#### Chapter 13

## The Japanese, the Holocaust of European Jewry, and Israel

# A. Did the Japanese know about the Holocaust as it was taking place?

At several points in this study, it has been noted that in spite of Japan's adherence to the Axis Pact, there was never any meaningful strategic cooperation between Germany and Japan over the course of the war. Each party conducted the war on its own. Furthermore, beyond the fact that there was no visible military coordination and cooperation, even on the diplomatic arena, the two had serious disagreements on a number of issues. One disagreement was regarding Japan's relations with the Soviet Union, due to Japan's persistent refusal to launch an attack against the Russians in East Asia. Another was an earlier Japanese refusal to launch an attack on Singapore in 1940 and 1941. A third was the refusal of the Japanese government to treat the Jews in a violent and murderous manner, as the Nazis did. Naturally, under these circumstances, the Nazi leaders did not see any reason to inform the Japanese, in general terms or in detail, of their plans to exterminate European Jewry. However, due to the fact that Japan and Germany were allies, Japan did have a number of sources of information regarding what was happening in Germany and its occupied areas. The questions that have never been fully or even partially answered in a satisfactory manner were: who were these sources; what was their access to those in Germany directly or even indirectly involved in the extermination of the Jews; and could the government and military of Japan be aware of the mass murder of European Jewry taking place and the magnitude of the Nazi death machine?

#### Overt and Covert Sources

From the Japanese side, potential sources for providing information about the fate of European Jewry were first and foremost Japanese diplomats and officials stationed in various European capitals and major cities, such as ambassadors, minister plenipotentiaries, military and naval attachés, other attachés, and members of the consular staff and intelligence officers such as Sugihara Chiune. They were posted mainly to Berlin, Rome, Bern, Stockholm, Lisbon, Madrid, Bucharest, and Moscow. The diplomats reported to the foreign ministry in Tokyo. The military and naval attachés reported directly to their respective headquarters in Tokyo. Their natural sources for information about European Jewry would be German government officials, mainly officials in the foreign ministry under Joachim Von Ribbentrop who dealt with East Asia.

Other sources would be the German military and the *Abwehr*, the German intelligence service. The Japanese ambassador to Berlin during the war, General Oshima Hiroshi, was an ardent admirer of Hitler and of the German culture and language. He maintained constant contact with Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, and on a number of occasions he received hints that Germany was determined to solve the Jewish problem once and for all. But he was never explicitly told by what means this problem would be solved, under what timetable, and how many people it would involve.

Another question is to what extent the heads of the German foreign ministry and the supreme command of the German armed forces were in the picture regarding the Final Solution. There are some six thousand documents from that period that have survived in the archives of the Japanese foreign ministry, in addition to 60,000 pages of the protocols of the Japanese war trials (IMTFE), reports of Japanese diplomats to the foreign ministry in Tokyo, reports of the military and naval attachés to the Japanese army and navy, and reports from Japanese consular officials to the consular division of the Japanese foreign ministry. The documents indicate a lack of detailed knowledge of the Nazi plans to exterminate the Jews that had been decided upon at the Wansee conference in January 1942. There were virtually no Japanese reports of the mass killings of Jews that began soon after the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Most the Japanese diplomatic and consular documents that mentioned the "Jewish Question" dealt with issuing entry or transit visas or other matters pertaining to Jewish migration to Japan or travel through Japanese-held territories.

Other Japanese nationals who could have been aware of the killings of Jews were Japanese business representatives in Germany, some countries occupied by Germany, and neutral countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, and Turkey. They of course had no contacts with Jewish businessmen, who no longer existed in the Reich or the occupied nations—and barely existed

in the neutral states. Many Japanese businessmen residing in Britain and in the United States were repatriated over the course of 1942 and returned to Japan, so they too could not have heard anything.

A third group that could have heard something were Japanese journalists, who after Pearl Harbor wrote and broadcast mainly from Berlin and Rome, but also traveled in German-occupied areas in Europe. Until the signing of the Axis Alliance in September 1940, there were regular reports in the Japanese media about anti-Jewish measures, mainly originating from Germany. There were reports of the Nuremberg Laws and the "Kristallnacht" pogroms of November 9, 1938. The Japanese government made no effort to censor such news items. Once Japan became part of the Axis, however, a tight censorship was imposed on news that could harm Germany or present it in an unfavorable light. Mentioning the persecution of Jews was seen as reporting on Germany in a negative way.

