed over the IDF, the peak of the Zionist enterprise, before 1973 were shaded by doubt. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 168-169)

The Israelis also withdrew to their private sphere and were presented as petty bourgeois characters that are held prisoner by their petty ambitions, their fears, and their unfathomable narrow-mindedness. As people retreated into private life, the percentage of those taking an active part in politics by attending rallies and the like went down. Parties, instead of representing well-defined groups and classes, were coming to be seen as little but organized mafias where hacks - sometimes, hacks who could not make it anywhere else - competed among themselves for power, money, and glory. Among the clearest sign that values were shifting, and that social change was well under way could be found in the decline of those showpieces of the ‘First Israel’, the kibbutzim. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 170-174)

In short, Yom Kippur would never be the same in the Jewish state. A religious holiday of deep personal introspection had been transformed into - and remains to this very day - an annual remembrance of incompetence, grief, loss, and the shattering of Israeli illusions. (Gordis, 2016, p. 319)

**12. How important was American support for Israel?**

Amid the turmoil that followed the Yom Kippur War, Israel had to fight yet another war. The roots of this conflict are found at the end of the War of Attrition. At this time King Hussein of Jordan, worried that the various Palestinian terrorist organizations were getting out of control - they had hijacked four western airliners, flown them to the kingdom, and blown them up - launched a major offensive against them and, massacring thousands, broke their power. Having been expelled from Jordan, Palestinians went to Lebanon, hitherto the most peaceful of all Israel’s neighbours. (Creveld, 2010, p. 140)

By 1982, over fifteen thousand Palestinian guerrillas were operating in southern Lebanon, from Beirut down to the area increasingly called ‘Fatah-land’. On the 6th of June Israel launched Operation Peace for the Galilee expanding its military presence in southern Lebanon up to the year 2000 in what was called Israel’s Vietnam. Nevertheless, Arafat and the PLO were no match for Israel’s massive fire power. Eventually, after being forced out of Jordan in 1971, the PLO now had to leave Lebanon, too. The campaign was overshadowed by the massacre of the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps leaving Israel permanently embittered and plagued by guilt. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 341-345) The war further increased the economic burden on Israel. The gap between its foreign currency holdings and its obligations widened to over $15 billion. This was five time the 1973 figure and twenty times the 1965 one. (Creveld, 2010, p. 161)

It was very largely thanks to Uncle Sam that financial ruin was averted at five minutes before zero. (Creveld, 2010, p. 162) Already at the beginning of the 1970s U.S. government aid rose from practically nothing to $250 million a year - as well as long-time loans. (Creveld, 2010, p. 151) By 1984-1985 U.S. aid was raised to $3 billion annually and a further $1.5 billion arrived in the form of emergency assistance. In fact, aid was more extensive than these sums indicate. To them should be added two brand-new air bases built in the Negev; American orders for Israeli-made military hardware; joint military-technological R&D; and the construction on Israeli soil of depots in which U.S. military equipment was stored. (Creveld, 2010, p. 161)

In the diplomatic arena, after the Israelis with the 1977 elections rid the country of an elite that, in the eyes of many, had turned into little but a slogan-spouting, money grabbing mafia with no ideology and no sense of what it wanted except to hold on to as much power as it could for as long as it could, (Creveld, 2010, p. 181) the Americans mediated during the Israel-Egypt peace negotiations. Although president Carter’s role is sometimes described as ambiguous, if not pro-Arab, (Spencer, 2019, pp. 118-134) the Camp David Accords agreement, signed on March 26, 1979, left both sides fairly content with their achievements. (Wikipedia, 2021) (Creveld, 2010, p. 189) Once Egypt had left ‘the circle of hostility’ Israel was more secure than ever in its history; the more so because, in September 1980, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War ended any fear of an ‘eastern front’. (Creveld, 2010, p. 192)

**13. Did Israel rely only on American help?**

American support alone was not enough. The main factors that helped Israel rebuilt its economy was:

