

Oom Shmoom Revisited: Sharett and Ben-Gurion

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Since independence, Israel has lived with a paradox--*needing and seeking* legitimacy, understanding, and empathy from the world community while simultaneously also *discounting* the world, which David Ben Gurion articulated so succinctly with his "Oom Shmoom." These tension-laden tendencies reflect not only strong cultural dispositions along with issues arising from Israel's troubled birth, development, and existence, but also some of the deep ruptures in what it means to be Israeli in a globalizing world.

We therefore aim to reflect upon Israel's *delicate balance* between its desire to be different from a world that it simultaneously genuinely needs and that it also wants to be a legitimate member of.

Reviewing his first year in office, and perhaps even foreshadowing the surprise announcement which would come in September 1993 of the historic mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin declared before the Knesset:

The train that travels towards peace has stopped this year at many stations that daily refute the time-worn canard -- "*the whole world is against us.*" The United States has improved its relations with us.... In Europe, our dialogue with the European Community has been improved and deepened. We have been inundated by visiting heads of state -- and we have responded to them with friendship and with economic and other links. We are no longer "*a People that dwelleth alone.*"¹

This optimistic snapshot of Israel's place among the family of nations reflected happier days some 18 years ago, and was part of a deliberate attempt to break away from longstanding negative, cautious and suspicious Israeli and Jewish attitudes reflected in the those two well-known slogans, *the whole world is against us* and *a People that dwelleth alone*. Such a negative worldview derives from a sweeping and general Jewish and Israeli alienation from, and sometimes disdain for, all the *goyim* -- the entire gentile (non-Jewish) world.

Those who share such a pessimistic worldview would no doubt also endorse the rallying call attributed to David Ben-Gurion: "It matters not what the *goyim* say but [rather] what the Jews do." Taken together, these slogans constitute something of a syndrome, reflecting a complex set of negative attitudes to the outside world firmly entrenched in Israeli political culture into which the colorful Yiddish phrase "*oom-shmoom*" fits perfectly.

The phrase "*oom-shmoom*" has been a well-known one in Israeli public life ever since the mid-1950s. It is a classic application of the all-purpose Yiddish idiom of repeating a word and adding the prefix "shm-" the second time, to indicate mockery of the original word. Thus, "*oom*" -- the Hebrew abbreviation of *ha-umot ha-me'uhadot* (the United Nations) -- becomes, derisively, *oom-shmoom*.

Today, the phrase serves as a shorthand for negative Israeli attitudes to the United Nations. As Aharon Klieman has written, "[r]esentment is deep at how Israel fares in world public opinion and in international forums such as the United Nations. Cynicism prevails... The world beyond Israel's borders

is often perceived of ... as distinctly inhospitable -- a dangerous and challenging place.”² From the perspective of Israel’s critics, *oom-shmoom* is also presented as damning evidence for the “well-established contempt for the United Nations within Israel’s ruling circles.”³

ORIGINS of the “OOM-SHMOOM” PHRASE

The first written evidence of the expression “*oom-shmoom*” entering the highest levels of Israeli political debate dates back to March 1955. Although the phrase has been attributed to David Ben-Gurion, it does not appear in any of the prime minister’s writings and papers, but rather in Moshe Sharett’s personal diary, first published in 1978.⁴ On 29 March 1955, the Israeli Cabinet devoted a marathon six-hour session to debating Ben-Gurion’s proposal to conquer the Gaza Strip as a way of curtailing *fedayyun* cross-border attacks. According to Sharett’s diary account, Ben-Gurion made a point of correcting an earlier remark made by Sharett to the effect that, had it not been for the UN resolution of 29 November 1947 recommending the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state, the state would not have been created in 1948. “No, no, no!” he cried out, “only the daring of the Jews created the state, and not any *oom-shmoom* resolution.”

Sharett was clearly outraged, commenting in his diary: “This ‘sweet and respectful’ expression for the U.N. was used time and again in his speech by Israel’s greatest statesman.” (Ben-Gurion had returned to Cabinet one month earlier to serve as Defense Minister, under Sharett’s short-lived premiership, after 16 months in retreat at Sde Boqer.) Two weeks later, Sharett continued his dispute in an exchange of letters, splitting hairs with Ben-Gurion over the UN role.⁵

The significance of Ben-Gurion’s *oom-shmoom* remarks may well have been exaggerated in Moshe Sharett’s mind and through his published diaries. On the one hand, the actual disagreement between the two men in the spring of 1955 was of the narrow, hair-splitting type. Not unlike other Sharett-Ben-Gurion disputes, this one was more over timing and tone than substance and principle.

Shabtai Teveth, Ben-Gurion’s official biographer, indicated in personal communication with this writer his belief that -- contrary to the Sharett diary account -- the *oom-shmoom* remark was probably uttered in private, outside the Cabinet room after the meeting. The mocking tone reflected, in Teveth’s view, the “Old Man’s” irritation at Sharett’s dogged insistence rather than a direct put-down of the UN as a body.⁶ Indeed, the colourful and disparaging phrase appears nowhere in the official records of the Cabinet meeting. Is Teveth correct in suggesting that Sharett overdramatized Ben-Gurion’s glib phrase? Or are we to trust Sharett’s diary account as being reasonably accurate, with the official stenographic protocol gently sanitized by the Cabinet secretary?

There may indeed be some truth in both explanations. In any event, the official protocols of the Cabinet meeting present a similar – if somewhat less pointed -- thrust to Ben-Gurion’s remarks. As in Sharett’s account, Ben-Gurion utters frequently reworked phrases about the state emerging as a result of “Jewish willpower and Jewish strength to remain here until death” and not thanks to the United Nations – except (as Ben-Gurion did allow) for the moral support of the 33 countries who voted for partition on 29 November 1947. “But, in essence,” he insisted, “the UN resolution would have been of no use had there not been Jewish youngsters prepared to kill and be killed.”⁷

Whether this phrase was actually uttered inside or outside the Cabinet room is less important than the fact, as we shall see below, that the contemptuous and dismissive phrase, *oom-shmoom*, does not accurately represent Ben-Gurion’s much more nuanced attitude to the United Nations. Yet, from the days of this somewhat petty backroom squabble, the phrase *oom-shmoom* has become a permanent element in Israeli political folklore, a catch-phrase used to designate a variety of negative attitudes to the UN as a world body.

