

## **First electronic debating forum**

### **The image and significance of contemporary Zionism**

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**Professor Gideon Shimoni** is a former head of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he also held the Shlomo Argov Chair in Israel-Diaspora Relations. He is the author of many publications, including *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1995). *Prof. Shimoni is a member of Metzilah Board of Directors.*

#### **Israel Harel:**

Dear Gideon,

Sixty years after the establishment of the State of Israel — the creation and the highest achievement of the Zionist movement — we are facing a critical situation, which cannot be overstated. Demographics indicate that during the last years Israel has become home for the majority of the Jewish People (5.5 million) — which is possibly the highest Zionist aspiration; and yet, the state moves away from its Zionist identity and despite an absolute Jewish majority in it, it is turning into what is known as 'a state of all its citizens.'

This process is being led by the legal establishment — mainly the High Court of Justice. This establishment embraces popular, post-modern and post-national trends, which are promoted by certain circles in academia, media and politics — mainly in the West. Around the world those trends are expressed mainly in public debates which do not endanger the physical existence, or the identity of the states in which they take place — or their hundreds and even thousands years of existence as nation states. However, in Israel, which lacks a tradition of sovereignty, the implications might be critical.

The Israeli situation is unique for a number of reasons; the most significant of which are the following:

Firstly, in Israel there is a large minority group (20% in the general population, which constitutes about 30% of elementary school first graders), the Arab minority, which resents the identity — and sometimes the very existence — of Israel as a Jewish state. This minority perceives itself as a part of the Palestinian People. Most Arabs in Israel identify with their People, who fights a cruel and unrestrained war of terror against Israel.

The second important issue is the fact that in recent years growing influential Jewish circles in Israel and in the world — though by no means a majority group — are adopting post-Zionist and even anti-Zionist attitudes. The post-Zionists argue that once the State of Israel has been established, Zionism no longer has a role; hence it is time for Israel to turn into a normal state that does not give precedence to its Jewish-Zionist nature. The anti-Zionists go much further: they deny a priori the right of the Jewish People to statehood in Eretz Israel (Land of Israel, or Palestine). Some believe it because they accept, or promote, the notion that the Jews are not a nation but a religious group, and some because they assert that the state originated in sin, at the expense of another People — the Palestinian People — who populated it previously. Both groups echo international trends, mainly post-modern theories which argue that there is no longer a justification for nation states, least of all a Jewish nation state (It should be noted that any self respecting post-modernist — especially a post-Zionist or anti-Zionist one — supports the founding of a Palestinian nation state, and denies the right of Jews to live in it).

Jewish anti-Zionist organisations encourage the High Court of Justice to move towards 'a state of all its citizens.' They also helped Palestinian citizens of Israel to establish organisations, like Adalah (The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel), which lobby the High Court of Justice on key questions regarding the dichotomy between Israel as a Jewish Zionist state and Israel as a state of all its citizens. Hence, the High Court of Justice often finds itself ruling — on many questions related to the state's identity — in one direction, namely: its citizens take priority over its Jews. At the same time, the High Court of Justice keeps ignoring separatist tendencies within the public that is represented by Adalah. Last year, the representative body of Arabs in Israel, The Arab Higher Monitoring Committee, comprised of the mayors of

Arab municipalities and Arab MKs, published its 'Visionary Document.' One of the document's principles states: 'The very definition of Israel as a Jewish State excludes us from it and puts us at a situation of conflict with the nature of the state in which we live.' Other organizations — representing most of the Arab public figures and academics in Israel — published similar documents, each more radical than the previous ones in their denial of the Jewish right to statehood in Israel. Zohir Andreus, editor of Ma'a al-Hadath newspaper and one of the leading and well respected Arab intellectuals, has written recently: '[the land of Israel] is our homeland, but this [State of Israel] is not, in any shape or form, our state.'

