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A Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East  
and its Ambience

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Introduction

This paper is being written in July 1993. It sets out what I believe to be Israel's policy on a NWFZ in the Middle East, with which I identify. It is a personal statement and is not written on anyone else's authority. It is the statement of an Israeli and reflects an Israeli point of view. Any statement reflects a point of view.

Even as the peace talks are toiling ahead laboriously - it cannot be otherwise - they have yielded so far more progress than tens of years of resolutions in international organizations, intended to discomfit Israel.

For Israel, as I see it, it is a matter of singular importance to ascertain, what its partners to the talks have at the back of their minds. If it is peace and a genuine acceptance of Israel in the Middle East, matters of detail should be tractable; if, however, claims on Israel are designed to detract from its ability to withstand a future confrontation, the augury for the talks is less propitious. We do not know, I think, what is at the back of the minds of Israel's partners to the talks; we do know the answer, for the time being, with respect to the countries which refuse even to be party to these talks.

For the purpose of this discussion, I single out two elements of which the Israelis hold views which differ from those of the Arab and some other states participating in the peace talks, the one of a general nature, the other of pertinence to the nuclear issue.

On a general level, Israel places all its expectations on the peace talks, for the simple reason that they try to address all problems in context, that all parties talk to each other and that agreement is sought between them. Israel is especially wary of initiatives and interferences by international organizations. These lift preferred issues out of context and pass resolutions by majority votes, a situation which does no justice to the issues raised, and puts Israel at an almost automatic disadvantage. In fact, using majority votes on specific issues in the U.N. or its specialized agencies, in disregard of the agenda of the peace talks, seems to the Israelis injurious to these talks, and casts doubt on the good faith of the participating states.

On the nuclear issue, the Arab states wish this issue to be pushed to the top of the agenda of the multilateral talks on Regional Security and Arms Control; i.e. for Israel to place its nuclear installations under full-scope safeguards. Israel for its part believes that confidence-building measures of a general nature ought to be at the top of the agenda, and that the nuclear issue should eventually be taken up within the negotiations for a NWFZ. Time will be ripe for such negotiations towards the successful consummation of the peace talks, and a NWFZ will be concluded once peace in the Middle East is assured. The Arab states try to enlist the UN and the International Atomic Energy Agency (I.A.E.A.) to pass resolutions designed to put international pressure on Israel. As I said before, Israel views with misgivings the engagement of international organizations on select matters pertaining to its security, which cannot but increase its wariness with respect to the intentions of the states participating in the peace talks, Arab states and others.

The first part of this paper is dedicated to the issue of a NWFZ proper and its general political and security ambience. In the second part, I shall dwell at some length on perceptions, self-image and hopes. They are more important in assessing a country's character and conduct, than the endorsement of, say, the Charter of the UN or the formal adherence to the NPT. It is their drawback, as compared with the endorsement of formal instruments, that they are more elusive of comprehension and discernment. Nonetheless, I claim, they are ever so much more important.

#### Israel and Nuclear Non-Proliferation.

In the late sixties it became known that Israel was engaged in nuclear activities which it refused to submit to international inspection. The most Israeli governments would say was the delphic statement that Israel would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Israeli governments did not elaborate on this statement and have not done so to this day. As I understand it, the purpose of such statement is to give a sense of reassurance to Israelis in times of gloom, to serve as possible caution to states which contemplate harming Israel by dint of their preponderance in men and materiel, and to relieve states which do not wish to take up definite positions in this matter, from doing so. I am aware, of course, of all speculations on the state of Israeli nuclear developments, but abide by the authoritative statements of Israeli governments. I claim, in fact, that any more detailed knowledge is intrinsically irrelevant to what follows.

It was clear to the Israelis, that nuclear proliferation was in itself a bad thing and that they need pursue a positive policy in order to remove the danger of a nuclear arms race from the Middle East. They refused to go along with repeated international

injunctions to sign the NPT or submit to full-scope IAEA inspection. The Arab states urged resolutions in this sense in every conceivable international forum, and these fora went willingly along with these urgings, singling out Israel and disregarding any other country, similarly presumed to have nuclear capabilities. It was the Israeli understanding that the Arab states wished Israel to be well-controlled in the nuclear realm, and maintain the option of waging wars against it, at a time of their choosing, with nothing to worry about. Israelis saw further justification for their apprehensions, as time went along, when their concerns with the Iraqi nuclear enterprise were brushed aside by the supplier states on the grounds that Iraq was a signatory to NPT, and when Israel was roundly condemned and punished after it had put the Iraqi reactor out of action in 1981. Had it not been for the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent acknowledgement of Iraq's military potential, Israel might still be left to contemplate its situation, alone.