The degree of support for the *oom-shmoom* outlook was one of the major variables in the “attitudinal prism” of Israeli decision-makers interviewed by Michael Brecher in the 1960s, as revealed

in his pioneering work, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*.⁸ Its popularity can also serve as a barometer reflecting fluctuations in the negative experiences that Israelis have with the world body in any given period. Over the years, politicians and pundits have reverted to the *oom-shmoom* phrase to underscore Israel's basically dismissive and suspicious attitudes to the international body – as witnessed most recently in the wake of the Goldstone Report on Israel's war on Gaza, December 2008/January 2009.⁹

“OOM-SHMOOM” between BEN-GURION and SHARETT

Much has been written about the differences in temperament and approach which resulted in the breakdown in the mid-1950s of the decades-long political partnership of David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett. One of the most insightful short summaries of this breakdown was penned by Abba Eban:

[T]he difficulties between Ben-Gurion and Sharett went far beyond quarrels over “turf.” In theory they should have constituted a balanced harmony. Each possessed some virtues and had some faults that the other lacked: Ben Gurion was impulsive, imaginative, daring, dynamic; Sharett was prudent, rational, analytical, realistic. Had they been able to work in close harness, an ideal equilibrium might have been achieved. But the contradictions that divided their characters also created an incompatibility of emotion.... Far from moving toward a sense of partnership, they had become unable to bear the sight of each other. Ben-Gurion thought that Sharett was talented, but pedantic, excessively meticulous, and inclined to confuse the vital with the incidental. Sharett, with all his admiration for Ben-Gurion, considered him demagogic, tyrannical, opinionated, devious, and, on some occasions, not quite rational. Their complementary virtues should have been harnessed for the national interest, but their antipathies were too strong for those potentialities to be fulfilled.¹⁰

Among the issues over which the two leaders clashed was their appraisal of Israel's best ways of dealing with the United Nations and the great powers. As one of Ben-Gurion's biographers has noted, “the controversy over ‘what the gentiles will say’ was the key to most of the disputes which began to poison the atmosphere between Ben-Gurion and Sharett in the 1950s.”¹¹ Indeed, belief in a worldview characterized by such slogans as “*oom-shmoom*” and “it matters not what the *goyim* say ...” is one of the defining contrasts used by Brecher, Shlaim, Sheffer, Bar-Siman-Tov and others¹² to distinguish between rival “activist” and “diplomatic” schools of Israeli foreign policymaking as associated with Ben-Gurion and Sharett, respectively.

Much of the academic analysis of Israel's foreign and security policies is based on this generally sound contrast between the so-called “Sharett school” favouring caution, moderation and a diplomatic approach and the so-called “Ben-Gurion school” favouring daring, military prowess and minimizing the importance of outsiders' approval for Israel's behaviour.

But, without denying the general usefulness of such contrasts, there is much evidence to suggest that these analyses tend to exaggerate actual *policy* differences between Ben-Gurion and Sharett and their respective supporters. As one veteran writer on Israeli military history concluded, during the Suez-Sinai crisis “Israel's moral standing in the eyes of the world was a decisive consideration, much more than Ben-Gurion's much-publicized derisive reference to the UN (‘Um-Sh'mum' [sic]) suggested,”¹³ and that, generally speaking, “the difference between him and Sharett was not as great as one is led to believe.”¹⁴

The evidence summarized here likewise challenges the validity of an exaggerated polarization between the two men's approaches. Certainly, while we can understand much about Israel's foreign policy by regarding Ben-Gurion and Sharett as personifying “two broad competing strands of Israeli perceptions and high policy in the period 1948 to 1956,”¹⁵ the differences between the “Ben-Gurionists” -- who held a very low opinion of the UN -- and the “Sharettists” -- who deplored the *oom-shmoom* attitude -- were seldom diametrical opposites. Often they were differences of *style, timing, degree* or *emphasis*, rather than fundamental policy.

It would be wrong, for example, to stereotype David Ben-Gurion as cavalierly dismissing the *oom-shmoom* and paying little heed to what the *goyim* say, caring solely for Israeli self-reliance and self-defense. Contradicting the image of a narrowly-focused, defense-oriented politician, a diary entry of mid-1950 reveals the Israeli Prime Minister's nuanced thinking on the interplay between military accomplishments and Israel's international diplomatic posture: "Foreign policy and defense policy," he wrote,

both serve the same purpose.... If [verbal] explanations do not persuade, [then] use is made of force.... Force is not only an army but the creation of the fact.... When the state was established it faced three problems: borders, refugees, and Jerusalem. None of them was solved or will be solved by the force of explanation -- but on the strength of facts.... The creation of a fact in the solution of the three problems takes precedence over explanations, and there must be no holding back from an action [just] because it involves an unfriendly reaction and arouses anger against us.

Even so, Ben-Gurion went on to concede that there was a "limit" to Israeli "indifference" to world opinion: "[W]e are dependent on the whole world like every country and more so than every other country. However, a change in relative strength in practice comes before friendly relations [with outside elements]." ¹⁶

Likewise, it would be inaccurate to caricature Moshe Sharett and the MFA as showing little concern for Israel's defense requirements and naively exaggerating the importance of international opinion. Sharett, for example, made it clear that he was not opposed to reprisal raids *in principle* and was prepared, if necessary, to risk the disapproval of the UN and the powers. But he regarded resort to military force as acceptable only when it appeared to be the lesser of two evils, and he favoured measured response over excessive retaliation that would only lead, in his view, to a thirst for revenge and an escalation of violence. ¹⁷ As one Israeli scholar has summarized it, Sharett's approach called for a constant balance between Israel's foreign and defense policies, between self-reliance and [an] awareness of its dependence o[n] international support. Defense policy should be subordinated to foreign policy and be determined by it. Sharett ... was highly sensitive not only to "what the gentiles will say" in response to Israeli action, but even more so to "what the gentiles will do." ¹⁸

Like Sharett, Ben-Gurion also showed healthy respect for "what the gentiles will *do*." Even his apparent disinterest in "what the *goyim* say" is contrary to one of the "old man's" three constant operating principles, as described by biographer Shabtai Tevet, namely, that Israel will not survive without the sympathy and support of at least one of the free world's major powers. ¹⁹ In another sense, the contempt for non-Jews implied in Ben-Gurion's rhetorical dismissal of "what the *goyim* say" is contradicted by his passionate intellectual interest in the history, cultures, languages, geography and social development of many peoples and countries around the globe. In addition to his patriotic concern for the Zionist "ingathering of the exiles" and the building up of the IDF, Ben-Gurion was imbued with a broad international outlook that led him in the 1950s and 1960s to foresee the rising power of the countries of Asia and to be among the first to alert Israelis to the need to build bridges with them. In late 1952, for example, it was Ben-Gurion who urged that a worthy Israeli delegation be sent to a conference of Asian countries to be held in Rangoon. Writing to Foreign Minister Sharett, he stressed the fact that he regarded this meeting as being

of *supreme importance* [underlined in original] ... more important than the UN General Assembly and conferences of that kind (from our point of view).... This is in my opinion an *historic* [underlined in original] opportunity of unique political and moral importance where we can meet with the intelligentsia ... of Oriental countries. ²⁰