This development, and other post-Zionist phenomena in Jewish society in Israel, is a call for the vast majority of Israelis, who still regard themselves as Zionists, to redefine for themselves — regardless of the political correctness controlling the academic, judicial and media establishments — what does it mean to be a Zionist at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in Israel and in the Diaspora. It is also a call to stop the assimilation processes which eat into the remains of the Jewish People that diminishes willingly, out of its own volition.

Those negative phenomena prove that the ultimate aim of Zionism in the last 110 years remains unchanged: to concentrate the Jewish People in Zion, because only there — and even that only through a continuous physical and spiritual struggle — can it survive as a self-governing nation and live in accordance to its historical and spiritual heritage.

Therefore, the objective of Zionism in the early twenty-first century must be to rescue world Jewry from diminishing through assimilation — which can only be achieved in the Land of Israel — and to save Israel itself from internal and external dangers — which could result in losing its identity as a Jewish and Zionist state.

Only a mass Jewish emigration could stop the hasty assimilation process in the Diaspora and reinforce Israeli faith in the righteousness of the Zionist project (proof: the Jews keep immigrating to Israel), prevent the loss of the Jewish and Zionist identity of the state and enlarge the Jewish majority in face of the Israeli-Palestinian minority that denies its identity, and in some cases its very existence.

Yours,  
Israel Harel.

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**Gideon Shimoni:**

Dear Israel,

The question prompting this exchange is: 'How would you define the image and significance of contemporary Zionism?' I propose to begin with the definition of Zionism. I do so from my perspective as an historian of Zionism. But first one must note that Zionism, in common with all nationalisms, has always encompassed a wide variety of ideological syntheses. These have ranged from predominantly religious to predominantly secular identity versions and across a political spectrum that has included socialist, liberal, conservative and even pro-fascist orientations. Given this complexity, the definition of Zionism, whether past or present, requires us to extrapolate the consensual common denominator. Accordingly, the Zionist position is found to uphold these basic propositions: 1. Jews are an entity comprising not only religious attributes but also ethnic and actual or potential national attributes. 2. As such, Jews have an acute need and moral entitlement to national self-fulfilment and self-determination. 3. This can only be realized through a political state containing a Jewish majority and only in the historical homeland of the Jews — Eretz Israel. 4. An ancillary proposition is that the continued existence and Jewish cultural creativity of that state is of central significance for Jewish life throughout the world.

The significance of these propositions is most effectively highlighted when contrasted with their opposite. Ideologically speaking, rejection of all or part of these propositions has always constituted anti-Zionism in one form or another, and this remains true to this day, even after the State of Israel exists. However, within Zionist ranks the constitutive elements of these propositions have always been open to a wide berth of legitimate interpretations. Answers vary greatly to such questions as, for example, what exactly is the geographical extent of Eretz Israel? Does Jewish national self-fulfilment require all, or could it be only part, of Eretz Israel? How exactly should the 'Jewishness' of the state be expressed? Also, does Zionist fulfilment demand the aliyah (Jewish immigration to Eretz Israel) of all Jews (to be sure, only the most extreme and dogmatic have ever touted this view) a majority of Jews or only a viable society of Jews?

This brings my response more directly to your comments. The definition of Zionism upon which your views rest appears to be that its 'ultimate aim' has always been and therefore remains 'to concentrate the Jewish People in Zion, because only there... can it survive as a self-governing nation.' Since you deduce from this definition that 'the objective of Zionism' is 'to rescue world Jewry from diminishing through assimilation — which can only be achieved in the Land of Israel,' you appear to deny both the value and the possibility of Jewish survival outside of Israel. As an historian of Zionism (and, I might add, as one who personally chose aliyah out of purely Zionist motivation) I must say that this has never been, nor can it be today, a consensual interpretation of Zionism's goals. While I do not question your personal right, as a self-identified Zionist, to such a definition of Zionism and its aims, you should know that it represents only a segmental interpretation or view within the Zionist spectrum.