1) Education. By the end of the 1970s education accounted for 8.4 percent of the GNP; as of 2008 the figure was 8.5 percent, which is higher than any of the OECD countries. (Creveld, 2010, p. 234) Priority was given to natural sciences (Creveld, 2010, p. 237) that tend to boost the economy, provided that the corresponding funds are used effectively. To this end Israeli students seem to have an advantage compared to their foreign counterparts. Before they enrol, they serve two, three, or even four (if they get a commission) years in the military. There, some of them carry heavy responsibilities indeed. After their discharge they are wont to spend a year or so traveling abroad, seeing the world and sowing their wild oats. As a result, they are older, much less childish, than their counterparts. (Creveld, 2010, p. 236) In brief, Israeli universities, are an integral part of the economy, yet retaining a great deal of academic freedom and avoiding submission to the whims of the commercial world or, what can be even worse, those of their students. (Creveld, 2010, p. 235)

2) The Army. Israel’s security consumes a significant amount of the national resources. Even before Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 defence was consuming about 30 percent. This allowed for the development of a national defence industry allowing also for significant exports. The developed technologies, as is often the case, were then forwarded to civil life. Indeed, as of 2007, high tech industries, employing 7 percent of the workforce, accounted for 23 percent of foreign sales. Many of the people that started these companies first met during their military service. After their discharge from R&D agencies of the IDF, making use of the informal character of Israeli life and the country’s small size, they stay in touch. They latch on to some interesting idea and start a new company in their homes or even a garage. In 2007, Israel was said to have the highest number of start-up companies per capita in the world. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 227-231)

3) Innovation. As many visitors will soon note, Israelis are utterly lacking in social discipline. They gesticulate, they raise their voices, and they treat any queue as an invitation to jostle one another. They drive like madmen and will smoke a cigarette under a ‘’no smoking’’ sign. Certainly, this system comes with disadvantages. It might explain why Israeli firms are not that good in building and managing large-scale enterprises. This, in turn may explain why they have so seldom succeeded in producing consumer goods that crowd the selves of developed countries as Canon, Seiko, Sony, Toshiba, Samsung and others.

On the other hand, this lackadaisical, disrespectful, and often noisy approach to life is not without certain advantages, too. A certain kind of mental rebelliousness is almost definitely an indispensable prerequisite for creativity and inventiveness. All this may explain why Israelis, though they may not have developed and sold many famous consumer products, do provide many of the programs and devices that go into these products. In 2000, high-tech firms exported over 45 percent of their product. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 232-233)

4) Reform. Israel implemented a stabilization program, that, as foreign economists wrote, was among the most successful in the entire world. As very often in such cases, cuts in subsidies and transfer payments - from 22 percent of the GNP in 1979-1983 to 17 percent in 1980-1984 and 15.4 percent in 1985-1989 - made people extremely unhappy. Israeli society, which had been smothered by the state for so long as to become almost identical with it, finally started casting off its socialist shackles. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 214-215) One can sum up the process by saying that during the entire period from 1997 to 1992, Israel did much to push itself away from state-directed socialism toward a market economy, complete with a very active and often volatile stock exchange. (Creveld, 2010, p. 222) Yet the state was far from having sold all its assets and the role the government played in the economy remained considerable. Thus, the extend of the shift should not be exaggerated. (Creveld, 2010, p. 225)

Similarly, fourfold answers for Israel’s success given in the book of Ari Shavit include: the infrastructure of the defence industry, Israeli innovation and improvisation, Russian skill (immigration), and the integration of different fields of knowledge in small, daring groups (Shavit, 2013, p. 352) or reducing government spending dramatically (from 51 percent of GDP in 2022 to 42 percent in 2011), reducing the national dept significantly (from 100 percent of GDP in 2002 to 75 percent in 2011), maintaining a conservative and responsible financial system, and fostering the conditions required for Israeli high-tech to continue to flourish. (Shavit, 2013, pp. 354 - 355)

**14. How did the peace process evolve during this period?**

The Lebanese adventure, grown out of grandiose nationalist-religion dreams concerning the need for and the feasibility of Israel’s hold on ‘’the complete’’ Land along with its Arab residents, marked the end of any desire on Israel’s part to wage large-scale offensive war against its neighbours- that is unless it is left with no other choice. It also ended any illusion that the country would ever be able to impose peace on its neighbours through force of arms. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 209-210)