As we shall see below, the line between rhetorically dismissing "what the *goyim* say," on the one hand, and acting cautiously and strategically out of a fear of what the stronger nations of the world (whether working through the United Nations, or on their own) might *do*, on the other, was wisely

crossed by a pragmatic Ben-Gurion at several crucial moments. The dichotomy set up between *either* diplomacy aimed at winning world opinion *or* military action against Arab “terrorists” to ensure Israel’s security can often be misleading. Israel’s efforts to acquire armaments from the United States, France and other sources of supply were, by their very nature, based on a combination of both defense and foreign-policy imperatives. They involved years of devoted lobbying activity by officials in both the MFA and the Ministry of Defense (admittedly not always working in harmony). Such pleading in Washington, Paris and London was necessarily accompanied at times by veiled threats that Israel might be forced to resort to military action, for example, to capture Gaza or launch a “preventive war” -- threats uttered by “moderates” and Sharett supporters, not just the recognized “activists” Ben-Gurion and Dayan.²¹

The tendency to overstate the Ben-Gurion-Sharett differences is not merely a *post facto* academic invention, but was promoted and exaggerated during the in-fighting between these two leaders. The dichotomy was further sharpened in the day-to-day political and personality struggles and rivalries among members of the defense and foreign-ministry establishments. Thus, Ben-Gurion often portrayed Sharett in distorted and caricatured fashion, as though the Foreign Minister’s “entire world consist[ed] of nothing but ‘What will the gentiles say’ and [his] whole approach [was] to find favour in their eyes.” By contrast, he portrayed his own approach as being “to look after the security of the state, its independent status, and the education of its youth.” In his diary account of an important Mapai Central Committee meeting in early August 1955, Sharett further attributes to Ben-Gurion the mock-ideal of a properly-run government in which the Minister of Defense would be authorized to determine defense policy, while the role of the Foreign Minister would be “to explain this policy to the powers and to *oom-shmoom*.”²²

This condescending view did unfortunately exist and persist, carrying over well into the 1960s and 1970s, as Michael Brecher discovered during his extensive interviews with Israel’s leading decision-makers. Army and Defence officials, he found, “persistently ridiculed” the MFA’s methods and its alleged soft line and concern for “the *Goyim*”: in their preoccupation with foreign reaction, was the charge, they did not contribute to Israel’s crucial foreign policy objective -- security.... To the Army the [MFA] was saturated with “Sharettism,” the policy of caution and exaggerated concern with “the external factor.”²³

The macho image of Ben-Gurion as someone uniquely endowed to defend the nation has been fostered, in part, by those who like to romanticize Israel and think of it as a little maverick state standing defiantly alone against a hostile world. But it would be incorrect to conclude, from his association with cavalier, dismissive phrases such as “*oom-shmoom*” and “it matters not what the *goyim* say ...,” that Ben-Gurion and his supporters actually governed the country in accordance with policies based squarely on such attitudes. In practice, these slogans remained mostly in the realm of rhetoric. They were indeed highly emotive reflections of a broad current of Israeli sentiment -- a feeling of being in a small country, isolated and beleaguered in a cold and dangerous world. Such slogans were also effective in mobilizing party and public support for Ben-Gurion over Sharett as leader. But when it came to *actions*, Ben-Gurion’s superior leadership qualities included the ability to behave, when appropriate, in the moderate “Sharettist” tradition -- all the while consolidating his now-legendary posture as the sole true defender of Israel’s security by rhetorically dismissing *oom-shmoom* and attacking Moshe Sharett for being too concerned about “what the *goyim* think.”

RHETORICAL SLOGANS and POLICY DECISIONS

In the period under discussion (1948-1960), points of conflict between Israel and the United Nations did not yet include the controversial decision of UN Secretary-General U Thant to hastily remove the United Nations Emergency Force [UNEF] from the Egyptian-Israeli frontier in May 1967, or the 1975 General Assembly [GA] resolution delegitimizing Israel by equating Zionism with racism.²⁴ And, prior to 1960, we see only the beginnings of what were later to become two predictable patterns of United Nations debates: (a) the use or threat of the Soviet veto to increase the number of Security Council [SC]

resolutions critical of Israel and to reduce or eliminate those that would have been condemnatory of the Arab states, and (b) a blatant and intense East-West polarization within the General Assembly, and the accompanying politicization of non-aligned African and Asian delegations, after 1967, into a predictably pro-Arab and anti-Israel voting bloc.

Yet it was already clear in the first decade of statehood that Israel's relations with the United Nations were showing strains and taking on a tense and negative character. This could be seen not only in General Assembly and Security Council deliberations and resolutions, but even more acutely on the ground, in the region. UN-appointed Mediators (1948-1949) and the Conciliation Commission for Palestine [PCC] (1949-1951) put much pressure on the new Jewish state to offer concessions to Arab demands – conciliatory “gestures” that could have, in the estimation of the proposers, unblocked stalemated efforts at peace talks. As Israel's “border wars” heated up during and after 1953, Israelis came to resent and fear many of the positions adopted and public statements made by the UN secretary-general, and even more so those by Chiefs and officers of the UNTSO and MACs responsible for monitoring the 1949 armistice lines and DMZs between Israel and her Arab neighbours.

Given this largely negative Israeli experience of the UN and its personnel in the period under review, it is not surprising that a dismissive *oom-shmoom* attitude should find resonance in the comments of Israel's politicians and newspaper columnists. But were such statements an accurate characterization of the approach actually adopted by the Israeli leadership towards the United Nations? And did Israel's leaders make policy decisions that reflected a worldview based on defiant slogans like “the whole world is against us” and “it matters not what the *goyim* say but what the Jews do”?

The evidence adduced here indicates that the negative and contemptuous attitudes reflected in the *oom-shmoom* slogan were *not* espoused, in practice, by Ben-Gurion or his followers to the degree suggested by their own, or their critics', rhetorical excesses. On the level of official Israeli policy as endorsed by a majority of cabinet members, these attitudes were never translated into decisions that resulted in sustained actions deliberately derisive of the UN and defiant of the great powers. The impact of Ben-Gurion's dismissive attitude to the United Nations was visible far more in the realm of *rhetoric* than on the *operational* level.

A proper treatment of the topic requires two prefatory explanations. We need, first of all, to make an important precision to the Ben-Gurionite slogan, “It matters not what the *goyim* say but [rather] what the Jews do.”²⁵ (We have touched on this earlier.) Here the operative words are: “*goyim say*.” Certainly no Israelis -- or nationals of any other country, for that matter -- would subscribe to the notion that their own decisions and destiny should be governed by what outsiders might (harmlessly) think or say. But not even Ben-Gurion was so cavalier or chauvinistic as to extend this dismissal of outside *opinion* to a lack of concern for what outside powers might actually *do* -- i.e., actions that might turn out to be harmful to Israeli interests.

