

# 90 Years from Now

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On the occasion of my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, a panel discussion of eminent historians took place in Tel Aviv's Tsavta hall on the question: "Will Israel Exist in Another 90 Years?" There follows a slightly shortened version of my own remarks. A full video of the discussion with English translation will be published as soon as possible.

**W**ILL ISRAEL EXIST in another 90 years? The very question is typical of Israel. No one would take it seriously in England or Germany, or even in other states born from immigration, like Australia or the USA.

Yet here, people speak of "existential dangers" all the time. A Palestinian state is an existential danger. The Iranian bomb is an existential danger. Why? They will have their bomb, we have our bomb, there will be a "balance of terror". So what?

There is something in our national character that fosters self-doubt, uncertainty. The Holocaust? Perhaps an unconscious sense of guilt? A result of eternal war, or even the reason for it?

LET ME state right from the beginning: Yes, I believe Israel will exist in 90 years. The question is: what kind of Israel? Will it be a country your great-great-grandsons and daughters will be proud of? A state they will want to live in?

On the day the state was founded, I was 24 years old. My comrades and I, soldiers in our new army, didn't think the event was very important. We were preparing ourselves for the battle that was to take place that night, and the speeches of politicians in Tel-Aviv did not really interest us. We knew that if we won the war there would be a state, and if not, there would be neither a state nor us.

I am not a nostalgic person. I have no nostalgia for Israel before (the war of) 1967, as some of my colleagues here have expressed. A lot was wrong then, too. Huge amounts of Arab property were expropriated. But let's not look back. Let's look at Israel as it is now, and ask ourselves: where do we go from here?

IF ISRAEL continues on its present course, there will be disaster.

The first stage will be apartheid. It already exists in the occupied territories, and it will spread to Israel proper. The

descent into the abyss will not be dramatic or precipitous. It will be gradual, almost imperceptible.

Slowly pressure on Israel will grow. Demographics will do their work. Sometime before the 90 years are up, Israel will be compelled to grant civil rights to the Palestinians. There will be an Arab majority. Israel will be an Arab-majority state.

Some people may welcome that. But it will be the end of the Zionist dream. Zionism will become a historic episode. This state will be just another country where Jews live as a minority—those who remain here.

There are those who say: "There just is no solution." If so, we should all obtain foreign passports.

Some dream of the so-called "one-state solution". Well, during the last half-century, many states in which diverse nations lived together have broken apart. A partial list: the Soviet Union, Cyprus, Yugoslavia, then Serbia, Czechoslovakia, Sudan. There has not been a single instance of two nations freely uniting in one state. Not one.

I AM not afraid of any military threat. There is no real danger. In our time, no country possessing nuclear arms can be destroyed by force. We are quite able to defend ourselves.

Rather, I am afraid of internal dangers: the implosion of our intellectual standards, the proliferation of a parasitical orthodox establishment, and especially emigration. All over the world, people are becoming more and more mobile. Families disperse. Zionism is a two-way street. If you can be a good Jew in Los Angeles as well as in Tel Aviv, why stay here?

The connection between Israel and the world's Jews will become weaker. That is natural. We are a new nation, rooted in this country. That is the real aim. Our relations with the Diaspora will be like, say, between Australia and England.

I WANT to raise a basic question: will nationalism itself survive? Will it be supplanted by new collective modes of organization and ideologies?

I think nationalism will continue to exist. In the last century, no power has succeeded in overcoming it. The internationalist Soviet Union has collapsed and left nothing behind but a rampant, racist nationalism. Communism succeeded only when it took a ride on nationalism, like

in Vietnam and China. Religion succeeded when it took a hike on nationalism, like in Iran.

Wherein lies the power of nationalism? It seems that the human being needs a sense of belonging, belonging to a certain culture, tradition, historic memories (real or invented), homeland, language.

I SHALL pose the question in a different way: will the nation-state survive?

In factual terms, the nation-state is an anachronism. It came into being during the last three centuries because the economic need for a large local market, the military need for an adequate army and so forth required a state the size of, say, France. But now almost all these functions have been taken over by regional blocs like the EU.

This is the reason for a curious phenomenon: while nation-states join larger unions, they themselves break up into smaller units. Scots, Corsicans, the Flemish, Catalonians, Basques, Chechnians, French Canadians and many many more are seeking independence.

Why? A Scotsman thinks that an independent Scotland can join the EU and reap all the benefits, without having to suffer English snobbery. Local nationalism trumps larger nationalism.

SO WHERE shall we be in 90 years, at the beginning of the 22<sup>th</sup> century?

In the year of my birth, 1923, an Austrian nobleman named Count Nikolaus Coudenhove-Kalergi called for

a pan-European movement in order to create the United States of Europe. At the time, a few years after World War I and a few years before World War II, it sounded like a crazy utopia. Now we have the European Union.

At this moment, the United States of the World sounds like a crazy utopia, too. But there is no escape from some kind of world governance. The global economy needs it to function. Global communications make it possible. Global spying is already with us. Only an effective global authority can save our suffering planet, put an end to wars and civil wars, world-wide epidemics and hunger.

Can world governance be democratic? I certainly hope so. World communications make it possible. Your descendents will vote for a world parliament.

Will the nation-state continue to exist in this brave new world? Yes, it will. Much as nation-states do exist in today's Europe: each with its flag, its anthem, its soccer team, its local administration.

THIS, THEN, is my optimistic vision: Israel, the nation-state of the Israeli people, closely aligned with the nation-state of the Palestinian people, will be a member of a regional Union that will include the Arab states and hopefully Turkey and Iran, as a proud member of the United States of the World.

A democratic, liberal and secular state where your descendents will be proud to proclaim: "*I am an Israeli!*"