However, in their quest for a positive policy, the Israelis were inspired by certain facets of the Tlatelolco Treaty, by which a NWFZ was established in Latin America. Especially, they realized that the Treaty of Tlatelolco had its beginnings in the initiative of the states of the region, had been negotiated by them directly and freely, and included the possibility of mutual inspection. They read particular virtue not only into the Treaty's goals but, no less, into the modalities, as well. Their reasoning was simple. The Arab states had made much of Israel's "nuclear threat and capabilities" and had easily ensured massive majorities at the UN and the IAEA, on resolutions censuring Israel, requesting it to put its installations under international safeguards, and enjoining all states to cease cooperating with Israel. The Israelis had not threatened a single state, and all references to Israel's nuclear activities were made by others, and not by Israelis.

The Israelis, therefore proposed as their positive policy, the establishment of a NWFZ, freely negotiated between the parties and including, for firm reassurance, the mutual verification of the agreed safeguards by the parties themselves. The Israelis surmised that if the Arab states really consider Israel's nuclear stance a threat, they would wish to test the earnest of Israel's invitation. Instead, the Arab states said, Israel's proposal was a "gimmick", because Israel could not expect all Arab states to sit down with it and negotiate. Thereupon, the Israelis said, they were ready to start discussing the establishment of a NWFZ with any Arab country, willing to come forward. Not a single Arab state has responded to this invitation, since it was formally proposed some 12 years ago, and repeated each year. Instead, the Arabs insisted, a NWFZ in the Middle East should come about by the accession of all states of the region to the NPT or the acceptance of full-scope safeguards, and corresponding resolutions are passed by the UN, year by year. Even negotiation between the parties is expressly omitted from these resolutions. Israel joins the consensus, because it identifies with

the goal, but it registers its reservations on the modalities, which the Israelis understand to be the acid test of what the Arab states really want. As I said earlier on, the Arab refusal to negotiate a NWFZ with Israel and the continued insistence that Israel be internationally controlled in the nuclear realm, convey to Israel two messages. Despite protests to the contrary, Israel is not really perceived as a threat, and the Arab states wish to retain the option of waging wars against Israel, with no cause for restraint.

Under these circumstances, it seems clear to me that the Israelis cannot entertain any measure of confidence that the Arab support for a NWFZ amounts to more than the removal of a presumed Israeli nuclear capability. In the light of these experiences, the Israelis were convinced, that the establishment of a NWFZ could not be separated from concurrent attempts to deal with military postures and capabilities of all kinds, and of the underlying political and emotional causes which fueled them. In fact, so little confidence do the Israelis entertain, for the time being, that the conclusion of a NWFZ, based on free negotiation and mutual reassurance, can only be credible, once war against Israel has been renounced as a way of settling differences with it. Rather than promoting my own views, let me quote from the "Study on effective and verifiable measures which would facilitate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East" submitted by the Secretary General of the UN to the General Assembly in 1990. It is a remarkably unbiased document.

This is what it says on the precariousness of Israel's situation.

(Para 97)

Nevertheless, there are indications that Israel's relative conventional strength may be diminishing. In this connection, one factor that should be pointed out is the acquisition by potential opponents of ballistic missiles with a relatively long range and high accuracy. This gives those States a means of striking at a longer distance and enables them to participate in a conflict, even if their territory does not directly abut on the opponent's. As its population is small and becoming smaller in proportion to those of the other nations in the area, Israel has also become more vulnerable to a situation of prolonged warfare leading to a high number of casualties among its civilians or its military.

(Para 98)

Against this background, it is appropriate to point out that Israel's security position is characterized by three features which cannot but play a part in determining its attitude towards the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone; the relatively small size of its territory; the sustained hostility between itself and the great majority of States of the region; and the fact that it has no military allies in

the region and that the one State that might support it in a conflict is geographically remote.