A second underlying constant that must be taken into account is the widely-acknowledged weakness of the United Nations as a supra-national body that suffers from what one observer has labelled a “curious organizational deficiency”:

Despite its endowment (at least theoretically) with devices to punish offenders against the peace, it can offer virtually no incentives to desirable behavior. Beyond announcing its moral and political approval, the rewards it offers are hypothetical.... The most persuasive implements for resolving conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean may well be force and reward. The UN system can reliably use neither.²⁶

In this respect, Israel was no different from any other member of the world body: “United Nations resolutions were treated in the manner of all sovereign states: those which served Israeli interests were accepted; those which were perceived as inimical were rejected” or ignored.²⁷

In addition, Israel was no different from other member-states in assessing the power-politics dimensions of UN decision-making. Ben-Gurion was under no illusions about why the UN, as a body, would not support Israel's complaints about Egypt's non-compliance with UNSC Resolution 95 (1951), which called upon Egypt to terminate restrictions on Israeli commercial shipping through the Suez Canal. "I am opposed," he told Mapai Party members in 1955,

to dispatching one of our ships [to test Egypt's blockade and force the issue], only to have it captured and helpless.... Nor will I issue a complaint before the Security Council, because I know they will not deal with it seriously.... The United Nations is not a tribunal of higher justice; it is a political institution, with political considerations. And the United States and the Soviet Union are not interested in disputing [with Egypt] over Jewish [i.e., Israeli] cargo passage through the Suez Canal.²⁸

Israeli leaders were quick to learn that there was, operating within the United Nations, a double-standard according to which more powerful states might have no cause to fear critical or condemnatory resolutions, or could ignore them more successfully than smaller, weaker states. This point was vividly illustrated in late 1956, when the Soviet invasion of Hungary never evoked any real threat of international sanctions while Israeli occupation of Egyptian territory in the wake of the tripartite Anglo-Franco-Israeli attack did.

Yet the UN did have "teeth" at selected moments, namely, when one or more of the great powers chose to employ incentives or threaten sanctions in support of, or in conjunction with, the world body. And if Israel (correctly) viewed the UN as unable, on its own, to force compliance with all its declared wishes, in the early 1950s her leaders could not help but notice when the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union or (to a lesser extent) France stood ready to back the UN in pressing Israel to accept an international edict.

Despite the growing list of UN resolutions criticizing Israel's behavior on several fronts (refugees, Jerusalem, armistice violations), this cannot be attributed in the 1950s to determined Israeli decisions to act on the basis of the dismissive *oom-shmoom* attitude. The following examples testify to a pattern of Israel's respect – rather than contempt – for what the *goyim* at the United Nations and in the United States might say or be prepared to do.

Example 1: Bnot Yaacov Water Diversion Project

In October 1953, Ben-Gurion (over Sharett's protests) initially brought Israel into a showdown with the United Nations over the UNTSO Chief of Staff's recommendation and the UN Security Council's request to cease its water-diversion works at the Bnot Yaacov bridge in the Israel-Syria DMZ. If Israel's decisions had been truly motivated by the syndrome of defiance and rejection illustrated by *oom-shmoom* and "It matters not what the *goyim* say, but what the Jews do," this diversion of the Jordan waters would have gone ahead despite international criticism or even condemnation. Yet, once the US administration suspended financial aid, a pragmatic Ben-Gurion gave in ("without prejudice to Israel's rights, claims or position in the matter") and within two weeks ordered a "temporary" work stoppage -- an action that was immediately followed by a resumption of American aid.²⁹ This was the first of several illustrations of Ben-Gurion backing down when he realized that he could simply not afford to ignore what the *goyim* associated with *oom-shmoom* were *saying* -- largely because of what the *goyim* in the American administration were *doing* in support of the world body.

Example 2: Cabinet Decisions on Reprisals

Israel's reprisals against neighbouring Arab states were decided by the Cabinet. During 1955, it rejected (usually for fear of provoking an international backlash) a number of proposals developed by Defense Minister Ben-Gurion in concert with his Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, for far-reaching military action against the neighbouring states. In late March 1955, Ben-Gurion urged the Cabinet to approve the capture of the Gaza Strip; this proposal was defeated on 3 April. The following day, the Cabinet voted down his proposal to abrogate the Egypt-Israel GAA. Later that year, Ben-Gurion and Dayan

elaborated a plan to break the Egyptian blockade of Eilat's access to the Red Sea by capturing the Straits of Tiran. On 5 December, a slim majority of the Cabinet rejected this proposal. In the spring of 1956, Ben-Gurion himself vetoed an IDF request to respond with reprisals to *fedayyun* provocation from Gaza; the Prime Minister was, on this occasion, urging restraint in deference to the UN Secretary-General's trouble-shooting visit to the region.

Whenever it came to a vote, Ben-Gurion's "activist" approach was espoused by only a minority of Israel's leaders, both in Cabinet and within the Mapai Central Committee.³⁰ Being out-voted on a number of his pet proposals helps explain Ben-Gurion's growing vehemence in denouncing Sharett for what he felt was an exaggerated concern for international opinion.

Example 3: Reactions to "Excessive" Reprisals

In the cases of Israeli reprisal attacks on Qibya (October 1953), Gaza (February 1955) and Syrian bases opposite Lake Kinneret (December 1955), the IDF did end up -- for various reasons -- inflicting greater death and destruction than originally conceived or approved at Cabinet level. In light of the resultant international condemnation of Israel, a majority of Israel's Cabinet openly or implicitly chastised Ben-Gurion and his Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan. Not only Foreign Ministry officials, but also many of Israel's leading politicians, were concerned about Israel's standing in world public opinion, whether in the eyes of the United Nations or, more importantly, in Israel's dealings with its western allies: the US, Britain and France.³¹

Such reaction was especially strong after the Kinneret raid, which resulted in the killing of more than fifty Syrian soldiers and which had involved a failure to consult the Cabinet. Sharett, who was in the United States at the time, wrote mockingly in his diary:

Ben-Gurion the Defense Minister consulted with Ben-Gurion the [Acting -- during Sharett's absence] Foreign Minister and received the green light from Ben-Gurion the Prime Minister.

