



Middle East Spotlight

Israel at 60

“In order to be a realist,” said David Ben-Gurion, “you must believe in miracles.”

Sixty years have passed since the miracle of Israel’s birth, six decades since the realization of the Jewish people’s 2,000-year-old dream of an independent state in the Land of Israel. What Ben-Gurion called the “redemption” of the Jewish people is now an established fact: The ancient Hebrew language has been revived, and Jews from around the world have returned to live in the land of their ancestors as masters of their own destiny.

At its birth in 1948, Israel was a tiny and fragile country of only about 600,000 people. Since that time, nearly three million Jews from all corners of the earth have immigrated to Israel, including more than one million from the former Soviet Union. Today, the Jewish state’s population has grown to more than seven million, some 20 percent of whom are Arabs—mostly Muslims—equal under the law.

One cannot take for granted that Israel—a country that has never had secure borders—exists as a free and democratic state. Israel’s liberal values are enshrined in its Declaration of Independence, which promises that the state “will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture.”

With its strong commitment to human liberty, Israel is a natural friend of the United States. America sees in Israel the values it holds most sacred. Indeed, Israel is a country worth celebrating, but one must not forget that the Jewish state’s successes have come at a tremendous cost.

By now we can all recite the familiar years of Israel’s many wars—’48, ‘56, ‘67, ‘73, ‘82 and so on—but we must not become desensitized to the toll that these wars have taken on Israeli society. In its War of Independence, for example, Israel lost about 6,000 people—1 percent of its population at the time. Were this same percentage of the U.S. population to die in battle, there would be 3 million American dead.

Since 1948, thousands of Israelis have been killed or wounded in battle and from terrorist attacks. Having known the horrors of war, the Israeli people yearn for peace more than any other people. They sing songs of peace, pray for peace and teach their children the virtues of peace.

As we mark Israel’s 60th, we must be proud of America’s long friendship with the Jewish state and continue to do all we can to work for peace.