By the end 1987 Israel and its security forces faced new challenges. The first intifada broke out in December and the IDF, used to fight against enemies, who, on paper at any rate, were much stronger than itself, now faced an ‘’enemy’’ consisting of men, women, and children without proper organization, proper training, proper weapons, proper anything. As usual in such cases sympathies are with the weaker and the breaking, in some cases, of the rules of engagement meant to prevent civilians from being hit caused a gradual break down of the mutual trust among the troops and the society they served. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 239-244)

Eventually, in 1993, at a time when the PLO’s fighters in Israel’s northern border were started to be replaced by those of the Hezbollah, Yasser Arafat met Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and President Bill Clinton on the White House Lawn. (Creveld, 2010, p. 209) With the Oslo Accords, signed in August of that year, Israel and the PLO formally recognized each other. A Palestinian National Authority (PA) was set up, and it committed itself to changing the Palestinian National Charter, which had called for the destruction of Israel. Disputed territories were divided into three zones: Zone A were to come under the full control of the PA. In Zone B Israelis would look after security and the Palestinian Arabs civil affairs. Zone C areas, which included settlements established by Israelis, were to remain under full Israeli control, which however did not extend to the Arab civilians. These arrangements were to maintain in force for five years, during which an overall settlement would be negotiated. (Creveld, 2010, p. 249) Two years later, following an agreement known as Oslo II, Israel gave the Palestinian Arabs self-rule in the towns of Bethlehem, Hebron, Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah, and Tul Karem, as well as some 450 smaller settlements. (Creveld, 2010, p. 251)

In the past any Arab leader who was suspected of cooperating with the Jews promptly put his life at risk. The list of those assassinated is long: Jordan’s king Abdullah I (1951), Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat (1981), Lebanon’s President Bachir Gemayel (1982) … (Creveld, 2010, p. 36) Now it was time for an Israeli to pay the price for the peace negotiations. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was murdered in Tel Aviv on November 4th, 1995.

**15. Did the piece process work out though?**

The Israeli side heavily criticized Yasser Arafat for hir role in the failure of the 2000 Camp David Summit (Wikipedia, 2022) to reach a final agreement on the peace process. It is said that as long as negotiations dragged on, the international community would fete him as a reformed fighter now dedicated to peace. Were he to sign an agreement, however, the international community would expect him to govern and would hold him accountable for what unfolded in his newly founded state. With time, fewer and fewer people were inclined to believe that Arafat had any intention whatsoever to make the transition. (Gordis, 2016, p. 377)

Bill Clinton also expressed his disappointment by telling Arafat, when the latter tried to assuage the outgoing president by telling him what a great man he was, in January 2001: ‘’Mr. Chairman, I am not a great man; I am a failure; and you have made me so.’’ (Creveld, 2010, p. 262)

The blame for the failure rests not on one side though but on both. From their side, the Israelis never ceased settling the disputed territories (Creveld, 2010, p. 256) and lit the fuse for the second intifada, also known as the Al Aqsa Intifada after one of the mosques on the Temple Mount, visited by Ariel Sharon on the 28th of September 2000, although the latter claimed ‘’ this has nothing to do with me’’. Desperate attempts by Clinton and prime minister Ehud Barak to reach cease – fire and renew the Camp David talks led nowhere. (Creveld, 2010, p. 263)

**16. What is to (will) be done for the settlement of the Palestinian Israeli – Arab conflict?**

The attempt for peace negotiations, even though it did not succeed and perhaps even assuming that it could not have succeeded, was well worth making – for the simple reason that talking is always better than shooting. Certainly, it did nothing to harm Israel’s security. As long as it lasted it raised the country’s international standing, and its own self – image, to unprecedented heights. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 255-256) Thus, it is reasonable to assume that some form of peace negotiation will always be in place between Palestinian Israelis and Palestinian Arabs.