But the nub of my disagreement with your statement lies elsewhere. On the basis of your obviously sectional definition of Zionism and its purposes, you seem to brand a vast school of self-defining Zionists, with which I happen to identify, as opponents of Zionism and as a grave danger to Jewish survival. Given the historical perspective, which I have offered above, you correctly label as anti-Zionists those (even if they call themselves post-Zionists) who deny the very entitlement of Jews to Israel as a State, with a Jewish majority, serving the national-cultural self-fulfilment of Jews. Personally, I agree that their views and actions must be vigorously refuted and resisted. But why do you so undiscerningly paint all who disagree with your interpretation of Zionism and consequent policy preferences with the same anti-Zionist brush? Your comment's main thrust is a severe criticism of the role of Israel's Supreme Court, but inferentially your criticism extends to an entire gamut of issues relating to those who oppose the entire settlement project in Judea and Samaria and who are solicitous of civic equality for the Arab minority.

Regarded once more from an historical perspective, there can be no doubt that the mainstream consensual aspiration of the Zionist movement was to found a state committed to both the national self-fulfilment of the Jews and the human and civic rights of all its inhabitants. As Ben-Gurion repeatedly phrased it, 'Eretz Israel is to be for the Jewish nation and for all its Arab inhabitants.' It is

noteworthy that Ze'ev Jabotinsky subscribed to this vision no less than Ben-Gurion. Indeed, no major Zionist leader elaborated more affirmatively than Jabotinsky on cultural autonomy as well as equal civic rights of the Arab minority. This is the consensual position that was inscribed in Israel's declaration of independence, despite peripheral extremist views that have advocated unequal treatment of the Arabs, at worst on Kahanist religious grounds and at best for reasons of security and self-survival.

As a state committed to being both Jewish and democratic, the maintenance of this balance is at the very heart of contemporary Zionist ideology and praxis. Equally at balance are security considerations on the one hand and the striving for peace on the other hand. You are, of course, entitled to weight the scales of balance as dictated by your particular views and policy preferences. But it is fallacious to depict, as you seem to do, alternative balances of preference as inauthentic Zionism or worse still, as betrayal of the Zionist cause.

Conventional political rhetoric usually designates Israel's basic political division into left-wing and right-wing. Since the original meaning of these terms has been lost or distorted, I hold that more meaningful and emotively neutral labels are 'conservative-hawk' and 'liberal-dove.' Given the views you express, I venture to suggest that you fit best into the former camp. But your presentation might lead Metzilah's readers to think that there is no genuine liberal-dove Zionism, since you relegate it to anti-Zionism, whether blatantly so or disguised as post-Zionism. Your presentation omits or blurs the prominent and active existence of Zionists who firmly value and uphold the compatibility between liberal humanistic values and Jewish national needs and aspirations. You are not wrong in pointing to the uniquely problematic circumstances that plague Israel's existence; a large (20%) minority that increasingly identifies with the vast hostile Arab environment, denies that Jews are entitled to a nation-state (while not necessarily also denying that Palestinians or other Arabs are entitled to such a state) and accordingly demands that Israel abandon its Jewish national purposes. But the liberal-Zionist camp has a morally sound position, precisely because it safeguards truly equal civic rights, as well as a fair degree of minority cultural autonomy, by means of built-in democratic restraints against infringements; restraints which depend above all upon constitutional commitments and an authoritative Supreme Court.

Given this, the Jewish majority has the moral right to give precedence to serving Jewish national needs and culture, just as a Palestinian state would have the right to serve Arab national needs and culture. Should a Palestinian state, alongside of Israel, one day exist, a Palestinian nationalist option, analogous to the Zionist aliyah option, will one day be open for any Arab citizens of Israel who may be critically dissatisfied with living in a state whose culture and national symbols are not Arab.

In the final analysis, the praxis of being a Jewish and democratic state is above all a question of balance. One cannot deny that to this day the balance of power is certainly in the hands of the Jewish majority. At the same time it is also a fact, revealed in reliable polls, that a considerable section of that majority is inclined towards dispensing with democratic restraints. In that context, the Supreme Court indispensably fulfils its sensitive responsibility of balancing considerations of Jewish national needs and entitlement and genuine security considerations with protection of equal civic rights and human dignity as laid out in the law. Every issue is empirically weighed and balanced. Otherwise, to give just one important example, surely the Court would never have sanctioned the separation fence despite rulings of the International Court of Justice in The Hague. By the same token, it would not have disallowed certain sections of the security fence.