On the need to deal with all security issues, comprehensively, and not with the nuclear aspect alone, the study says:

(Para 105)

....However, it is most unlikely that Israel will give up the security it believes it now derives from its nuclear ambiguity, its presumed deterrent and its eventual weapon of last resort, without a much higher degree of assurance that such a conflict will not occur, as well as compensation in terms of arrangements to enhance regional security in all of its multiple and complex dimensions, conventional as well as chemical and nuclear, political as well as military.

(Para 151)

The close relationship - the "linkage" - among all the elements that affect security is well known: Nuclear capabilities are linked to chemical weapons, chemical weapons to conventional arms, conventional arms to political conflict. And all these threads are woven into a seamless fabric of fear and insecurity. If the area is to become and remain truly nuclear-free, then this fabric must be cut into pieces and dealt with piece by piece. The problem is much too complex and unyielding for any comprehensive settlement to solve all at once. Yet all the separate elements must be worked on concurrently, for it will not be possible to settle any one piece of the problem unless it is clear that progress is being made on the other pieces as well. A radical transformation, step-by-step, must be effected in the military and political relationships of the entire area. The peoples of the Middle East must develop confidence that the political conflicts which surely will long remain are going to be settled - and settled equitably - without resort to force or the threat of force.

In the light of the foregoing, it seems to me that the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East cannot but follow a peace settlement, proven over time. The next section spells out what I believe to be the natural sequence of events.

### The Peace - Talks

It is an outstanding achievement of the US to have convened the parties to the Middle-East conflict and to have engaged them in face to face bilateral and multilateral negotiations, and to seek progress wherever it can be made in the hope that progress in one area may lead to progress in others.

There is a natural sequence of events which I visualize as desirable from an Israeli point of view.

First, I should like Israel to be accepted as normal by the Arab states, after prolonged and futile attempts to dispose of it.

- Normalcy means
- a public recognition and acceptance of any state of the region as an integral part of the region. Israel has throughout affirmed its recognition of the Arab states.
  - a public declaration on the part of all states of the region that they will not resort to force in the settlement of their differences. Israel, for its part, is ready to reaffirm its repeated pledges to this effect.
  - a public renunciation on the part of all states of the region of attempts to enforce a boycott of any of them or to delegitimize the international standing of any of them. Israel, for its part, has never employed such measures and undertakes never to resort to them in the future.
  - Accredited representations by all states in Israel and vice-versa.

No price should be exacted from Israel for its acceptance as a normal state.

Second, in parallel with negotiations for a political settlement, confidence and security building measures should be put in place and tested over time. Confidence is built on time, and there are no short cuts.

Let me quote the Secretary General of the UN, once again, on the primacy of creating confidence:

(Para 110)

..... Confidence must be built on all sides: confidence that declaration of desire for a just and lasting peace are not merely a smoke screen, confidence that military solutions to political problems are excluded, confidence that military postures that are perceived as threatening can be avoided or adjusted. Renunciation of hostile acts and of threatening, inflammatory declarations would do much to increase confidence as well. Most important of all, there must be progress in solving the fundamental conflicts in the region. Without such progress, technical measures in the nuclear area or on other security problems will hardly be given serious thought, much less will they be developed to provide a meaningful barrier to

tension and even war.

Third, regional co-operation should be engaged on hazards (environment, diseases) and critical shortages (water) which threaten all the states of the region. Such co-operation need not be based on good will, but becomes more urgent for all parties, as time progresses.

Fourth, attempts need be made to induce also rejectionist states (such as Iraq and Libya) to join the peace process. I cannot conceive of practical arms control measures, unless all confrontation states are committed to a peace process, involving not only Israel and the Arab states, but also the Arab states among themselves.

As long as Iran is staunchly vowed to Israel's destruction, Iran cannot eventually be ignored in arms control and security measures in the Middle East. The Gulf states might feel the same way, although for different reasons.

Fifth, once everyone joins the peace process, practical discussions on arms control can yield results.

As an Israeli, I would insist that arms control bear in the first instance on conventional arms and that Israel attach its signature to a NWFZ only once peace is assured.

