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Speech [Baltimore, Md.]. 13 November 1956.

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Speech by Rabbi Herbert A. J. Weis
Baltimore, Md - Nov. 13, 1956

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

As pressing as the calendar is in view of the events with which we are too terribly familiar, it wasn't a chore at all to come to Baltimore tonight, it was a pleasure. It is a pleasure for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that this community has a genuinely earned and authentic reputation of being a broad solid, dedicated Jewish community, high among the honor roll of what we consider the good communities of America to be. A more personal reason for coming is the feeling of joy and pleasure standing here on the rostrum of one whom I esteem very highly. Colleagues, friends and co-workers, Rabbi Lieberman is, in my judgment, one of the great Jewish leaders of America, and to have the opportunity to stand here in his Temple is a privilege for me.

I shan't say anything about Elkan except that all of the warmth, all of the human drama, all of the heart-warming things which I would have liked to have said he has said, and for this I shall not forgive him. It leaves me only the dry, the political, the analytical, it leaves me in the roll of the commentator after all of the pulsating drama has been laid before you. Elkan, don't do it again.

We had one-hundred and twenty, we thought, rather important Americans on this recent UJA Mission to Europe and Israel, and I think they were all important. Among them there were some who were younger than Elkan, some who were richer than Elkan, some who were perhaps higher in whatever the scale of standards is considered to be, but I tell you that among the one-hundred-twenty there was no-one more lovable, there was no one more enthusiastic, there was no one more

contagiously happy about what he was doing than your Elkan Myers, and it spread through the whole group. I'd say that to him privately as well as publicly and so I have the right to talk.

I think it's good that we are meeting tonight in a synagogue because this is a place where there is calm, quiet sobriety. This is a room in which we are accustomed to think of the higher things in life. This is a room where there may be clamor and clangor outside, but here we give ourselves over to try and find the best within ourselves and we try to reach the highest ideals which we can set for ourselves. That's why it is good that in this room we have the discussion which is taking place tonight. Because part of the environment of the past two weeks has been so hectic, so violent, so filled with brutality and bloodshed that we sometimes become over-heated with the political implications and the super-charged atmosphere. We lose sight of the more transcendent and universal things which are our ultimate objective. Let's try to understand these political things and let me try to make the events of the last weeks clear if I can. But when I've done that, I'd like to go back to the things which are permanent, everlasting, the things which have to do with the saving of life and the building, the making of brown and green, the making of sad people happy, the things for which all of us give our money, our labor, our love.

So let me deal in two parts tonight. One is war and all the things that that brought up, and one with peace and all the things we dream about. I think you all understand, really, if you followed the events of the last eight years, and even more if you followed the events of the last two decades, I think you all understand pretty well what happened two weeks ago yesterday. What I ^{mean} meant simply by the events of the last two decades is this; we understand well what it means to be confronted in the world, anywhere in the world, with a ^{man} ~~Mayor~~ whose aspirations are grandiose and whose methods are dictatorial. We know far well now what it would have meant twenty years ago in 1936 if someone had stopped Hitler when he moved to cross the Rhine. You must understand that what took place two weeks ago Monday was trying to stop early what the world would have had to have stopped later at greater cost had he been allowed to go unchallenged. This is the reference to twenty years ago but reference to eight years ago means this. Israel was born eight years ago with the support of the United Nations. To crush her then had failed, to embark upon a program which for eight unceasing years has been a program of harassment, murder, sabotage, burning, looting, ^{dedicated} ~~distated~~ unendingly to the accomplishment of that objective which they failed to do in 1948 and which they vowed eternally to continue to try to do even until today when the Government of Iraq announced again this afternoon that they were dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel.