Taken to its logical conclusion your position might become the negative mirror image of the anti-Zionist charge that there can be no synthesis; either a Jewish nation state or a nationally neutral state 'of all its citizens.' But surely even the mainstream conservative-hawk camp does not seek to totally evade the synthesis; else why does it not even hint at denying the vote to Arab citizens, which, after all, would be the most effective defence of all against the threat of the Arab bogey.

Whether the conservative-hawks, or the alternative liberal-doves, are the majority or the minority of otherwise mainstream Zionism today is a moot point. Only scientifically valid opinion polls and general elections can perhaps describe the reality. But the world media image of that reality is another matter. This brings me to the question of Zionism's contemporary image. Given the fact that ever since the Six Day War the conservative-hawks have gained political ascendancy in determination of the facts on the ground in the crucial area of the controversial settlement and occupation

regime, this has undoubtedly reshaped the image of Zionism in overall world public opinion. Of course, an image depends on the eyes of the beholder. Zionism's image is a priori negative in the eyes of Arab enemies of Israel and their protagonists, anti-Semites, certain radical left circles and so on. We may thus discount crass anti-Semitic and insidious anti-Zionist distortions that equate, a priori, Zionism of whatever ilk with racism, Nazism and apartheid. By the same token, Zionism's image may well be invariably positive in the eyes of American evangelicals. Be that as it may, it remains a fact that the predominant image of Zionism as reflected in worldwide public opinion has become that of a national-irredentist, colonialist enterprise engaged in occupation and dispossession of another nation and suppression of its resistance. It is a telling pointer to the responsibility for this image attributable primarily to the conservative-hawk school, propelled by Gush Emunim's subsuming of national-religious Zionism, that even the most dedicated and eloquent advocates of Zionism (an outstanding example is Alan Dershowitz) find it necessary to disassociate their advocacy from Israel's entire settlement and occupation regime. I fear that only the successful reassertion of the liberal-dove school of Zionism might redeem this unfortunate image of Zionism in wide circles of public opinion throughout the world.

Yours,  
Gideon Shimoni.

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**Israel Harel:**

Dear Gideon,

In your response to my opening remarks, you present yourself as an historian several times. In one of the principal paragraphs you write that aliyah 'has never been, nor can it be today, a consensual interpretation of Zionism's goals.' Those who considered aliyah a necessary act deriving from Zionism were positioned, according to your interpretation, outside of the 'consensual interpretation.' We were the 'extreme and dogmatic.' Maybe. But you would surely agree that it was exactly this 'extremist' section which fulfilled the main practical goal of Zionism — aliyah — even if in your view this was not the consensus. Since this section was the one to embody and fulfil the goal, it alone — not other sections of Zionism outside Israel — could have fulfilled the subsequent goal: the settlement. Only those who have made aliyah could establish the state to be. And since those who made aliyah settled, they have also engaged

in fulfilling the third goal: security and defence. Without defending the Zionist project from harm, the 'consensual interpretation' would have remained merely that, an interpretation.

Thus, we reach the inevitable conclusion, even if there are historians who would argue differently (and to be honest I find it hard to understand how): if it weren't for the aliyah, there would have been no one to establish the Jewish State; no one to settle in it; no one to fight for the security of its inhabitants. There would have been no defending force to fight against the Arab states and the Arab inhabitants who were looking to destroy the infant state following Ben-Gurion's declaration of independence. Thus, fulfilling the goal — certainly in the Zionist case — is more important than the interpretation of historians. Especially since the goals of Zionism (what others are there, apart from the three I have listed?), including those 'interpretations' that were in the 'consensus' (what are they?) failed to be fulfilled by most of the Zionists in Diaspora. The consequences of this failure were critical for Jewish history in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Decades which are full of Jewish blood.