At the same time though, one should keep in mind that a secure homeland for the Jewish people is a principal goal of Zionism (see question2). Furthermore, David Ben-Gurion’s concern for the demographic issue and the recognition of the need to establish a (viable) Jewish state without a large Arab minority remains in place (see question 8). These, together with the fact that the majority of the Israeli’s, in spite of the bitter opposition on the part of hard-liners, has repeatedly shown itself prepared to give its approval for the secession of land for peace, (Creveld, 2010, p. 269) point out, at least to me, that a two – state solution is more favourable for Israel.

It is doubtful that this is also the case for the Arabs and especially the Israeli – Arabs. It is reported that each time the possibility of transferring land from Israeli to Arab rule is mentioned, they become almost hysterical. And with very good reason: Visiting the occupied territories, and travelling in the Arab world, they can see first-hand how poor, how backward, how contemptuous of the individual most of that world is. Becoming part of the West Bank would mean joining a society where per capita income is less than 10 percent of the Israeli figure. To make things much worse still, they would be entering a world where ‘’rights’’ do not exist. (Creveld, 2010, p. 312) Nevertheless, I believe that the decision for the outcome of the whole process lies mostly on Israel’s side with the Arabs having little, if any, means to affect it.

If a Palestinian Arab state is established, it is suggested that Israel should not pretend that this establishment has solved or will solve anything. On the contrary, it should recognize from the first moment that this is the state of an inveterate enemy and act accordingly. (Spencer, 2019, pp. 220-221) Roadblocks, walls and other tested means to supress jihadist activities will most probably remain in place and probably be reinforced at the border with the Arab state. Furthermore, a bright light would be shed on such activities challenging the shapers of international opinion. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 267-271) (Spencer, 2019, p. 221) It is unlikely that the Israeli political Left could help loosening Israel’s grip on the envisaged Palestinian Arab state, if the latter was to be proven hostile to the Jews, as its evisceration during the second intifada has proven. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 383-384) The Palestinian Arabs would still have a choice though, to loosen this grip by electing an authority that would work towards the built of mutual trust with Israel for the benefit of both states.

Were Israel to opt for the assumption of full political control over the Arab territories (one state solution), the security measures in place could only lower its international standing, enhancing the accusations for an apartheid state.

**17. Where do Israeli – Arab relations stand today?**

The establishment of the state of Israel was followed by a combined attack from its Arab neighbours aiming at its elimination. The state of Israel is not threatened by its Arab neighbours anymore. There are peace relations with Egypt and Jordan. The situation in Lebanon and especially Syria casts any threat of war from these countries as negligible. In the wider circle of Arab countries surrounding Israel, Iraq, after years of war and foreign interventions, is also not a threat anymore. The activities of terrorist groups in these countries are a nuisance indeed but no threat for the sovereignty of the Israeli state.

The danger lies further to the north-east in Iran and its nuclear program. Notably the threat is also perceived by other Arab countries that joined the so-called Israeli – Arab or Israeli - Sunni alliance. (Wikipedia, 2022) Given Israel’s own nuclear teeth, which are sharp and constantly growing in number, to attack it without acquiring nuclear weapons first would be madness; to attack it after acquiring such weapons, much greater madness still. (Creveld, 2010, p. 316) Nevertheless, in the past Israel had the ability to implement the Begin Doctrine of pre-emptive strike in a way that guaranteed its future. The destruction of the nuclear reactors in Iraq (Operation Opera) (Wikipedia, 2022) and Syria (Operation Outside the Box) (Wikipedia, 2022) speak for it. But it has been suggested, that as time passes, this capability is eroding. (Shavit, 2013, p. 381) The execution of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, chief of Iran’s nuclear program (Wikipedia, 2022) in 2020 speaks for the opposite though. Still Iran represents the biggest challenge in Arab – Israeli relations today.