Another body that dealt with Jewish affairs on the eve of and during the Pacific War was the second section of the research department of the Japanese foreign ministry, which was responsible for the so-called "Jewish Question." This body activated the ostensibly unofficial Association for Political and Economic Studies, which was established in the mid-1930's and was a cover for collecting material on Jews and mainly for spreading antisemitic material in Japan. Over the course of the war, this association published a magazine called Jewish Studies. The contact person between the Association and the Japanese foreign ministry was Shiratori Toshio (1887-1949), who served as Japan's ambassador to Italy from the end of 1938 to the end of 1940. He was one of those Japanese diplomats who fervently supported and advocated for Japan's entry into the Axis Alliance. There is evidence that the Jewish Studies publication was also used by the German Embassy in Tokyo as a conduit to spread antisemitic material, although the German ambassador, Eugen Von Ott, was not known to be an avid Nazi. Nevertheless, the embassy did support the antisemitic activities of General Shioden Nobutaka and helped him organize a series of symposiums and conferences dealing with the "Jewish Question." Even in this case, though, nothing was said about the annihilation of the Jews as a whole.

Another source which could have provided information to the Japanese people and government about the German policy toward the Jews was Western media, mostly those of Britain and the United States. While in the general Western media there were a number of stories dealing with the systematic killing of Jews that began to take place in the summer of 1941 and intensified in 1942, none of this was ever reported in the Japanese

media. Similarly, when by the end of 1941, more stories appeared in the Jewish media in Britain and the United States describing the mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe, and similar mention was made on the British Broadcasting Corporation, but these stories had little impact on the public's knowledge in the West, let alone in Japan or its occupied territories. It must be remembered that Japanese media gatekeepers were ordered never to cite from enemy sources and that the Japanese citizenry were forbidden to listen to foreign news broadcasts—mainly British and American radio stations. Even if some Japanese people were exposed to these broadcasts, the stories describing the killing of Jews were always accompanied by the caveat that such stories had to be treated very carefully, as they could not be verified. Thus, foreign media were not a credible source for the Japanese. The first confirmation of the mass killing of Jews by gas reached the World Jewish Congress representative in Geneva in late 1942, and that too was greeted with much skepticism by the Western media.

After the war, the American media devoted a great deal of space to describing the atrocities committed by the Japanese army in Nanjing in December 1937 and in the Philippines during the first five months of 1942. Much mention was made of the experiments on human beings carried out by the secret Japanese unit 731, which operated in Manchuria over the course of the war. It devoted less space to atrocities committed by the Germans in Europe. Many Japanese people saw in this a manifestation of racism: why were the Americans more lenient toward the Germans and more critical toward the Japanese?

After the war, Japanese scholars and officials made many attempts to compare the detention camps built in the United States to house more than 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent to the Nazi concentration camps. Few of them paid attention to the fact that the American camps were called "Relocation Centers," and that while they demonstrated a regrettable racist tendency on the part of the United States government, under no stretch of the imagination could they be compared to the concentration camps—and certainly not to the death camps—of Nazi-occupied Europe. Some Japanese apologists of the time preferred to conveniently forget that Japan launched the war, and that the Japanese-American internees were not used as forced laborers.

The only source that could have shed light for Japan on the policy of the Final Solution was the German government itself. Obviously, it had no interest in explaining, even to its Japanese allies, its intentions toward the Jews and the true meaning of the Final Solution. The German ambassadors to Japan during the war, General Von Ott and Heinrich Von Stahmer, met regularly with officials in the Japanese foreign ministry. Records of conversations were kept, but they do not make any mention of the fate of European Jewry, nor did the Japanese raise such unpleasant subjects. It is unlikely that the German ambassadors in Tokyo were themselves ever briefed by Berlin on the extermination of European Jewry.