Imagine that the 'consensual interpretation' was different: that the 'extremist' interpretation was the leading one, and those who define themselves as Zionists would be obliged to emigrate. Millions of Jews would have made aliyah, and by so doing would have saved, first of all, their own lives. The Jewish state might have been formed earlier, establishing itself in the region, and achieving — even if only for the demographic majority — a recognition that it is still missing today. It is worth noting that only recently, in November 2007, The Arab Higher Monitoring Committee (the higher representative body of the Arabs in Israel), supported by the main Arab parties, has declared that it does not acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state. We can hardly expect the Palestinian leadership to agree to the Israeli Prime Minister's demand in the Annapolis summit that they recognise the Jewish state, if the Arabs in Israel will not do so.

An ideological movement, by definition, is a body that moves forward. And that movement forward can occur only if there are people who are willing to adopt its ideology. I dare to ask: if aliyah was never the interpretation of the 'Zionist consensus,' what was the consensus about? Was it that the Jews in Europe can survive Hitler? Or rather, not assimilate given the conditions of freedom

and equality that exist, especially since the Second World War? And if these are the two interpretations, how worthy are they, even if they are held by the majority? It has been proven — categorically and in a way that can no longer be refuted — that these interpretations are wrong. It is clear (one does not need to be an historian to reach this conclusion) that my ‘wrong’ interpretation - of the necessity of aliyah - was proven right beyond doubt. You know what? I wish I was wrong. That is, I wish that there was no assimilation and that one third of our nation were not extinct. But this is it. Those, like yourself, who have fulfilled the main mitzvah (commandment) — the aliyah (not just in my view but in the view of great and important members of the founding generation) have survived both physically and in terms of their national belonging. Their offspring did not assimilate, because in Israel it is possible to be a secular Jew free of the danger of assimilation.

David Ben-Gurion has prominently negated Diaspora and promoted aliyah. So much so, that he argued that one who does not make aliyah cannot be considered a Zionist. Is the founding father of the Zionist state also an ‘extremist’ in your view? He also reached the conclusion (decades before the alarming figures about the assimilation rate in the West were available) that only the State of Israel — despite being the most dangerous place for Jews today — can provide not only sovereignty but relative viability of the demographic — and thus the national — existence of the Jewish nation.

An additional point that you make in your response concerns the territory of the Jewish State. As you probably know, the ‘national home’ promised in the Balfour Declaration also included territories that are today the Jordanian Kingdom. The League of Nations, the predecessor of the UN that operated between the two world wars, ratified the declaration and, in doing so, turned it into an international — and binding — document. However, in 1922, in a typical British-Imperialist manipulation, Britain gave the territories to the east of the Jordan River — territories four times the size of the State of Israel — to the Amir Abdalla. He founded the Hashemite Kingdom on this land. By so doing, the British nation has betrayed the Jewish nation on the one hand, and the mandate that was granted to it by the League of Nations, on the other.

The small Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, as well as all the Zionist institutions, strongly protested against this betrayal. This is to say: Zionism believed then in what is scornfully referred to today

as 'the Entire Land of Israel' or, if you like, the 'historical Land of Israel.' Unable to fight the British Empire, the Jews had to swallow it. But they have not given up on the principle that the territory of the Land of Israel is the historical homeland of the Jews. Only when faced with the greatest catastrophe, the Holocaust, did the Zionist movement make the pragmatic compromise — by no means an ideological one — that it is better to establish a Jewish state on some of the Land of Israel, so that the Jewish survivors — and those still in danger, such as the Jews in the Arab states — will have a sovereign country of refuge.