**18. What about Israel and the rest of the world?**

In question 11 we saw how back in 1975 Israel was practically declared as a pariah state with UN resolution 3379. The problems of Israel with the UN continued also in recent years. Between 2003 and 2012, the UN issued 314 resolutions concerning Israel, nearly 40 percent of all resolutions in that time. At the end of 2013 of the 103 resolutions about individual countries from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), 43 of them (42 percent) had condemned Israel. Israel was the subject of more emergency sessions in the UNHRC than any other country. (Gordis, 2016, pp. 393-394) Thus, Israel needs to carefully tackle issues mainly related to the Palestinian Arabs (see question 16) to keep the country’s international standing high and avoid feeding initiatives like BDS. (Wikipedia, 2022)

In any case, today, Israel can by no means be considered a pariah state. As, after the end of the Cold War, the American colossus straddled, or seemed to straddle, the globe, Israel’s special relation to the U.S. helped it improve its international position out of all recognition. Many countries were eager to resume or improve relations with it, seeing that the road to Washington appeared to lead, to some extent, through Jerusalem. More recently, the alternative to the American hegemony seems to be a world divided among five large powers: the United States, the European Union, Russia, China, and India. Israel keeps (or should try to keep) a good relationship with all five. Maintaining normal relations with them, and assuming a minimum diplomatic skill, it ought to be able to maneuver among them even if, one day, it can no longer rely on the U.S. as its principal protector. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 315-316)

**19. What are the main internal challenges that Israel faces today?**

In the answer to question 13 we discussed the four pillars of Israel’s success. When the discussion goes to the perils the country faces, there are four problems: (i) The education system has deteriorated, and it endangers Israel’s ability to sustain technological excellence. (ii) The employment rate among ultra-Orthodox men is only 45 percent. (iii) Most Arab women do not work. (iv) Fewer than twenty business groups control much of the local market and thus restrict competition. (Shavit, 2013, p. 355)

As far as the problems (i) and (iv) are concerned, retaining and growing talent and diversification in the economy should not be taken lightly, but relay totally on political will. Influencing the beliefs and corresponding habits of the ultra-Orthodox Jews and non-Jewish minorities [problems (ii) and (iii)] is much more complex. Especially for the latter (see also question 16).

Regarding ultra-Orthodox Jews a way of political action is based on the, unpleasant, cut-off of government subsidies like child allowances in order to force many Orthodox men to look for work. Presumably, secular studies, to prepare them for work, and secular jobs will draw them closer to the mainstream and a different lifestyle; even if this does not happen, the fact that people have jobs will allow them less free time in which to follow the rabbis’ call, descend into the streets, and demonstrate against this or that alleged violation of religious law. (Creveld, 2010, p. 308) Should Israel fail to contain its ultra-Orthodox elements, then a situation similar to the ulema-state alliance that tortures the Muslim world cannot be excluded with unexpected consequences for Israel, the Middle East region and the rest of the world. (Kuru, 2019)

**20. What (how) is today’s Israel?**

Israel belongs to the West. Thus, the American influence on the country’s social, economic and political life is to be expected. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 287-291) The characteristics of the Mediterranean part of the western world are also present though, as we saw in question 13, in its people’s lackadaisical, disrespectful, and often noisy approach to life. Yet this is just one side of how things are. The other consists of a society that, in many ways, is as varied, friendly to foreigners, open minded, and above all, creative as any other on earth. (Creveld, 2010, p. 287) Indeed, starting as a desperately poor ‘’developing’’ country whose main product was oranges, and in spite of the most important obstacle of all, the absence of peace, Israel has been able to increase exports eleven thousand times in nominal terms. (Creveld, 2010, p. 274) Looking at other western countries around the Mediterranean basin, Israel is now richer than Portugal and Spain, not very far from the richer but much bigger France and Italy and significantly richer than Cyprus or Greece.

Rich or poor, over 90 percent of Israel’s inhabitants now live in the towns. Old or new, many of the towns consist mainly of blocks of flats, some of them prefabricated. While the northern half of Israel has some of the world’s highest population densities, the southern half is desert. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 280-281) Looking at two of its most important cities, whereas Tel Aviv is rich, Jerusalem, two-thirds of whose population is either Jewish Orthodox or Arab, is relatively poor. It is also a place filled with fanatics of every possible religion, creed, and belief. The place teems with tensions and fierce hatreds of every kind. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 277-278) In spite of history and tradition issues then, maybe it is worth considering whether modern Israel would really like to have Jerusalem as its capital after all.