Even as the peace process is underway and all issues are on the agenda of the bilateral and multilateral talks, I am perturbed, as I said in the beginning, by the Arab insistence to have the nuclear issue lifted out of context and arrogated by the UN and IAEA, where they dispose of majorities, and where majority resolutions take the place of negotiations, envisaged in the multilateral talks. It reinforces my opinion, that Israel should not allow this item to be either arrogated by international organisations or be pushed to the top of confidence building measures. There is no confidence for Israel in such strategems.

Sixth, hopefully peace agreements will be concluded.

Especially, it will become apparent during the transitory period, if the Palestinians wish to make the autonomy a success. If they do, it is my conviction that all options are eventually open for an enduring settlement. If they chose otherwise, peace may elude both them and the Israelis.

Peace would be followed by

Seventh, a NWFZ comprising the States of the Middle East, North Africa and Iran, much in line with the suggestions for the extent of the region contained in the study of the Secretary General of the UN.

There should be no problem with Israel's accession to the NPT after that.

As I contemplate what I believe to be the natural sequence of topics to be taken up in the peace talks, I know it is and will be otherwise. There may be a variety of reasons. The most unpalatable reason would be that the Arab states still do not wish to accept Israel as an integral part of the region, and that it is not peace they really seek. As an Israeli, I feel I need be wary before I can entertain confidence.

Also, I can conceive of auspicious developments, such as occurred in Europe. All the negotiations conducted by the US and the late USSR over decades did not remove the spectre of a global war. They turned out to have been useful, however, when Mr. Gorbachev came to power and radically changed the priorities of his country. It seemed then that all the weapons that had accumulated had lost their purpose, and all the preparatory work of the past stood the negotiators in good stead. But Mr. Gorbachev could not have been planned or foreseen. He could only be acknowledged in retrospect. It is of course possible, that a similar discontinuity in ingrained paradigms occur also in our area. But those cannot be foreseen and planned. They can be hoped for. If such radical changes occur, they will put an entirely different aspect on the hitherto weary progress of the peace-talks.

There is one more issue I wish to address, in this context.

As we approach the 1995 NPT Review Conference, it is assumed that pressure will mount, once again, for Israel to join the NPT, especially since the Arab states will make their support for an indefinite extension of the NPT dependent on Israel's accession.

Under present circumstances, I cannot conceive that Israel can yield to pressure. It continues to be sole guarantor of its security. If the Arab states will hold the extension of the treaty or Israel to ransom, they should not in my view, be permitted to do so. All they need to do is to make peace with Israel. It is by way of peace, that a NWFZ will come about, followed, as I believe by Israel's accession to the NPT.

States are not uniform in their intentions or performance, nor can situations be dealt with uniformly. I feel this should be recognized and acknowledged also with respect to Israel. As long as intentions and performances follow different criteria, different criteria ought to apply to the states which hold, and act upon, them.



At the beginning of this paper, I invited the reader's indulgence, if I were to dwell on perceptions, self-image and hopes, as essential components in assessing a country's attitudes. I judge these to be vital and wish to take up this theme, in what follows.

### Perceptions, Self-image and Hopes, in general

All three ingredients - perceptions, self-image and hopes - have an enduring and a transitory aspect. The transitory aspects are the ones conveyed by a perusal of the daily newspaper which tend to obscure the more enduring aspects which are, in the final count, the ones which matter.

Let me illustrate some of these points by three examples.

In the beginning of World War II, Britain was inundated by adverse news. The British were perceived to be vacillating and did not know their own mind clearly, until Churchill made them realize they really wanted to stand up to Hitler rather than negotiate with him.

During Cold War times, the Americans were often perceived to be compromising the values they ostensibly held dear, in their effort to curb the expansion of the Soviet empire. In this effort, they also supported corrupt and dictatorial regimes in order to deny the Soviets a foothold in them and paid a heavy price in lives and in the distortion of their national priorities. It was often difficult to discern that their sense of identity and pride really resided in what they called "the American way of life", the boons of which they wanted the rest of the world to applaud and adopt. An outsider may not feel totally enamoured of the American way of life, but would certainly embrace its essential elements, of a government accountable to its people, of realizing one's innate potential, and of the pursuit of one's international interests tempered by a sense of propriety and fairness. All these are the enduring aspects of the image the Americans have of themselves and as the embodiment of which they wish to be perceived.