As a historian of Zionism, Gideon, you must know Ben-Gurion's words in the 20th Zionist Congress in 1937 in Zurich: 'If I had been faced with the question: a Jewish state in the west of the Land of Israel (note the emphasis of the 'west of the Land of Israel' meaning there is also a 'east of the Land of Israel') in return to giving up on our historical right to the entire Land of Israel I would have postponed the [establishment] of the state.' And he added (as far as I know, to applause from many of the delegates): 'No Jew is entitled to give up the right of the Jewish nation to the land. It is not in the authority of any Jew or of any Jewish body; it is not even in the authority of the entire nation alive today to give up any part of the land.' This sentence has won great attention also in the St. James conference. He concluded by stating the view of the majority (then) in the Zionist movement: 'this is a standing right under all conditions. Even if, at any point, the Jews choose to decline it, they have no right to deprive future generations of it. Our right to the entire land exists and stands for ever.' In view of the things that are being said today, it is hard to avoid the gloomy realization that, sixty years after Ben-Gurion announced Israeli independence, the current Israeli president, prime minister and not a small coalition of Knesset members seem willing to relinquish this historic claim. If nothing else, they have no right to do so because this land belongs to those who have left us, and those who are yet to come. Without them, it is impossible to make a decision.

True, after the lesson of the Holocaust, Ben-Gurion, as well as the majority of his supporters, accepted the Partition Plan in 1947. But in his writings, Ben-Gurion never doubted that one day the entire Land of Israel would be under the sovereignty of the Jewish Nation. Sadly, we do not hear these sentiments from today's politicians, who support giving up much of the territories. The fact that they refer to the territories liberated in the 1967 war as

'occupied' goes to show the ideological shift that the Zionist movement has gone through, despite there being an existing Jewish state.

You group me with what you refer to as 'conservative-hawks'. Indeed it would seem I am a hawk, according to popular stigma. Although of the two of us, you are the historian (I am called, at best, the ideologist), allow me to say this: if the liberals, the 'doves,' had led the Zionist movement during the decisive moments of the twentieth century, the Jewish State would not have been founded. The Liberals, like the Brit Shalom group, opposed Jewish settlement even on land that was lawfully bought. They opposed the founding of a Jewish defence force during the difficult times between 1936 and 1939. They preached a policy of restraint in face of Arab attacks on small Jewish settlements in Israel. They would rather have no Jewish state at all than one founded by force against the will of its Arab inhabitants. Fortunately, during this period of Jewish settlement in Israel, the 'conservative hawks' gained prominence. They promoted settlement, the founding of the Hagana and the Palmah and the resistance movements that eventually pushed back the five Arab armies that attacked Israel the day after the declaration of independence. Without them, the fate of the Jews in the Land of Israel would have been similar to that of their brothers in Europe.

Thus, Gideon, I do not resent being called a 'hawk'. Zionist history shows the dignity of this position: it stands today, as in the past, against those who abstain from any contract that is not agreed by the Arabs or, sadly, by the 'international' community.

At the end of your argument you attempt to explain why Israel's world image is so poor. In your opinion, of course, the main reason for criticizing Israel, even amongst those who were not initially hostile to it, is the 'occupation.' Allow me to protest: it is Zionism, not politics, with which we are dealing here. Essentially, morally and logically, a nation cannot be an occupier in its own land. Judea and Samaria are not occupied territories. These are territories at the heart of the homeland. This is the homeland that we have no right to give up willingly. Moreover, even those who believe we have no claim to places where the Jewish nation and its culture was formed — Bethlehem or Hebron, for example — have an obligation to justify our moral position. That is, if they are truly Zionists. Had they done so, criticism towards Israel would have lessened, and the anti-Semites and the boycott propagators — for example, in the British academy — would have been overturned.

The adoption of the 'occupation' rhetoric by those who call themselves Zionists is not only irresponsible but falsely distorts reality.

I have lived for thirty years in Ofra, in the historical land of Benyamin. For fifteen years I headed the Yesha Council (the Judea, Samaria and Gaza council). I can testify that in the first years we had a tacitly cool relationship with our Palestinian neighbours. Those who claim differently, like Peace Now, are distorting the truth for political objectives; This is not the place to elaborate on that. In 1988 the Arabs put an end to this relationship with the hostile activities they call Intifada (Arab word for 'uprising'). Until then, there were hardly checkpoints, the residents of Nablus and Tul Karem worked in Tel Aviv, Natania and Haifa. The territory called the West Bank flourished economically and educationally and there were great improvements in medical services. Only when Israel started to defend itself from terrorism, especially suicide bombers, were checkpoints and that massive Wall put in place (I oppose the Wall because I think that the best defence is attack, not a wall). These are defence measures, not Apartheid, Gideon. They are necessary for defending you, me and our families. You know very well that when terrorism stops, Israel will gladly remove the checkpoints and open its gates to workers, students and traders from the towns and villages of Judea and Samaria.