As is so often the case, the change from its socialist roots to capitalism did not come without a cost. Israel’s welfare state, though comprehensive, had always been rather elementary. The distribution of property and income also became less egalitarian. (Creveld, 2010, p. 274) Indeed, compared to what Israelis had been used to, the new world they were now building was in many ways cold, competitive, and harsh. It was however, also one in which opportunities abounded as never before and which was prepared to bestow extraordinary rewards on the young, the talented, the hardworking, and the successful. (Creveld, 2010, p. 276) The trend towards more and more individualism continues. In part this is because Israel is no longer engaged in a daily fight for its existence. (Creveld, 2010, p. 283)

Thus, in Israel a woman who takes up a career faces a choice. Either she must remain childless (often single as well), or else she must have several others who will clean for her, (Creveld, 2010) wash for her, and look after her children for her. For many parents the solution comes from relatives, especially mothers and mothers-in-law, incidentally, another excellent example of the way the ‘’liberation’’ of women usually comes at the expense of other women. In any case, many parents have grown so anxious about their offspring that the latter barely learn how to move a finger for themselves. This fact is not without importance when it comes to Israel’s competitiveness and its ability to wage war and defend itself, when necessary. (Creveld, 2010, pp. 292-300)

Few if any of these problems though are unique to Israel. Other similarities with the western world and especially south and south-eastern Europe include worries about corruption, (Creveld, 2010, p. 301) aggressive media eager to publish only what they think will sell that usually does not include good news about good people performing good deeds, (Creveld, 2010, pp. 302-303) and other problems that are usually summarized to a comparison with Scandinavia with its near perfect external peace, very high environmental standards, economic justice, far-reaching social equality, and stolid, all but corruption-free political establishment that provides citizens with a very good administration indeed. (Creveld, 2010, p. 313)

But then this is only one side of the coin. In the eyes of many people, much of Scandinavia stands for a pompous bureaucracy that thinks it always knows everything better than anyone else. Supposedly it is characterized by extremely tight social control over the individual, from erection to resurrection, as the saying goes. To this is added occasional inexpressible boredom - everything is so *normal* - coldhearted interpersonal relationships, and a higher-than-average suicide rate. Compare this with hot, messy, noisy, sweaty, heterogeneous, undisciplined, warmhearted Israel (and here I add my home country Greece and south and south-eastern Europe); the kind of place where almost anybody will lend you his or her cell phone in an emergency and where, sneezing near an open window, one may hear some invisible passerby call out ‘’Bless you’’. Assuming the stereotype is more or less correct, should we really want to be like Scandinavia? (Creveld, 2010, p. 313)

# References

Creveld, M. V. (2010). *The Land of Blood and Honey, The rise of modern Israel.* New York: Thomas Dunne Books, An imprint of St. Martin's Press.

Gordis, D. (2016). *Israel, A consice history of a nation reborn.* New York: Harper-Collins Publishers.

Kuru, A. T. (2019). *Islam, Authoritarianism and Underdevelopment, A global and historical comparison.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacCulloch, D. (2009). *A history of Christianity.* London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Ross, D., & Makovsky, D. (2019). *Be Strong and of Good Courage, How Israel's most important leaders shaped its destiny.* Audible Audiobook.

Shavit, A. (2013). *My promised land, The triumph and tragedy of Israel.* New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Spencer, R. (2019). *The Palestinian Delusion: The catastrophic history of the Middle East peace process.* Nashville: Bombardier Books (An Imprint of Post Hill Press).

*Wikipedia*. (2021). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp\_David\_Accords

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yishuv

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption\_in\_Israel

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_Israeli\_public\_officials\_convicted\_of\_crimes\_or\_misdemeanors

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suez\_Crisis

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-Day\_War

*Wikipedia.* (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000\_Camp\_David\_Summit

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab%E2%80%93Israeli\_alliance

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\_Opera

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\_Outside\_the\_Box

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohsen\_Fakhrizadeh

*Wikipedia*. (2022). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boycott,\_Divestment\_and\_Sanctions

*World population review*. (2022). Retrieved from https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-atheist-countries