Today these eight years have been perfectly incredible. Elkan went to Israel five years ago, people here went there four years ago and three years ago, and ~~seven~~ years ago, and we who come and go saw in a passing way from time to time what it meant for the people in the country, to live as it says in the Bible, with one hand on the plow and with one hand on the weapon. We appreciate it perhaps from a distance and rather

academically that life was tough in Israel and that it was sort of like the ancient wild West, where you tried to cut out your clearing and at the same time keep one eye on the Indian. We might have appreciated it academically, we never really could appreciate it unless we saw down deep inside of the life of every human family what that situation meant. The Harassment, the sniping, the devotion to a program of extermination went on for eight years but really reached its height two years ago when there were organized bands that we call in the Arabic tongue Fedie. Fedie in Arabic means "unto the death" and I can only think of the example in World War two when Japanese pilots were called ^{Hammichrai} ~~suicide~~ pilots, which was a way of indicating that they were willing to fly their aircraft down against the decks of an American battleship in the hope that by crashing themselves and their plane on the deck they would blow up the ship. The pilot dedicated himself to a policy of suicide to achieve his objective of murder.

^{Fedayeen}
The ~~Fedie~~ are the same. They left bases in Egypt, penetrated into Israel knowing that the possibility of their return to safety was very limited but dedicated to these suicide squad operations. Soldiers are supposed to be heroes or if not then their officers command them to but civilians are not expected to be heroes in every waking hour of their lives, and yet they had to be. These incidents which have gone on month after month have been great in number; a bus goes along the road is ambushed. Machine guns are brought to bear against it and eight people are killed. This is no great tragedy, eight people in a world where human life is held very cheaply. Two women go out into an orange grove to pick oranges and they are chopped down. A boy goes out to plow a field and he is shot by an unseen sniper. One boy; none of these really world shaking, yet what you have to try to understand is what this means to a civilian population, every single member of whom gets the feeling that he might be next. Mind you, we are not talking about people who live in

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exposed border settlements 500 yards from a border. The orange grove incident was inside the city limits of Tel Aviv. The bus was inside the ^{Neger} ~~Magid~~ which was the widest part of Israel, far away from the border. The children at prayer in a synagogue machinegunned down. It was in a very thickly populated village inside Israel. I think you have the picture.

The foreign minister, Mrs. ^{Meir} ~~Magid~~, who has ^{rebranded} ~~rebranded~~ her name from Meyerson because Mr. Ben-Gurion has a quirk that all people in the foreign office and in the armed services, these two things over which he has some measure of control, must have Hebrew sounding names, and ^{Meyerson} ~~Meyerson~~ is a Polish, Yiddish or Russian not quite good so it becomes ^{Meir} ~~Magid~~. Her explanation of this is a very simple one.

What alternatives do we have. We can do three things. We can do nothing about this and then our people that had a right to criticize their Government for not providing them the basic minimum of security, or we can let the people take the law into their own hands and if some Arab sniper comes and shoots them they can organize a posse and go out and try to find some Arab to kill. This would be chaos, this would be anarchy, or our third alternative is for us, the Government, to try to do something concrete in the way of stopping these raids. They tried many things. They tried to retaliate. Sometimes they stopped the Arabs, sometimes they didn't. Then the retaliation would bring upon them all of the bad public relations from the United States and elsewhere where people would say why do they retaliate. They were confronted with an authentic dilemma. These ^{Fedayeen} ~~Fedayeen~~ raids are at the basis. I want you to understand, of eight ceaseless years of attack. Now let us build on that.

In 1951 Israel took the case of the Suez Canal to the United Nations; 1951, five long years ago, and said to the United Nations our ships cannot go through the Canal. If our ships cannot go through the Canal we warn you that if Egypt is stopping us some day she will stop some of you and you had better do something about it. The United Nations took the matter up in 1951, passed a resolution saying that Israel, specifically Israel, should have free passage through the Canal. Egypt said no. You know what the answer of Egypt was. We are at war with Israel and therefore we did not give her free passage. It is on the records in the United Nations and Mr. Trigve Lee answered back and said even if you are at war with Israel by your words, the Constantinople war of 1888 says there shall be free passage of all ships in war or peace, so even if you are at war your argument does not hold water. Egypt said "so sorry, we intend to block ^{the canal} ~~them~~, and ~~the world~~ did nothing about it, even though the resolution of the United Nations was on the books, so this was the second thing.