With the end of the Cold War, it became immediately apparent that these were the values by which the Americans set the most store. It seems to me that such affinity as exists between Israel and the U.S. does not rest on convenience, but on what is called "shared values", those innermost convictions which seem at times the victim of adverse circumstances, but reassert themselves whenever they are given the chance.

Nearer home, Mr. Begin who was commonly perceived to be an assertive Prime Minister, withdrew from Sinai, and evacuated the city of Amit

which had been built there, in return for a peace agreement with Egypt. This act of faith was contrary to all appearances and had massive popular approval. To my mind, this was testimony to an overriding and enduring desire for peace, when the opportunity presented itself.

The Israeli Self-image, Hopes, and Perception of their Situation.

In the spirit of the foregoing, let me set out the image most Israelis have of themselves and how they perceive their circumstances.

Let me say straight away that my presentation may be decried as sanctimonious, and that I should know better. Palestinians, to whom the Israeli occupation is odious, surely will feel this way and I shall not take issue with them. Yet, all I say in the sequel I hold to be basically true, and I am charitable with the Israelis because they truly find themselves in an unenviable situation, politically and militarily.

The Israelis share the goals, common to all democracies, of promoting their well-being by virtue of their internal exertions. They have no national ambitions, detrimental to other countries, or designs on them. They wish to live in peace and seek their sense of distinction in successfully integrating a heterogenous population, in doing good and pioneering work in education, science, industry and agriculture, and in being internationally recognized for the spirit and the quality of such assistance as they can render to countries engaged on their own indigenous development. And they wish to be able to travel freely in the area and visit those landscapes and places with which the history of their people is bound up. This is simply a modern version of the Zionist message, and the only one which makes sense. If I am right - and I believe I am - and the Israelis were allowed to live in peace with their neighbours, all I have said above would turn out to be the sum total of their goals. Indeed, even under adverse circumstances, these goals exercise and sustain them.

Circumstances, however, were not benign. From its inception in 1948, the State of Israel was denied its very existence, unconditionally, by all the Arab states in the Middle East and the North-African littoral until its Atlantic coast. All wars fought - in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 - were about the existence of Israel and not about any specific issue of contention.

(With respect to 1956, this statement may be strongly contested. Israel joined the Suez campaign only, in order to stop the Egyptians from constantly dispatching Palestinian irregulars from Gaza into Israel with the object throwing life in the country into disarray. Indeed, buses to the south had to be protected by armed

guards and the situation was bad. Israel had no other purpose).

The Lebanese campaign - beyond the establishment of a security zone against rocket attacks - was the only questionable campaign initiated by Israel. It was meant to make Israel's Northern border secure and enable a Lebanese government to assume control of Lebanese affairs, and in particular of the militias committed to war against Israel. It did not achieve its objective and the Israeli army withdrew under popular pressure. In no war did the Israelis ever engage with territorial ambitions in mind. In particular, when in 1967 President Nasser closed the Tiran straits, asked the UN troops to leave the Sinai peninsula and put in his own divisions and promised "streams of blood in Tel-Aviv", and when the U.S., Britain and France would not live up to the guarantees they had given for the status-quo in the Middle East, the Israelis were very uncertain about their fate in what became known as the "Six-Day War" of 1967. They grimly determined to withstand the expected onslaught. They had no other ambition in mind. As it turned out, they found themselves in control of the "occupied territories". They were immediately ready to return most of them in exchange for peace, but were rebuffed by the three "nos" of the Khartoum summit of Arab leaders: No recognition, No negotiation, No peace.

Thus they have been in occupation of these territories and their restive population, since 1967, and cannot let go as long as these territories could serve as deployment areas for hostile forces, as they have in the past.

There was one signal and significant exception.

When President Sa'adat came to Jerusalem in 1977 and said clearly: "No more war" and offered peace in return for the Sinai peninsula, his offer was taken up - as I have mentioned before - with alacrity.

Indeed, I wonder, and so do many, what price for peace would be exacted from the Israelis nowadays, had it not been for the inadvertent occupation of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza in the Six-Day War.

Let me remind the reader, that it is not history I am writing but the perception the Israelis have of it.