Following a storm of protest among the various coalition partners, a Cabinet decision demanded that, in future, all reprisal operations be submitted for approval. There is ample evidence of Ben-Gurion being put "on the defensive" among his colleagues in late December because of the Kinneret raid.³² While maintaining a confident and unapologetic facade before Israeli and world opinion, Ben-Gurion reportedly confided to one of his commanders that the operation might indeed have been "excessive" and "too successful."³³ The timing of the Lake Kinneret raid — the eve of Moshe Sharett's return from the US — also seriously compromised the Foreign Minister's personal credibility with John Foster Dulles, and thus Israel's relations with the US. Sharett and Eban both complained bitterly at the time that the raid had the effect of undermining Israel's quest for American arms, which they believed (erroneously, it turned out) was on the verge of receiving a positive response.³⁴

Example 4: "Preventive" War

Intense worry mounted inside Israel in the months following the Soviet-(Czech-)Egyptian arms deal announced in September 1955. Much public and secret discussion revolved around whether Israel ought to launch a pre-emptive strike or "preventive" war against Egypt, at a time of Israel's choosing and before Egypt had successfully absorbed its latest arms acquisitions. During this period Ben-Gurion, serving as both Prime Minister and Defense Minister, found himself frequently reining in his more-consistently activist Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, and other IDF commanders who believed Israel had to act quickly in initiating such a "preventive" war. For example, when in mid-November 1955 Dayan recommended a massive military confrontation with Egypt as soon as possible, Ben-Gurion ordered him to hold off until the end of January, claiming there was still a prospect of obtaining arms from the US. As Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov has argued,

Ben-Gurion, who usually attributed minimal importance to external constraints in implementing his policy of retaliation against the Arab states, was now more restrained. When the question became one of [initiating a] war with Egypt, he considered the constraints of the great powers more seriously.³⁵

Although the main considerations in Ben-Gurion's calculation were timing and arms procurement, his decision against preemptive military action was one which showed respect for what the *goyim* -- especially those in Washington -- might do or say with regard to Israel's arms requests.

An even more striking illustration of Ben-Gurion in the perhaps-unexpected role of "restrainer" rather than "activist" was his mid-December 1955 address to the IDF General Staff, conveying and justifying the Cabinet's recent rejection of the "preventive war" option at that time. Once again, the overriding factors in his analysis were timing and arms procurement, but the Israeli Prime Minister and Defense Minister presented two further reasons for restraint at that time. The first was the heavy cost of even a victorious war to Israel's border villages, youth and economy -- "a loss that will set us back as much as five to seven years." Ben-Gurion's second reason was his concern for Israel's image in international opinion:

Up to now the Arabs have attempted to denounce us as expansionists, and aggressors, with varying [degrees of] success. If we were to start this war, we would indeed become known as the aggressors, and it will not redound to our credit.... As the victims of aggression they [the Arabs] will receive arms from all sides. One thing I am sure of: we will receive no arms.... Israel will have no arms, and we shall have to face the Third Round. We shall be in the same position as today, but the circumstances will be much more difficult, and whatever satisfaction we may have experienced on the day of victory will have been dissipated. It will be much as it is today, except that in the eyes of the world we shall have been at fault.... We must take all these matters into consideration.... [We must] do everything to obtain arms, to improve the Army and not become involved in a preventive war. The belief that the best thing for us to do now is to attack immediately is an emotional and hurried decision which fails to take into account all the factors involved....³⁶

Such appreciation for Israel's need to be seen by the outside world as being in a defensive, rather than an aggressive, posture harked back to Ben-Gurion's preference, since the 1930s, for *havlaga* (restraint) over activism and revenge in the face of Arab provocation. It displayed a concern for attempting to set Israel on the moral high ground of international opinion, rather than appearing to behave as a nation defiantly promoting its narrowly-defined security interests.³⁷

Example 5: Preparing for the Sinai Campaign

In September and October of 1956, Ben-Gurion considered the possibility of collaboration with France and England in an attack on Egypt. In elaborating a set of conditions he wanted to place on such collaboration, Ben-Gurion displayed a remarkable sensitivity for what at least *certain goyim* might say or do. While the conditions he sought to lay down did not, in the end, govern Israel's collusion arrangements, the following two diary entries are nevertheless noteworthy illustrations of his approach:

(1) On September 27th, 1956, Ben-Gurion wrote:

I made three negative assumptions: (1) We shall not be the ones to open [hostilities]. (2) We shall not participate unless there is British agreement and their agreement must also include our defence against a Jordanian and Iraqi attack. (We on our part will promise not to attack either Jordan or Syria.) (3) That no action will be taken contrary to US opinion and without it being informed.³⁸

(2) During his secret meetings at Sèvres, near Paris, on October 22nd, Ben-Gurion recorded in his diary:

I explained my reasons for rejecting the ... proposal that we start the war against Egypt and, 48 hours later, after an ultimatum to both sides, the English and the French would take the Canal. There are ethical, political and military reasons. Why should we all of a sudden become the aggressors -- and have our friends in the world denounce us? (Pineau tried to explain that with their veto they will prevent a condemnation in the Security Council.) The US would disapprove,

and there's no telling what Russia would do. And most important -- Egypt would bomb the airports in Tel Aviv and in Haifa.³⁹

Indeed, as Shabtai Teveth has noted,

Ben Gurion's deep concern over the possibility of aerial bombardments on Israeli population centers was at the heart of his conviction that Israel should not go to war without a strong ally.... The need for a powerful ally seemed so vital to Ben Gurion that at one time he thought Israel should join the British Commonwealth and tried to suggest as much to the British Government. Later his aides explored the possibility of Israel joining NATO. Both of these attempts came to naught, and without allies Ben Gurion felt that Israel would gain little or nothing from war with the Arabs.⁴⁰

When finally recommending Operation "Kadesh" to his cabinet on 28 October 1956, Ben-Gurion realized full well that power would "be brought to bear to force us to retreat from Sinai," adding the confession that he feared America most of all since it was fully "capable of forcing us to withdraw. She doesn't need to send an army for that purpose. She has other effective means which are powerful enough."⁴¹ All in all, the calculations made by Ben-Gurion along his road to Suez seem hardly those of someone who cared not what the *goyim* might say or do.

Example 6: From "Victory Speech" to Agreement to Withdraw

On 7 November 1956, Ben-Gurion pronounced what was seen as a great "victory speech" to the Knesset. Expounding his "new revelation at Sinai," he declared the GAA with Egypt null and void, claimed that the Sinai Peninsula had never been recognized as belonging to Egypt, and argued that the Jews had an ancient historic claim to the islands of Sanafir and Tiran at the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba.⁴² Michael Brecher describes the speech as "a tactical error of the first magnitude," noting that "it alienated not only *'oom shmoom'* and Israel's enemies -- but her friends as well."⁴³

There were a number of intersecting external pressures building up on Israel to retreat, both prior to and following Ben-Gurion's speech. These included:

- (a) a menacing letter from Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin, made worse by French and US indications of a real danger of Soviet missiles being used, and the noteworthy absence of any offer of US protection against such attack;⁴⁴
- (b) a request for assurances of Israel's withdrawal from US President Eisenhower, accompanied by not-so-veiled threats of both losing America's international diplomatic support and suffering an embargo of US financial aid;⁴⁵
- (c) early indications that American Jewry would not unanimously back Israel in a struggle against the US Administration;⁴⁶ and
- (d) persistent requests for Israel's immediate withdrawal from Egyptian soil made by an impatient and unfriendly UN Secretary-General, accompanied by a movement within the General Assembly for condemnatory resolutions with the prospect of sanctions, and Israel's total isolation in world opinion.⁴⁷