I should like you to know quite simply that the blockade of the Canal, discriminatory against Israel, has cost ultimately in many ways, has cost you and me because our money is involved, \$30 to \$40 million dollars, are things which Israel has had to buy from far places because she could not bring ships through the Canal. Egypt tried to bring Israel to her knees through that economic boycott and blockade. While she didn't bring her to her knees she cost her a pretty penny of change every year. Fortunately Israel had a port of her own which she could use to bypass the Canal. The port is at the bottom tip of the ^{Negev} ~~peninsula~~ called ^{L. lat} ~~Elat~~. It is right on the site where King Solomon had a port in Bible days. There are copper mines twenty kilo meters from the port where

it has been uncovered and it was once a great waterway so if we cannot use the Canal let us develop our own waterway. From ~~Abet~~^{flat} you go down through the Gulf to ~~Abet~~^{Agaba} to go down to the Indian Ocean. You come down the Gulf and before you get into the open stream of the Indian Ocean you get to pass two small islands at the neck of the funnel and these two islands are owned by Saudi Arabia who left them empty for centuries, literally, but Egypt placed upon these islands heavy batteries of artillery and said that any Israeli ship that tries to go through the neck of the Gulf of ~~Abet~~^{Agaba}, past the island which is called Teran, concerning which you will hear much more in the days to come, we will shoot from our shore batteries. So Israel is plugged on the Canal and plugged at ~~Abet~~^{Agaba}, and then Egypt really went to work to tighten the ring of steel. She began to make unified commands with other Arab armies. She began to talk to the armies of Jordan and Syria and Iraq and Saudi Arabia whose great civilized King said two years ago that he would send ten million other Arabs to their death in order to destroy Israel. Cheap, as he deals with the lives of his subjects.

Egypt began to go to these states one by one linking them with her in a military alliance which her Chief of Staff, General Amair Corb, called a ring of steel. Insult came to injury, the crowning blow of all when that irresponsible mad man, President Nasser, invited into that troubled area the enemy of mankind, Russia. With all of the diplomacy of the United States trying to contain Russia, with all of our efforts to build up a Nato, with all of our efforts to try to show the danger of Russia to the world, with everything that we do with blood and pressure in Korea to hold her back, this fine English gentleman invites her in the front door. When I came to you in Baltimore a year ago, and every other city in America

which I could reach, and said that Russian arms were pouring into Egypt ^{eventual} and that these arms would be used to destroy Israel and to the/detriment of the Western world, I was talking to Jews who were willing to listen and understand. The rest of the world neither listened nor understood. The Russian bear is in on the Nile by invitation and when Israel saw this and put together the pattern, the ^{Fedayeen} ~~Arab~~ and the blocking of the Suez and the blocking of the ^{Aqaba} ~~Acaba~~, and the economic boycott in an unlimited scale, and now the Russian arsenal available for the kill, Israel knew that the day of reckoning was coming.

What can you do about it? What can you do? One year ago in October Mr. Sharett flew to Geneva where the great Summit Conference was going on. The deal with the Russians was made on September 27, 1955 and in October a few days later, a year ago, he went to talk to the great foreign ministers of the powers of the West and Russia, too, to say that this was something which the State of Israel felt was a danger to herself and to the peace of the world. He spoke then to deaf ears. As the months went by he spoke to ears which began to open, including the ears of the United States, which began to understand the dimensions of the danger and during 1956 Israel tried to arm herself against what would come. She did so with the active cooperation of certain Western powers and with the indirect cooperation of the United States, indirect because the United States sent nothing or sold nothing to her but encouraged other Western countries of Nato to sell to her which they would not have done without United States acquiescence and approval.

And so now the stage is set for the explosion. Mr. Ben-Gurion doesn't want a war. What does he do? He tried to find a way to break the power of the Egyptian war machine without at the same time making war

on Egypt, for in making war with Egypt he would have broken his word that Israel would not start a war, and more importantly than that he would have caused the death of large numbers of civilians, Egyptian civilians, but again he knows the Jewish heritage and as it says in the ^{Midrash} midrash when the Jews were fleeing the Red Sea from the Egyptian then we do not smile and laugh and sing and dance when our enemies are being drowned. We Jews are not built that way. So he tried to find a way to break the power of Egypt at the same time without damaging Egyptian civilians and people. And he found his way, ^{which} was to send his armies across the Sinai Desert where there are no civilians toward the Suez Canal which the whole world wants opened up and taken out of dictatorship control and by going across the desert toward the Suez he would be doing something, hoping to kill two birds at the same shot, break the Egyptian power, not hurt civilians, and do something which the rest of the world also wanted done. This was stopping Hitler at the line before it got to a big war. This was his logic, this was his motivation, this was his reading of history.