The main efforts of the Germans ambassadors from June 1941 at least until 1943 focused on convincing the Japanese to abandon the Non-Aggression Pact Japan had signed with the Soviet Union in April 1941 and to attack the Russians in Siberia in order to reduce the pressure on the retreating German forces in Eastern Europe. The arguments became more intense after the German defeat in Stalingrad in January 1943. They resembled Stalin's incessant demands on his Western allies to open a second front in Europe as early as possible for similar reasons.

Among the staff members of the German embassy in Tokyo were some Gestapo personnel. Colonel Meisinger, a Gestapo officer, served in Tokyo for a brief period prior to being transferred to Shanghai. Apparently part of the task of Gestapo personnel in the embassy was to spread fear in Japan over the existence of Jewish spies and fifth-columnists. As it turned out, however, the most senior foreign spy ever caught in Japan was Richrad Sorge, a German whose mother was Russian. An ardent communist, he had spied for the Soviet Union and had very close ties with the German ambassador and his senior staff members, including Meisinger, one of his drinking companions. Sorge was the one who informed Stalin in the fall of 1941 that Japan had no intention of expanding the war to the Soviet Union. This information finally convinced Stalin that he could move some 600,000 soldiers from Siberia to the European front, a move credited with stopping the German army at the gates of Moscow. Sorge was captured, along with his Japanese collaborators (one of whom had ties to the office of Prime Minister Konoye), in late 1941 by the Japanese police. They were executed in 1944. None of them were Jewish.

The information department of the German Embassy in Tokyo was involved in disseminating antisemitic literature to the Japanese media. Some of this material was used by Japanese writers to pen articles against Jews, but most of the material was not even used. This department also disseminated the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and other antisemitic literature to the Japanese public. In the material there was never any mention of the Final Solution or the existence of death camps. The impact of this propaganda is hard to evaluate. Since most Japanese people had never seen a Jew

in their lives, the material probably didn't mean much to them, unless it was in connection with the leaders of the Western allies who, the Japanese were told, were under the control of international Jewry (whatever that was).

In Japan and the territories under its control there were a number of Nazi and pro-Nazi organizations, some consisting of German nationals, others consisting of local people who for various reasons thought it useful to join them. Their influence was very limited. In January 1943, the German embassy in Tokyo helped put together an exhibition in a large Tokyo department store on the theme "The Freemasons: The Secret International Organization of the Jews." It was also instrumental in helping General Shioden's Association for the Study of the Jewish Question arrange for its 1943 conference, and a year later helped the League for the Implementation of the Imperial Education Rescript to organize a symposium on Jewish plots against Japan. In those gatherings there was absolutely no mention of what was taking place at that very moment in Auschwitz, Birkenau, Treblinka, and other Nazi death camps in Europe. Thus the average Japanese newspaper reader could not have had any inkling about the mass murder of Jews that was taking place far away from Japan. The "Jewish Question" was a matter of which he had little knowledge, about a people of whom he knew virtually nothing.

The Japanese policy toward the Jews was determined in the March 11, 1942, meeting, some six weeks after the Wansee conference (January 20, 1942) that had sealed the fate of European Jewry. It is unlikely that Japanese leaders were informed of the decisions made during the Wansee gathering. The Japanese policy, as we have discussed, was the diametric opposite of the Final Solution. There is no clear-cut evidence that Nazi Germany ever demanded that Japan hand over Jews in areas under its control to be included in the Final Solution.

After the war, a number of Japanese intellectuals and academics stated that they'd had no idea what the Nazis were doing to European Jewry. In this they were no different than millions of people in Western, Central, and even more so Eastern Europe, who claimed they knew nothing of the systematic killing of Jews. Perhaps the first intimation of what the Final Solution meant came to many Japanese people in the form of reports on the Nazi war trials in Nuremberg between the summer of 1945 and late 1946. These trials were reported on extensively in the Japanese media at the demand of the American occupation authorities, who wanted to demonstrate to the Japanese how evil their war-time allies were. It can be safely argued that the majority of the Japanese people had no interest in what

had happened to European Jewry. They were busy battling for sheer physical survival after the devastation of their homeland by American bombers. Even if they had shown some interest, it would have been hard for them to imagine how their war-time allies could have master-minded the killing of some six million people. In this they were not the only ones. To this very day, it seems impossible to comprehend.