You claim that only a liberal-dove approach can save Israel's image in the eyes of the world. I beg your pardon but this is a somewhat naïve claim. The 'occupation' is only an excuse of most of Israel's critics, let alone its enemies. In the absence of the occupation those who oppose our right to exist would find other reasons to resist the Jewish sovereign life in its historical homeland — the Land of Israel.

Yours,  
Israel Harel.

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**Prof. Gideon Shimoni:**

Dear Israel,

To keep this dialogue in focus, allow me to reiterate that the main issue under discussion is the definition of Zionism today. The definition I suggested was framed in ideological terms; that is to say, by defining the postulates of Zionism concerning the Jewish People, its character, needs and entitlements for Jewish national

self-fulfilment. Jews who uphold these postulates are Zionists, even though they may and do differ in their interpretation of the ways and means for achieving this: Jews who negate these postulates are, as in the past, either non-Zionists or, if they actively oppose Zionism, anti-Zionists. My main criticism of your contribution to this dialogue was that it wrongly treats just about all that differs from your particular interpretation as dangerous abandonment of Zionism.

Also my comments concerning the act of aliyah were made in the above context. For, to say that 'the ultimate aim' of Zionism has always been aliyah is a misinformed simplification. Nor, by the way, did the World Zionist Organization, as such, ever posit that the act of personal aliyah was a sine qua non for being a Zionist. To be sure, some segments of the Zionist movement — mainly youth movements — did posit this, and, speaking personally, this was the interpretation that I followed. But the historical record shows that this was never officially or even consensually accepted by the World Zionist Organization. Nor is it today. At the same time I fully concur with you on the paramount importance of aliyah and its indispensably crucial role in the history of Zionism. So the fine historical exposition you offered in your counter-response bursts through an open door, even though I don't think your tendentious use of quotations from Ben-Gurion would pass muster in an academic treatise. Furthermore, I think you and I agree that it is an indisputable Zionist imperative to call for, encourage and facilitate, by means that include a 'Law of Return,' the aliyah of any Jew who needs or wishes to become a citizen of Israel. But aliyah is a means — indeed a means veritably constitutive of Zionism — not an end goal. The same applies to settlement of the Land of Israel. The ultimate purpose of both was and should still be the national self-fulfilment of the Jewish People.

This brings one to the core issue, the alternative conceptions of what should constitute national self-fulfilment of the Jewish People and how to optimise it today, given that its basic prerequisite, the State of Israel, has been attained. As in the pre-state period of Zionist history so today too a wide spectrum of conceptions vie within Israel and are echoed by those who regard themselves as Zionists but live in the Diaspora. In suggesting that the labels conservative-hawk and liberal-dove were preferable to 'leftist' and 'rightist,' I sought fair characterization rather than stigmatization. So it is just as well that you say you fly the 'hawk' flag with pride,

rather than regarding it as a stigma. I also sought to leave aside minor positions on either extreme of the avowedly Zionist spectrum, thereby describing only the Zionist mainstream. Otherwise, it would have to include, on the one extreme, Kahanist-type religious notions that Zionist consummation requires subjecting non-Jews to the choice between physical 'transfer' or halachically sanctioned subordinate status of ger-toshav (alien inhabitant). On the other extreme, it would include such positions as that of Meron Benvenisti who argues that established settlement and geographical facts fatefully make the reality of a single state with a probable Arab majority an irreversible reality with which the aspiration for Jewish national self-fulfilment must presumably come to terms by the most severe self-abnegation (Of course, excluded by definition from this analysis are avowed anti-Zionists, for example adherents of views espoused by the likes of Ilan Pappé as well as certain Naturei Karta and Satmar ultra-orthodox groups).