Has he accomplished it? Here's how I would add up the pluses and the minuses. The power of the Egyptian war machine to make a Pearl Harbor type of attack on Israel is now broken. Never mind what Mr. Nasser says about the fact that the French and the British bombed dummy planes on the ground. They were not dummy planes at all. They were those deadly Russian Migs, scores of which no doubt they put out of commission. Those big Stalin tanks were captured in that bleakness of the Sinai Desert by these little funny people who are not really soldiers but who have learned to become soldiers. They went out into the desert and took those vehicles and made them their own and will leave them to rust somewhere, never to be used again. The power of the Egyptian war machine to make a Pearl Harbor, I think, is done.

Secondly, I think that the conscience of the world will never again permit a solution of the Suez question which would discriminate against Israel. It is unthinkable to me, to use a word which has become very popular lately, it is unthinkable that any decision would be made about how to settle the Suez which would not include Israel. Whether it is a Users' Association, whether it is a U. N. Corporation, whether it is some international body, whatever it is, I tell you that if they ever agree to some solution of Suez which still keeps Israeli shipping out then the morality of the world is bankrupt. Let's not worry what happens if we ever get to that situation. Then World War III is on us and we are all in the drink. When the morality of the world goes bankrupt there is no hope for anything and therefore quite practically, and quite realistically, not as a dreamer, I do not see how the nations of the West, Britain and France, can permit a solution to the Suez which will not also include Israel and get her the free access that she and every other nation in the world deserves. Currently Israeli troops are now sitting on the Island of Teran, thank goodness. Teran is very small. Nobody is talking about withdrawing from it. It will come up and when it does come up Israel will withdraw from Teran. It belongs to Saudi Arabia but Israel will withdraw from Teran only when it is made perfectly clear, by whatever United Nations guarantees make anything else clear, that no foreign power shall inhibit the free shipping on a free international waterway out to the Indian Ocean. There are countries in East Africa which are hungry to trade with Israel. There is Ethiopia, there is Madagascar and there is the whole East African Coast that is wide open for the free commerce upon which the welfare of the world must depend, and there is England and there is Ceylon and there are the Philippines, and there is Indonesia.

There is the whole East to which Israel looks with great hope. Two little islands have to unplug that funnel. That will now be done.

The ring of steel is broken. Jordan and Syria and Iraq, regardless of what they may do tomorrow, have not today, yesterday or last week done anything and there is reason to hope, therefore, that Nasser doesn't have the monolithic control over this unified field command which he tried so hard to create, but most importantly of all, what I really see out of this situation is the possibility that there will come a permanent peace, not just an uneasy armistice. The raiding of the ^{Fedayeen} ~~Red Sea~~ was possible, an economic blockade was possible, and the ring of steel was possible because the Arab States said we are not at peace with Israel. When this fatuous legal argument is withdrawn from them and they are at peace with Israel the whole situation will be different because any violation then will permit Israel to go to the United Nations and shout the word aggressor. I really feel that there is a situation developing here in which Israel and the United States and the United Nations can take Egypt, first of all, and then the other Arab countries because they are secondary, and force them to make permanent, binding peace arrangements which will therefore not be able to be broken so easily. This you may say is visionary on my part. This you may say is a dream. This I say is the rainbow or the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow which may emerge out of all of this storm and thunder.

If then you take the fact that there will be no Pearl Harbor, at least not now from Egypt, that Suez and ^{Aqaba} ~~Aqaba~~ may be open, and that peace can come out of this, not just armistice, and that all this was done without destroying Egyptian cities, and with two countries of the West who saw their coming in as allies, I say that if that be the possibility then this event of the past two weeks may well turn out to be the brilliant stroke

that will cut the Gordian knot and once and for all head toward a solution of that Middle Eastern area.