"Within less than 48 hours," notes Shlomo Avineri, "after Bulganin's letter and the clear indication from Eisenhower that Israel would be on its own against a Soviet threat, Ben-Gurion changed course completely."⁴⁸ For purposes of our analysis, Ben-Gurion's about-face illustrates that he was making difficult decisions based on conscious calculations of what the powerful "*goyim*" -- including those involved in the UN (*oom-shmoom*) -- were thinking, saying and threatening to do. Despite his apparently cavalier dismissal of what he called Ambassador Eban's "frightened" communications of those tense days and Foreign Ministry Director-General Walter Eytan's reports of Israel's near-total isolation in world opinion, even Ben-Gurion was not exempt from sharing the general sense of alarm -- including fears of bringing the western world to the brink of a world war involving the Soviet Union -- in the days following his "victory speech." On November 8th, he instructed Eban to announce Israel's

conditional compliance with the UN call to withdraw, while he himself took to the airwaves at 30 minutes after midnight to make the difficult and painful announcement to the Israeli people.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

Students of Israeli foreign policy should be wary of accepting at face value simplistic and overdrawn applications of the admittedly useful “activist”-“moderate” dichotomy sometimes popularized through self-serving memoirs, political rivalries, personal backstabbing and electoral rhetoric. Differences over *oom-shmoom* and “It matters not what the *goyim* say ...” between the fondly-remembered David Ben-Gurion, on the one hand, and his non-charismatic and much-forgotten partner, Moshe Sharett, on the other, were not always the contrasting polar-opposites that have commonly been presented.

Most writers presume, along with Avi Shlaim, that “the dominant school of thought” in Israeli foreign policymaking during this period “was inspired and led by Ben Gurion” while Moshe Sharett “was an independent and original thinker on the basic questions of Israeli security” who “represented a clear and serious alternative, albeit one which was never tested.”⁵⁰ The examples cited above of actions taken and not taken are evidence that -- notwithstanding the mid-1956 ouster of Sharett as Foreign Minister and the heroic mythology surrounding the Sinai campaign⁵¹ -- the dominant trend during this period was *not* a “Ben-Gurionist” or activist approach, but rather a *blend* of tough reprisals along the frontiers, on the one hand, tempered by a “Sharettist” sober appreciation of international opinion, on the other. In their day-to-day political decisions, both Ben-Gurion and Sharett showed a healthy respect for the United Nations, for the great powers who stood ready to back UN decisions, and for what the *goyim* might **do** should Israel act in open defiance of international opinion on selected issues.

ENDNOTES

* This paper is adapted from my “‘*Oom-Shmoom*’ Revisited: Israeli Attitudes towards the UN and the Great Powers, 1948-1960,” in *Global Politics: Essays in Honour of David Vital*, eds. Abraham Ben-Zvi and Aharon Klieman (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 167-99.

¹ Y. Rabin address to the Knesset, 27 June 1993. The Biblical reference is to a phrase in Numbers 23:9. Cf. Yaacov Herzog, *A People that Dwells Alone: Speeches and Writings of Yaacov Herzog*, ed. Misha Louvish, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975.

² Aaron S. Klieman, *Israel & the World After 40 Years* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1990), 43.

³ Vijay Prashad, “The United Nations Equals Zero,” *Counterpunch*, January 16-18, 2009, <http://www.counterpunch.org/prashad01162009.html>.

⁴ Moshe Sharett, *Yoman Isbi* [Personal Diary, 1953-1957], 8 vols., ed. Yaacov Sharett, Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Maariv, 1978. I was unable to find any discussion of “oom-shmoom” in the popular biography by Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1977), published a year before Sharett’s diaries.

⁵ *Yoman Isbi* III: 874 (29 Mar. 1955); IV: 931-2 (13 Apr. 1955).

⁶ Email correspondence, June 1999.

⁷ There are, however, two noteworthy differences from the version given in *Yoman Isbi*: (a) the protocol does not contain any mention at all of the phrase “oom-shmoom”, and (b) Ben-Gurion’s argument is not directed at Sharett in particular, but rather at “several colleagues who say that the state would not have been created had it not been for the UN resolution.” Israel State Archives [hereafter: ISA], Cabinet Meetings, vol. 21, meeting #37, item #309, pp. 57-74.

⁸ Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* (London / Toronto / Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1972), 366f. Cf. *ibid.*, chap. 12 and pp. 298, 307, 332f., 338, 342.

⁹ E.g., Alan Baker, “There is no need for a big fuss,” *Jerusalem Post*, 20 September 2009; Uri Avnery, “UM-Shmum, UM-Boom,” 19 September 2009, accessed at <http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/avnery/1253361627/>. More than a decade earlier, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded to a UN vote censuring Israel for its construction work in the disputed Har-Homa/Jamal-Gneim area, generated newspaper headlines with his comment that, if this was all the *oom* was good for, then it was truly “*shmoom*.”

¹⁰ Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1992), 249-50; cf. Eban, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1977), 202.

¹¹ Michael Bar-Zohar, quoted in Gabriel Sheffer, “The Confrontation Between Moshe Sharett and David Ben-Gurion,” in *Zionism and the Arabs: Essays*, ed. Shmuel Almog (Jerusalem: Historical Society of Israel / Zalman Shazar Center, 1983), 102. Cf. Brecher, *Foreign Policy System*, 253.

¹² Brecher, *Foreign Policy System*, chap. 12 (“Ben Gurion and Sharett: Contrasting Views of the World”); Avi Shlaim, “Conflicting Approaches to Israel’s Relations with the Arabs: Ben Gurion and Sharett, 1953-1956,” *Middle East Journal* 37:2 (Spring 1983), 180-201; Sheffer, “The Confrontation,” 95-147; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “Ben-Gurion and Sharett: Conflict Management and Great Power Constraints in Israeli Foreign Policy,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 24 (1988), 330-56.

¹³ Netanel Lorch, “David Ben-Gurion and the Sinai Campaign, 1956,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald W. Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 309. This view would seem to contradict the one advanced by Michael Brecher, who argues that “[t]hroughout the decision flow on Sinai, ... it was the denigrating ‘oum shmoum’ image which prevailed”, and cites as evidence Ben-Gurion’s 15 October 1956 speech to the Knesset. M. Brecher *Decisions in Israel’s Foreign Policy*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1975), 235.

¹⁴ Lorch, *loc.cit.* This view is shared by Ben-Gurion’s official biographer, Shabtai Teveth, among others.

¹⁵ Brecher, *Foreign Policy System*, 256f.

¹⁶ Diary entry, 22 July 1950, quoted in Uri Bialer, “Facts and Pacts: Ben-Gurion and Israel’s International Orientation, 1948-1956,” in *David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel*, ed. Ronald W. Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 216-17.

¹⁷ On several occasions, Sharett compared his own, restrained approach to Ben-Gurion’s “system of angry reactions designed to bring matters to a crisis point, as if redemption will thereby come about as a result.” *Yoman Isbi* IV: 920 (11 Apr. 1955). Cf. *ibid.* II: 455 (12 Apr. 1954); Sheffer, “The Confrontation,” 127, 133.

