



PERSPECTIVES

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Security Is Not Enough

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The State of Israel is at a fateful crossroads. The unending necessity to safeguard the state's secure existence ensures that its leaders will face complex and painful decisions. But there are other, no less critical considerations that must be factored into the decision-making equation – notably powerful national, historical, cultural, and religious sentiments and aspirations.

David Ben-Gurion was the only Israeli PM to make a point of stressing that the State of Israel has a higher purpose than providing a safe haven to persecuted Jews. During the first decade of statehood, he repeatedly emphasized:

“Security is but a condition for our existence and our independence. The state of Israel has a special mission. Every state must ensure the wellbeing, welfare, and progress of its residents. Our state, too, is obligated to do so, but it is not the cardinal concern. The supreme task of the state of Israel is the redemption of the People of Israel through the ingathering of the exiles.”

On the national level, the problem of security reflects the inextricable link between the spiritual and the physical aspects of the country's existence. Yet the political-security conversation guiding Israel for years has been reduced to an excessive, if not exclusive, focus on physical security – a point well understood by Israel's Palestinian “peace partners.” Prominent PLO leader Abbas Zaki explained the organization's feigned endorsement of the two-state solution this way: “If we divest the Jews of Hebron and Jerusalem, from which they draw their inspiration for their national existence, what will remain for them? What bond do they have to Jaffa and to Haifa? They will then collapse of themselves.”

Ben-Gurion, recognizing the spiritual calling of the People of Israel in its ancestral homeland, asserted during the early critical phase of the War of Independence that the struggle over Jerusalem was the key endeavor:

If a land has a soul, then Jerusalem is the soul of the Land of Israel and the battle over Jerusalem is decisive and not only from a military standpoint.... That pledge beside the waters of Babylon ("If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill") is just as binding today as it was in those days; otherwise we will not be worthy of the name "The People of Israel."

There is little doubt that Israel is now at a fateful crossroads. The ongoing challenge of physically protecting the lives of its citizens ensures that its leaders will face complex and painful decisions. But there are other, no less critical considerations that must be factored into the decision-making equation – notably powerful national, historical, cultural, and religious sentiments and aspirations.

The State of Israel and the Zionist enterprise need an up-to-date Jewish-Israeli narrative that gives meaning to the century-long struggle in the ancestral homeland. Placing the sole emphasis on the physical aspects of the "security problem," as some parties do in their eagerness to avoid the hard existential questions awaiting Israel, obscures this story. This is a time for clarity of purpose, not evasive pragmatism.

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