There is one big if. I shant go into it. I don't know any more about it than you do. The big if, of course, is what Russia will do. If she chooses to move she can destroy my dreams with a pin prick. If she chooses to move she can lay Israel flat in fifteen minutes. If she chooses to move at the risk of starting another World War then there is nothing that any decent people can do about it. That is the big imponderable. I have left that out because there is no answer to that one. Everything else I said, if you leave that out, has validity. I would just like to say and then leave this to the limbo and go on to the other things, I would just like to say to you that I would have given our treasure if somebody had stopped Hitler in 1936. The whole world may in a very short time to come in the future be laying their ^{Rupees} ~~hands~~ at the feet of Israel for having stopped Hitler. It may yet turn out to be that way and if it does then we will look back at these uneasy days and the uneasiness will be replaced with the feeling of pride that we did our part in the stopping of the Hitler who was the Hitler not just to Israel, mind you, but to the whole Western world, and somebody will point to us for it, mark my words, believe it.

I take you now to something else.

Elkan talked about Jews from Morocco and if you were a Jew in Morocco would you go to Israel under these conditions? I talked to Jews in Morocco and in this camp at Marseilles in July in Morocco when I was there, and in October in Morocco when I was there, ~~in September in Morocco~~ when I was there, with the international situation developing clearly for all to see, and I talked to ^{Jews in a Camp} ~~Jerusalem~~/outside of Casablanca and asked them why they want to go to Israel now. Weren't they doing a foolish thing?

There was a group of them from one village and they brought out an old man and he showed me his ear which had been carefully notched with a knife and a big slash taken out of it in a riot in the village from which they had come, and he said with a sort of a pitying tone to me, these people who we often think of as being illiterate and subordinate and not very important who are these Moroccans, they said to me in a sort of pitying tone, as though I were the ignorant and didn't understand the facts of Jewish history, they said to me why are we going to Israel now when Israel is in that predicament? Why should we stay here? How stupid can you be not to see that they did this to the old man. They will do this to the rest of us.

Danger in Israel, sure. How to fire a gun, no. We don't know that but if they put us in the most exposed border settlement we won't be in any greater danger than we are here and the difference is that in Israel the danger will be over and we will be living in our own free land and here the situation will never alter to our benefit but only to our detriment, so what would you do, and I, the sophisticated, the educated Westerner walked away from these people and their jealousy and their robes and I said to myself they are smarter than I am. I was stupid to ask the question, and all during this period I want you to know very simply September, October, November, next month December there have been

Handwritten signature

coming a flow of refugees and immigrants at a rate heavier than anything we have seen since 1951. They are coming because the places from which they are coming are places in which there is no future and the place to which they are going may be dangerous, may even be temporarily dangerous to life but ultimately will be free and peaceful and sustain their life and that is why they are making the choice.

If there are any reporters present I would like what I am about to say be considered off the record, the reason for this being that there isn't anything which I would like to hide but because there are people in a country in Europe whose lives may be put in jeopardy by any indiscretions which we commit in public speeches here in America and having said that, let me tell you that the Jews of Poland are now on the move. Thousands of Jews in Poland that have had the courage to go to the Polish secret police buildings to apply for exit visas from Poland have been granted those exit visas and run with them, as though they had a ticket for life to the Israel Embassy to get a passport to go to Israel. Once they can get out, too, they run to the Israel Embassy and they are processed through and they get the passport and they go. Elkan said he didn't know how.

Let me tell you and that's why this is off the record because we don't want to endanger them. They are making a hole in the Iron Curtain and they are helping to tear it loose and we as Jews in America ought to be doubly thrilled by that. We ought to brag to every newspaper but we can't because we don't want to endanger others of them back there who still are trying to get out. They go out of Poland to Vienna. The Jew in Warsaw takes his wife and his children and he knows there's a law in Israel, he takes his wife and his children and he goes to Vienna and some other Jew who he doesn't know, whose name he'll never learn and whose face he will never see again, but some other Jew is there to help him, and some