You, Israel, are at pains to depict the entire enterprise of settlement in Judea, Samaria and Gaza (presumably including its largely tactical fait accompli methods) as the true progeny of the pioneering Zionist labour movement exemplified by no less than David Ben-Gurion. Allow me to say that this kind of retrospective historical speculation is a futile exercise: for every continuity that you might suggest, one can suggest contrary discontinuities and alternative continuities. For example, it can be argued that for Ben-Gurion, whose vision of Zionist fulfilment was firmly of a democratic Jewish state as articulated in our Declaration of Independence, the most important prerequisite was that Jews should become a majority in the territory that would constitute that state (This was of course a view shared by Ben-Gurion's arch political rival Jabotinsky). Because it became clear that this would become possible only through partition of the British mandated state of Palestine, Ben-Gurion advocated establishing a Jewish state in part of that territory, even though he believed, no less than you do, that Jews had entitlement to all of Eretz Israel. It can be fully documented that this was the reasoning that underlay his decision to opt for a partition solution, first in 1937 and then finally in 1947. He did so despite the risks involved on account of absolute Arab rejectionism and hostility. So is there continuity between this and the conception of those who absolutely reject, for whatever reasons, any notion of allowing Palestinian sovereignty on any part of Eretz Israel now held by Jews?

I note that, unlike the national-religious core group of conservative-hawks, you do not place a premium on the Divine Promise as the be all and end all proof that Zionist fulfillment requires Jewish sovereign control over, and settlement of, whatever Jews believe to be the Land of Israel irrespective of the consequences for its Arab inhabitants and for Jews of Israel itself. I wonder whether this is because you recognise that presenting purely subjective claims based on revelatory faith as if they have objective validity is of dubious value. At any rate, your argument is not without cogency and credibility insofar as it is based on a kind of zero-sum view of the Jewish-Arab conflict, namely that the hostility of Arabs, not excluding many of those who hold Israeli citizenship, to Jewish self-determination in any part of Eretz Israel is absolutely implacable and inevitable. So the issue is only our survival or theirs and no territorial compromise will make any difference; it will only provide them with tactical advantages for their strategic goal of effacing Israel.

However, given the reality of implacable Arab hostility and resistance as well as the ultimately decisive demographic advantage of the Arab population, what vision of Jewish fulfilment does this connote? Surely it is the perpetuation with exponential acuteness of the regime of unilateral control and domination that at present applies only to the Judea and Samaria region and even, in all likelihood, its extension to cover the entire State of Israel? For only denial of the basic democratic principle of universal suffrage for all who are subject to the authority of the state will enable the national self-fulfilment of an ultimately minority Jewish population between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean sea. At the same time, the zero-sum view of the conflict assumes by definition that Arab hostility and attempts to destroy Israel are an inevitably constant factor. Hence this will continue whether Israel allows a Palestinian state incorporating Judea and Samaria or not; only our superior military might and prowess in suppressing resistance will preserve us.

So which conception and attendant actions are undermining Zionism's ultimate purposes? Is it not the conception that abjures and actively resists the very notion of giving up any inch of Eretz Israel that has fallen into Jewish hands and obdurately opposes any prospect of a Palestinian state alongside of Israel?

In conclusion, I return to my main disagreement with your conception of Zionism today and my objection to your attempt to depict and censure, as dangerous departures from Zionism, conceptions and policy preferences which express the liberal-dove conception of Zionism; a conception committed to the compatibility of Jewish nationalist and universal liberal values. Of course this necessitates constant engagement with decisions and praxis that must balance between national Jewish needs and universal human rights. Such engagement applies no less to issues affecting the entire citizenry of the State of Israel than to the most fateful question of national coexistence between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. I do not question your right to oppose tendencies of balance of which you disapprove. But to label them as betrayal of Zionism leading to 'separation of Israel from Zionism' is wrong.

Yours,  
Gideon Shimoni