In the mid-sixties, the Palestinian identity began to assert itself, vigorously. Until 1967, the Palestinians had been ruled by Jordan and Egypt and the establishment of a Palestinian state was not on the agenda. The establishment of a Palestinian state - in the whole of Palestine, as stipulated in the Charter of the P.L.O. - became the pivotal issue in the Middle East, after the Israelis found themselves in control of the "occupied territories". The Israelis were in a deep dilemma. It was utterly anathema to them to rule an alien population, yet they could not just withdraw and contemplate one more hostile

Arab state next to them. They appreciated how much the Palestinians wished to be rid of Israeli control, but could not lay themselves bare, faced, as they were, with the unrelenting enmity of all the Arab states and no prospect in sight of genuine peace, on any condition. The Israelis made efforts to placate their uneasiness, by promoting the development of a civilian infrastructure in the territories, the foundation of six universities and the introduction of intensive agriculture, in the hope that these developments would make for eventual co-operation, once peace in the area would enable the Israelis to relinquish control. Yet, it was fallacious to assume that these initiatives could make for tolerance and patience on the part of the Palestinians, juxtaposed as they were with Israeli suppression of attempts by the Palestinians to rid themselves of Israeli governance.

Until the late sixties, the Israelis saw themselves - as they were, and are - a minute island in a hostile sea of Arab states, They had a problem with the world, but not with their self-image. Yet, once they ruled an alien population and saw no way of relinquishing their control, under prevailing circumstances, they were and are beset with a dilemma which they alone are unable to resolve.

Until the late sixties, also, the Arab states had pursued their designs on Israel unconditionally, just for its being there, and brought to bear the clout of their numbers, their market potential, and the oil-wealth of some, in order to enforce an economic boycott of Israel, the severance of diplomatic ties with Israel by many states with no conceivable interest in Middle Eastern affairs, massive and automatic resolutions against Israel at the UN and the specialized agencies, and altogether not sparing any attempt to ostracize Israel from the international community. However, until the late sixties, all these attempts lacked any moral underpinnings.

After the Six-Day War, and with Israel in control of the occupied territories, the moral underpinnings presented themselves, and a large part of the international community was relieved to think that there was now justification for the pursuit of Israel by the Arabs which until then they had condoned with some misgivings. The picture of Israel sitting pretty in its area, suppressing a Palestinian minority, because they wanted to rule another few ten-thousands of square kilometers, was attractive to much of the international community. The willing support given to countless UN General Assembly resolutions against Israel serves as stark evidence for this statement. The fate of the Palestinians and the rights denied to them, became the central issue of the Middle East and of peace in the world, judging by the perpetual attention given to it by the Security Council. Arab designs on the existence of Israel were completely ignored, and Israel was left to contemplate its situation, alone.

The frustrations engendered in Israel for being denied any peace, or acknowledgement of its precarious situation, produced also

distortions in the thinking of many Israelis. It is the nature of frustrations to seek ideological outlets. Movements sprang up which advocated the retention of the occupied territories, based on the emotional ties of the Jews to the localities in which their history took shape, and Jewish settlements were set up for similar emotional reasons. These developments may seem offensive to some, and are certainly resented by the Palestinians. I, however, understand, as I have said, that it is frustrations which engender these movements.

And the frustrations are not of Israeli making. As I mentioned before, the moment President Sa'adat convinced Mr. Begin, he wanted peace and no more war, Sinai was returned to Egypt. This was a sterling affirmation of what the Israelis really want. It is my opinion that they would react in a similar spirit - but not necessarily similar extent - if they were offered genuine peace and all ideological extravagances would fade in consequence, especially those which contrast sharply with the image the Israelis have of themselves and the sense of achievement they seek.

I have recapitulated at some length the way the Israelis perceive the history of their state since its inception, of their Arab environment and of the at best tenuous reliance they can place on the equitability of the international community.

More importantly, I have tried to convey what, I am certain, is the enduring image the Israelis have of themselves and of the character of their state. If they are given the chance, transitory appearances would yield to the affirmation of their true sense of identity.

### Conclusion

Even though the assessments in this paper are personal, they reflect, I believe, a large body of opinion in Israel. This is the only justification for inviting their perusal. If these assessments are challenged, a burden of persuasion rest on the challenger.