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CELEBRATIONS TAKE place in the streets of Tel Aviv moments after the UN voted to pave the way for the creation of Israel, on November 29, 1947. (Reuters)

November 29, 1947

Herzl's Zionist idea goes global 75 years ago



CENTER FIELD
• By GIL TROY

Seventy-five years later, videos of the United Nation's November 29 vote still give goosebumps. The Soviet Union... yes! The United Kingdom... abstains. The United States... yes! The 33-to-10 majority triggers Jewish hours worldwide, even as Arab attacks begin.

While celebrating this mind-blowing milestone next Tuesday, let's rebrand. Calling Resolution 181 the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine emphasizes the UN plan dividing British Mandatory Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem internationalized. But the Arab world repudiated this painful compromise, which most Zionist leaders reluctantly accepted.

Instead, celebrate Resolution 181's true significance as The United Nations Recognition of Jewish Statehood. The world formally recognized Theodor Herzl's old-new Zionist idea that Jews are a people tied to a particular homeland with the right to establish a Jewish state in that homeland.

In this age of delegitimization, it's essential to emphasize that while world recognition was nice, Jews' rights to Israel preceded the UN and transcend any diplomatic power alignments.

This Sunday, November 27, at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem we will celebrate this November 29 breakthrough and Theodor Herzl's broader revolution, which began with that simple Zionist idea. On Sunday night, in launching my latest book project, *Theodor Herzl's Zionist Writings*, the inaugural three volumes of The Library of the Jewish People, we will toast Herzl's great gift to the Jewish people and to humanity. After centuries of leaps of faith, he offered a leap of hope, a liberal-democratic nationalist vision that tomorrow will be better than today and that we can roll up our sleeves to make tomorrow better.

Today, Herzl may be most famous for his remarkable profile with that fabulous black beard but that catalytic idea transformed his life—and Jewish life. More than an image guy, this lawyer-playwright-journalist was an idea man. In these newly-published diaries, the word "idea" appears over 600 times, which is why it's so appropriate that these volumes are launching the Library of the Jewish People's ambitious attempt to catalog the many ways Jews have danced with ideas over millennia.

Herzl began his 1896 Zion-

ist manifesto, *Der Judenstaat*, declaring: "The idea which I develop in this pamphlet is an age-old one: the establishment of a Jewish state." He understood that "No one is powerful or wealthy enough to transport a people from one domicile to another. Only an idea can achieve that... All through the night of their history, the Jews have not ceased to dream this royal dream: 'Next year in Jerusalem!'"

Like Luke Skywalker mastering the Force, Herzl channeled this explosive idea. He trusted that "The movement will be born the moment I impart my idea to the world." And he watched with fascination as the idea disrupted his own life. By June 1895, he wrote in his frank, compelling diaries, "The idea now absorbs me to such an extent that I relate everything to it, as a lover to his beloved." He soon reported: "The idea of the Jewish state has driven me out of my study." He surprised himself, by speaking here and there, and by negotiating with Kaisers, Czars and Sultans.

ULTIMATELY, HERZL trusted "the enthusiasm of our people. The idea must wing its way into the most remote, miserable holes where our people dwell. They will awaken from their gloomy torpor..." Then, activated, "a generation of marvelous Jews will spring into existence."

After the first Zionist Congress in 1897, Herzl predicted

a Jewish State's emergence in fifty years. Fearing mockery, he kept the thought private, in his diary. Fifty years and three months later, the world hopped aboard. What an achievement! Naturally, there were crucial intervening steps. Externally, in 1917 Lord Balfour offered the British Empire's endorsement and in 1920 the still-far-too-overlooked San Remo conference pioneered the UN validation with its own.

True, the Holocaust convinced lingering skeptics. But the key steps Herzl anticipated mobilized millions of Jews worldwide. Every Jew who moved to Palestine, every Jew in Eretz Yisrael who harvested land, established a home, launched a business, founded an institution, wrote a Zionist treatise, brought Herzl's Zionist idea to life.

By the time Hitler's Nazi bloodbath ended, Zionists had established a robust ideological, economic, and social infrastructure in Palestine. No longer a pipe dream, Zionism positioned the Jewish State as the obvious solution to the Jewish Problem.

Today, 125 years since Herzl's Zionist Congress, and 75 years since the world approved, Jews should no longer feel pressured to justify our state's legitimacy. Everyone should know the history of the UN's Recognition of Jewish Statehood – emphasizing the world's rare, formal recognition of the Zionist idea.

But Jews are not beggars at history's door. Most countries did not start with the world's permission slip. Reading Herzl's Zionist writings on November 29 will affirm that, decades before the Holocaust, Herzl recognized that "I am not bringing them a new idea but a very ancient one. Yes, it is a universal idea, and therein lies its power; it is as old as our people, which has never, even in times of direst misery, ceased to cherish it." And he wrote, "The Jewish state is something the world needs, and consequently it will come into being."

Approaching Israel's 75th anniversary, we declare: Israel is not on probation. Israel's legitimacy is inherent; it's not contingent on its good behavior or the world's good graces. And, yes, this remarkable democratic-Jewish state, filled with "Herzlian" marvelous Jews, has contributed far more than most countries, and must never apologize for existing.

Gil Troy's latest book project *Theodor Herzl's Zionist Writings, the inaugural three volumes of the Library of the Jewish People* will be launched Sunday, November 27, with Yaakov Katz and other speakers at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem, on Zoom and in person. For information and tickets, visit: https://begin-center.smartticket.co.il/en/Theodor_Herzl_-_Zionist_Writings_book_launch/?id=43663.