¹⁸ Bar-Siman-Tov, “Ben-Gurion and Sharett,” 332, citing Sharett to Ben-Gurion, 22 Mar. 1954, *Yoman Isbi* II: 408-10, Sharett to Lavon, 13 Sept. 1954, *ibid.*, 577, and Sharett’s address to the Mapai young people’s “study group” following his resignation, *Yoman Isbi* V: 1515-19 (28 June 1956). Cf. Sheffer, “The Confrontation,” 126f.; Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 722, 734.

¹⁹ Teveth, “Ben-Gurion’s Three No’s,” *ha-Aretz*, 5 Feb. 1988.

²⁰ Ben-Gurion to Sharett, 23 Dec. 1952, ISA, FM 130.02/2446/11. Cf. David Ben-Gurion, “Towards a New World,” *Israel Government Yearbook* 5721 (1960/61) ([Jerusalem:] Government Printer, 1961), 23-33, 36-42; Brecher, *Foreign Policy System*, 264.

²¹ Evelyn Shuckburgh of the British Foreign Office recounts “an hour of painful and vigorous arguments” in Washington with Reuven Shiloah and Gideon Rafael (the latter of the two being a loyal “Sharettist”), who were “quite frantic” about the September 1955 Czech arms deal and who “told [him] solemnly that Israel will not sit by and see the balance of strength turned against them by Soviet arming of Egypt.” Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Diaries 1951-56*, selected for publication by John Charmley (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 285f. (diary entry of 2 Oct. 1955). See also: Sharett, *Yoman Isbi* IV: 1203 (11 Oct. 1955), *ibid.* V: 1249f. (25 Oct. 1955), 1252f. (26 Oct. 1955), 1266 (30 Oct. 1955), 1272-4 (31 Oct. 1955); Eban, *An Autobiography*, 194-6; Bar-Siman-Tov, “Ben-Gurion and Sharett,” 339f.

²² *Yoman Isbi* IV: 1117 (8 Aug. 1955). Cf. Shlaim, “Conflicting Approaches,” 192; Sheffer, “The Confrontation,” 138; Bar-Siman-Tov, “Ben-Gurion and Sharett,” 337f.; Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett*, 820.

²³ Brecher, *Foreign Policy System*, 399.

²⁴ UNGA Resolution 3379, 10 November 1975, <http://naip-documents.blogspot.com/2010/02/document-31.html>

²⁵ This much-misinterpreted slogan is better understood in its proper context, namely, Ben-Gurion’s exhortation to Israeli youth to draw more upon their own resources (e.g., in developing the Negev) rather than looking to outsiders for approval or support.

²⁶ Leon Gordenker, “The United Nations as a Third Party in Arab-Israeli Conflicts,” *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 10:1 (March 1988), 65. In 1961 Ben-Gurion recognized that the UN “has not the power, the authority or the will to put its principles into practice.” David Ben-Gurion, “Achievements and Tasks of Our Generation,” *Israel Government Yearbook 5722 (1961/62)* ([Jerusalem:] Government Printer, 1962), quoted in Brecher, *Foreign Policy System*, 266.

²⁷ Brecher, *Foreign Policy System*, 144.

²⁸ Speech to Mapai Central Committee, 8 August 1955, quoted in Zaki Shalom, *David Ben-Gurion, the State of Israel, and the Arab World, 1949-1956* (Brighton UK / Portland OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 61. For the text of UNSC Resolution 95, see *United Nations Resolutions on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, vol.I: 1947-1974*, ed. George J. Tomeh (Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1975), 134-35.

²⁹ Primary documentation from the Israeli and American perspectives can be found, respectively, in Israel State Archives, *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, vol.8 (1953)*, ed. Yemima Rosenthal (Jerusalem: 1995), 645-1025 passim [docs. 366-620], -- hereafter *ID8*, and United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1952-1954, vol.IX*, eds. Paul Claussen, Joan M. Lee and Carl N. Raether, (Washington: USGPO, 1986), 1303-1434 passim [docs 658-9, 661, 663, 665, 673, 675, 682, 725, 734-6]. Critical discussions of the episode are given in: Brecher, *Decisions*, chap. 5; Stephen Green, *Taking Sides: America’s Secret Relations with a Militant Israel* (New York: Morrow, 1984), chap. 4; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “The Limits of Economic Sanctions: The American-Israeli Case of 1953,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 23 (1988), 425-43; See Abraham Ben-Zvi, *The United States and Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), chap. 2; Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett*, 682.

³⁰ Cf. Bar-Siman-Tov, “Ben-Gurion and Sharett,” 352; Shlaim, “Conflicting Approaches,” 191, 195, 198; Sheffer, “The Confrontation,” 135-40.

³¹ For primary documentation on the negative fallout in western capitals, at the United Nations and among diaspora Jewry after the Qibya raid, see reports and correspondence in *ID8*, 756-913 passim

[docs. 433-35, 439, 448, 461, 471-72, 477, 479, 483, 490-91, 495, 499-501, 503-05, 514-15, 518, 533, 539, 544]. Cf. Neil Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy*, vol.3: *The United Nations, the Great Powers and Middle East Peacemaking, 1948-1954* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 222-25; Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 244-62; "The 1953 Qibya Raid Revisited: Excerpts from Moshe Sharett's Diary," special document introduced by Walid Khalidi, annotated by Neil Caplan, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 31:4 (Summer 2002), 77-98.

³² *Yoman Ishi* V: 1310 (16 Dec. 1955). Cf. *ibid.*, 1314 (25 Dec. 1955); Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955-1957*, transl. Ruth Rossing (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 62f.; Ben-Gurion to Eban, 19 Dec. 1955, in *David Ben-Gurion, Rosh ha-Memshala ha-Rishon: Mi'har Te'udot (1947-1963) [The First Prime Minister: Selected Documents]*, eds. Yemima Rosenthal and Eli Shaltiel (Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 1996), 288-9 [doc. 75]; Ben-Gurion speech to Mapai Political Committee, 28 Dec. 1955, *op. cit.*, 290-2 [doc. 76]; Eban, *An Autobiography*, 198-99 and *Personal Witness*, 248-49; Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 365-68.

³³ Ariel Sharon, with David Chanoff, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 126f. Cf. Mordechai Bar-On, *Sha'arei Azza: Mediniut ha-Bitahon ve-ha-Hutz shel Medinat Yisrael: 1955-1957 [The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Defense and Foreign Policy]* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), 78 and 437 n.15; Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 366, 368.

³⁴ Isaac Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel: U.S.-Israeli Relations, 1953-1960* (Gainesville, etc.: University Press of Florida, 1993), 154, 161; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 58-61, 352 n.19; Sharett, *Yoman Ishi* V: 1314-5 (25 Dec. 1955); Eban, *An Autobiography*, 198-99 and *Personal Witness*, 248-49; Gideon Rafael, *Destination Peace: Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), 47-48; Herzog, *A People that Dwells Alone*, 241; Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 368.

