

# Israel from a 3G Perspective

Wednesday, March 29, 2006

Event Moderator: Leora Klein

Event Presenters/Discussion Facilitators: Dave Dabscheck, Dan Brooks, Laura Finkelstein, Dave Polen, Ron Reitman, Eric Werba

Event Structure: The discussion was broken up into three sections: Past, Present and Future. At the start of each section, presenters provided everyone some context to prep us for that section's Discussion Session.

## 1. Discussing history, Dan and Ron touched on...

Palestine as a refuge for Jews before the Holocaust: most Jews immigrating to Palestine before WWII were from Poland and Russia – areas whose Jewish populations were decimated in the Holocaust (3 million in Poland, 1 million in Russia).

The difficult decisions survivors faced after the war: where to emigrate and restart their lives; where would they be accepted as Jews?

Israel as a refuge for Jews after the Holocaust: Hundreds of thousands of survivors, as well as Middle Eastern Jews and other persecuted Jewish communities found a home in Israel. We mentioned that Israel, since its founding, is a force to protect world Jewry – whenever and wherever they face trouble.

Have Jews faced genocide since the Holocaust? The Jews have fought wars of survival on many occasions, the first coming just three years after the Holocaust, with many survivors doing the fighting. Although Israel has built up its defenses since the War of Independence, and the chance that Israeli Jews will face genocide from a *land* war today are remote, the stated intention of genocide against the Jews of Israel remains evident to this day.

Did the Holocaust “make the case” for Israel’s establishment? Did the case need to be made?

On one hand, world sympathy from the Holocaust might have played an important part in securing diplomatic relations and arms deals in its early days. On the other hand, was this essential to Israel’s founding? National Jewish institutions had been in place and vital infrastructure had been built by Jews before the Nazis even came to power in Europe. By the 1930s, Tel Aviv was a thriving Jewish metropolis.

**These points led us to our first discussion session. Each table, or subgroup, was given 10 minutes to discuss the following hypothetical questions:**

*(each subgroup elected a speaker to report their findings to the rest of us)*

**If Israel had existed prior to WWII, would there have been a Holocaust?**

- Some felt that there would not have been a Holocaust with an Israel (even if it had been nascent, ill-equipped and diplomatically weak) ready to take in Jewish refugees and aid partisans and allied forces in Europe; some said the Jewish death toll in Europe would have been much smaller.

- An interesting comment was made that this question depends on our definition of “the Holocaust”: whether this refers to the Holocaust figure of 6 million or 11 million. Other peoples deemed inferior by the Nazis might have faced mass murder even had Israel been able to save millions of European Jews.

- Overall, there was a strong sentiment that Europe’s Jews – when no one was willing to take them in – would have had a refuge in Israel.

### **If the Holocaust never happened, would Israel exist?**

- A few groups reported that they’d spent so much time discussing the first question, the second question was barely addressed. However, a few opinions were offered:

- Some appeared to agree that the founding of Israel in 1948 might have been hastened by the Holocaust and the ensuing refugee crisis. A counterpoint was made that Israel may have been established *earlier* had WWII not pushed the issue of Jewish nationhood to the backburner.

Another opinion was expressed that Israel’s establishment wasn’t a question of “if,” but “when”.

## **2. Discussing how the Holocaust and Israel are viewed today, Dave D. and Laura touched on...**

### The Positive:

- In America: Our strong support and sympathy for Israel as our ally; the prevalence of Holocaust education in our schools; the large and diverse attendance at the Holocaust museum in DC.

- Around the World: Obviously world opinion varies greatly; In Europe, some nations mandate Holocaust education and many EU nations have strong alliances with Israel. Australia has a relatively large survivor community and its government is a strong supporter of Israel.

### The Negative:

- The President of Iran, as well as others, is convinced that Europe’s guilt over the Holocaust led to Israel’s establishment, and thus the plight of Palestinian Arabs. In essence, the Holocaust is thus blamed for global problems today, specifically the Arab-Israeli conflict.

- Holocaust Inversion: Holocaust imagery has been increasingly used to describe Israel’s actions. Frequent sights at anti-war and anti-globalization rallies have included picket signs with Sharon-Hitler comparisons and Stars of David juxtaposed with swastikas. These trends appear to be growing, not diminishing.

- Continued rejection – from world leaders, academics, college campuses and others – of Israel’s right to exist.

**This background led us to our second set of discussion topics:**

### **How does the world view the Jews through the prism of the Holocaust and Israel?**

- Some groups discussed America's overwhelming acceptance of Jews and the prevalence of Holocaust education and films. However, it was noted that we have come across many in America who have never met a Jew, let alone know details about the Holocaust and the complex issues that face Israel.
- Some commented that many might know more about Jews as victims of the Holocaust as opposed to their religion, culture and traditions.

### **How have these two major events shaped us?**

#### **- As 3Gs, are we more informed than others about the Holocaust? ...about Israel?**

#### **- Do these events add/take away from our Jewish identity?**

- A few of us felt that as Jews, we are generally more informed than others about both the Holocaust and Israel.
- Some felt that since we're encouraged to learn about and embrace Israel, we're possibly alienated from having a desire to explore and understand Israel.

### **3. Dave P. and Eric Werba introduced our final segment: Israel and the Jewish future.**

Dave touched on how we, as descendents of survivors, will view Israel's establishment in the context of Jewish history. Will we examine it as closely as we do the Holocaust?

Eric briefly discussed the issue of organized Jewish resistance and Jewish power. From the partisans in the forests to Warsaw ghetto fighters, to all kinds of Jewish resistance during the war, there is a lesson to be learned from Jews needing to physically defend themselves – then and now.

**This led us to our third set of discussion topics:**

### **How do we secure the Jewish future?**

#### **Does this future lie with Israel?**

#### **Either way, as 3Gs, do we have a responsibility to Israel?**

- An opinion was expressed that it is unfair to assume that Israel is at the heart of the Jewish future – that there is more to Judaism than Israel.
- An opinion was expressed that although we don't have to worry about Israel's physical security, perhaps we should monitor slander against the Jewish state.
- Another opinion was expressed that the burden should be on us... not to pledge any sort of allegiance to Israel, but to be conscious of and educated about Israel. That, politics aside, Israel is an important part of Jewish history and Jewish life today.