other Jew feeds him and some other Jew puts him on an airplane, who pays for it he doesn't know because he doesn't know you in Baltimore. You pay for it and some Jew in Israel welcomes him when he gets off the plane and he cries because we saw it and he kisses the ~~ground~~^{ground} because we saw it and he breathes the air freely and after the slow years of darkness and silence behind that curtain he now has the compensation of breathing the fresh air and seeing the hot sun. Two hundred and fifty people a week we are now air lifting out of Vienna and we pray to God that it can go on week after week until we can get every Jew out of Poland who can come out and nobody knows if that door will close tomorrow and if that queer, perverted, bestial, psychotic, neurotic ~~seron~~^{mind} of the sick Communist world may suddenly decide tomorrow no more Jews out and they'll close the door as suddenly as they opened it.

I told you a year ago that the doors of Morocco might close, they have closed but we are still getting Jews out. I tell you now that I don't know how much time we have for Poland. We are trying to work as fast as we can to get out as many as we can. *good Jews, literate,* highly educated, skilled in Western ways, no fear of Communist agents among them. Nonsense. They are leaving out of a strong Jewish feeling of getting away from the place where religion and *folk and* national consciousness and all those characteristics have been stamped out under the ^{Russian} heel and because they want to save themselves as Jews, not just as people they are running out.

So we have no fear of their mental state of mind and we have no fear of their psychology and I told you if you ask a Moroccan Jew why he's willing to go to Israel now with Israel in this predicament he will give you one answer. You ask a Polish Jew and you'll get this answer which is slightly different from the Moroccan answer. The Jew from Warsaw

will tell you that he ^{lives} ~~leaves~~ in the shadow of the Warsaw ghetto whose bricks still give off a dusty smell. On those bricks the ashes are still there of the last 40,000 who went down in the fight in ^{Pesach} ~~Passah~~ week of 1943 and he will tell you that living in the shadow of the Warsaw ghetto he sees how Jews, even if they are heroic and want to fight back, cannot when the circumstances are against them, so he wants to go to someplace where he can fight back, where the circumstances will be for him, not against him and Israel then would be no Warsaw ghetto, so he comes with his wife and with his children.

I could tell you some things about Hungary. I've bored you long enough. I talked to Budapest on the telephone from Paris a week ago yesterday. We were worried about the condition of the leaders of the Jewish community in Budapest. I'll say that for you in one sentence. We are in an iron trap. We are caught from both sides. The rebels ^{who are} ~~was~~ trying to throw off the Kremlin's yoke shoot us because they say we are Communists and were responsible for bringing Communism on to Hungary and when we run around to the rebels, supposed to be fighting for freedom, we run smack into the Russian tanks and they shoot us because they say that we are ~~the~~ cosmopolitans, and ancient provocateurs and ^{we are} ~~were~~ the tools of the West who stir up this rebellion. So we get shot from both sides and the Jewish quarter of Budapest is in ~~flames~~ ^{flames}.

There have been many deaths we have not been able to tabulate. Two hundred Jews have gotten out of Budapest and are in Vienna now, no more than that I am sorry to say, but if there is ever a crack, if there is ever a fissure, if there is ever a tear in that Iron Curtain again, if you let us and if you help us we will put our finger in there and we'll try to get out as many Jews as we can. That's for the future. Right now I can say to you that [↑] ~~Paris~~ and Vienna are two great milestones on the road

[↑]
Marseilles

Jewish
to freedom and they shall remain so into 1957 and so long as we possibly
can hold those two lifelines open. With that I think I have said enough.
I have talked almost an hour.

There never was a time when we need the support of the Jews of
the United States more than we need it now. There never was a time when
more was at stake. I tell you this. Jews have decreed by their own
will power that the State of Israel should come into being and it was.
Jews have decreed by their own will power that other Jews will be saved
and they will. We can decree by our own will power almost anything we
want in the realm of decency and human progress; by our own will power
we need every ounce of strength you've got, whether the campaign comes
up next week, or next month, or in two months. Please don't forget
this night because there has to be a resounding clamor from the Jews
of America that this year of all years they will keep Vienna and
Marseilles open to Tel Aviv and Haifa. The destiny of hundreds of
thousands of people is at stake. You have it in your power to do it.

Thank you very much.

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