³⁵ Bar-Siman-Tov, "Ben-Gurion and Sharett," 341, citing Moshe Dayan, *Avnei Derekh: Autobiografia [Stepping Stones: An Autobiography]* (Jerusalem: Edanim [with Dvir, Tel Aviv], 1976), 164-65 (13-14 Nov. 1955). See also Shabtai Teveth, *Moshe Dayan: The Soldier, the Man, the Legend*, transl. Leah & David Zinder (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 249, 254-55; Shlaim, "Conflicting Approaches," 194. On the internal debates for and against Israel's launching of a preventive war, see, Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, chap. 4, and Motti Golani, *Israel in Search of War: The Sinai Campaign, 1955-1956*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998.

It should be noted that Ben-Gurion's argument against a war initiated by Israel was consistent with the IDF's chosen policy of deliberately attempting to *provoke Nasir* into being the one to initiate -- and be seen by the world to be the one who initiated -- full-scale hostilities. See: Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, chap. 4; Neil Caplan, *Futile Diplomacy*, vol.4: *Operation Alpha and the Failure of Anglo-American Coercive Diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1954-1956* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 164-68.

³⁶ Address to General Staff, 16 Dec. 1955, English text as transmitted to Allen W. Dulles, 10 Jan. 1956, US National Archives, NEA Lot59 D518 Box33. Cf. Dayan, *Avnei Derekh*, 174-75; Teveth, *Moshe Dayan*, 248-49, 255; Shlaim, "Conflicting Approaches," 196; Bar-Siman-Tov, "Ben-Gurion and Sharett," 342; Lorch, "David Ben-Gurion and the Sinai Campaign," 294; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 66-68.

³⁷ Cf. Teveth, "Ben-Gurion's Three No's," *ha-Aretz*, 5 Feb. 1988.

³⁸ Diary entry, 27 Sept. 1956, in "Ben-Gurion's Diary: the Suez-Sinai Campaign," ed. and intro. Selwyn Ilan Troen, in *The Suez-Sinai Crisis, 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal*, eds. Selwyn Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 300. In another context, Teveth notes ("Ben-Gurion's Three No's") that, ever since the Mandate period, Ben-Gurion had operated on three negative principles: (1) Israel will not survive without the sympathy and support of the Jewish people; (2) Israel will not survive

without the sympathy and support of the free world -- then represented by Great Britain, later by the United States; (3) Israel should never contemplate war nor embark on one unless the physical existence of its citizens was at stake.

³⁹ Diary entry, 22 Oct. 1956, in Troen, *op.cit.*, 307.

⁴⁰ Teveth, *Moshe Dayan*, 248-49.

⁴¹ Quoted in Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 271.

⁴² Ben-Gurion, Knesset address, 7 Nov. 1956, ISA, FM 130.03/1965/4; Hebrew text in Ben-Gurion, *Minbar Te'udot*, 341-46 [doc. 92]. Cf. Teveth, *Moshe Dayan*, 257.

⁴³ Brecher, *Decisions*, 282. A number of writers have drawn upon Abba Eban's report of remarks made to him by Canada's Minister of External Affairs, Lester B. Pearson: "This speech must have been as offensive to the British, the French, the Americans and to us Canadians as it was to the Arabs. If you people persist with this, you run the risk of losing all your friends." Eban, *Personal Witness*, 275. Cf. Lorch, "David Ben-Gurion and the Sinai Campaign," 306; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 274; Shlomo Avineri, "The Sinai Campaign and the Limits of Power (II)," in *The Suez-Sinai Crisis, 1956: Retrospective and Reappraisal*, eds. Selwyn Ilan Troen and Moshe Shemesh (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 246-47; Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London / New York: I.B. Tauris / Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), 477-79; Nathan A. Pelcovits, *The Long Armistice: UN Peacekeeping and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1960*, foreword by Samuel W. Lewis (Boulder / San Francisco / Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), 130-31; Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel*, 246-47.

⁴⁴ Bulganin to Ben-Gurion, 5 Nov. 1956, text in *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, ed. John Norton Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), III: 622-24. Cf. Ben-Gurion, Diary entry, 7 Nov. 1956, in Troen, "Ben-Gurion's Diary," 317-18; Ben-Gurion reply to Bulganin, 7 Nov. 1956, in *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, III: 624-25; Brecher, *Decisions*, 284-86, 290-91; Netanel Lorch, *Be-Tzvat Maatzamot: Yisrael ve-Labatzei ha-Maatzamot be-shilhei Milhemet ha-Atzma'ut ve-Maarekhet Kadesh* [In the Grip of the Powers: Israel and the Pressures of the Powers at the End of the War of Independence and the Sinai Campaign] (Tel Aviv: Maarakhot / Ministry of Defence, 1990), chap. 2; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 272-74; Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel*, 243-44, 247.

⁴⁵ United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1955-1957, vol.XVI: Suez Crisis: July 26 - December 31, 1956*, ed. Nina J. Noring (Washington: USGPO, 1990), 821-1096 passim; Brecher, *Decisions*, 286-87; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 274-76; Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel*, 247-49.

⁴⁶ Goldmann to Ben-Gurion, 8 Nov. 1956, tgm.870/297, ISA, FM 130.02/2459/1; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 275; Brecher, *Decisions*, 277-78, 287; Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel*, 248 and chap. 10.

⁴⁷ Brecher, *Decisions*, 291, 293-96; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 275. On November 7, the UNGA voted 65-1-10 calling on Israel "once again" to withdraw immediately. Resolution 1002 (ES-1), *United Nations Resolutions I: 34*.

⁴⁸ Avineri, "Limits of Power," 247. Avineri continues: "His response to Bulganin, which Ben-Gurion himself read over Israel radio, while aggressive in tone and language, clearly stated that Israel had no territorial claims on Egypt, and [had gone] to war only in order to secure its border against incursion and to guarantee freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Eilat."

⁴⁹ Ben-Gurion, Radio Broadcast, 00:30, 9 Nov. 1956, ISA, FM 130.03/1965/4; Hebrew text in *Minbar Te'udot*, 348-51 [doc. 94]. Cf. Ben-Gurion, Diary entry, 8 Nov. 1956, in Troen, "Ben-Gurion's Diary,"

318-19; Brecher, *Decisions*, 286-89; Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, 275-76; Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel*, 247-49; Ben-Zvi, *The United States and Israel*, chap. 3.

⁵⁰ Shlaim, "Conflicting Approaches," 180.

⁵¹ For Sharett's diary account of this turning point in Israel's life and his own marginalization, see "The 1956 Sinai Campaign Viewed from Asia: Selections from Moshe Sharett's Diaries," [introduced and annotated by Neil Caplan], *Israel Studies* 7:1 (Spring 2002), 81-103.