Perhaps one of the reasons the Japanese government ignored the German requests regarding the Jews was rooted in the almost total absence of any military, naval, or even political cooperation between the two. But apart from that, the concept of genocide was not known to the Japanese. Even the Rape of Nanjing, horrific as it was, was not intended to be and did not amount to genocide. There has never been a Japanese Wansee conference to plan the extermination of the Chinese or Korean people.

As a result of this almost total absence of knowledge regarding the Holocaust, the Japanese people felt no obligation toward Jews or, since 1948, to the State of Israel as far as expressing contrition or paying reparations, compensation, or restitution. The property owned by Jews in the Japanese occupied areas which was confiscated by the occupation authorities was returned to its owners by the Allies shortly after Japan surrendered. Jewish property in China was nationalized by the communists after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in October 1949.

We have seen that the German government never considered the "Jewish Question" a matter of high priority in its dealings with Japan. There is no evidence that the German embassy in Tokyo was in touch with Japanese experts on Jewish affairs, such as Colonel Yasue or Captain Inuzuka, either in Tokyo or later in Shanghai. True, the German embassy was instrumental in terminating the existence of the Congress of Far Eastern Jews that had been sponsored by the Japanese military authorities in Manchuria, but this body had never possessed any importance or influence, and its total dependence on the Japanese army was obvious.

Japanese cabinet ministers made hardly any statements relating to Jews during the war. One rare example was the reply of the Japanese Home Minister Ando Kisaburo (1879-1954) on January 26, 1944, to a question posed in the Diet by General Shioden Nobutaka.in which he accused the Japanese government of ignoring the "Jewish Question." The minister replied that Japan's policy was to eradicate discrimination based on race, but that this did not mean full equality. Each person had the place he deserved, in which he could live in peace and prosperity. Japan's goals were to implement the policy of co-existence and economic well-being.

In the same debate, Education Minister Okabe Nagakage said that while the Jewish problem was important, the government had not yet paid enough attention to it, and that he wanted to study the matter in depth and discuss it later. The cabinet secretary said that Japan was doing all it could to study the ideological issues in depth and would react to any development as the needs arose. These replies show that while the Japanese government did not come out openly against antisemitism in Japan, it also went no further than that in supporting prejudice against the Jews. It never called for the annihilation of Jews or for taking special measures against them.

There is no evidence of overt anti-Jewish expressions in open or closed meetings by Emperor Hirohito, Prime Minister Tojo Hideki, Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori, the commanders of the army and navy, or the war and navy ministers—in other words, by the key decision-makers in Japan during the war. There is no evidence to indicate that the decision-makers knew of what was happening to Jews in Europe. The general assumption is that even had they been told, the magnitude of the crime was so mind-boggling that even they, who had few qualms about sacrificing millions of Japanese lives for the sake of Japan's victory in the war, could not have comprehended the meaning, dimensions, and magnitude of the Holocaust.

#### Japan's Attitude to the Arab World<sup>2</sup>

In the 1940 Axis Pact's division of the world into spheres of influence, the Middle East was to be in the German sphere of influence, and thus Japan did not pay much attention to it. Oil produced in Arab countries could not, in any case, be used by Japan, simply because there was no way of getting it there. To the extent that there was any mention of the Middle East in the Japanese media during the war, some newspapers supported the Arab position on Palestine, saying that Zionism was a tool in the hands of Western imperialists and was designed to help the West control the Arab oil fields. None of the Arab states explicitly declared war on Japan in December 1941, but then they were not yet independent and thus could not. Syria and Lebanon won their independence in 1943 and 1944, and along with Egypt and Saudi Arabia remained neutral for some time thereafter. Only toward the end of the war was it indicated to several Arab states that they would obtain membership in the newly created United Nations Organization only if they declared war on Germany (which in any case was about to surrender) and Japan. Therefore, in March 1945 Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia declared war on the Axis powers, including Japan. This declaration of war did not obligate the Arab states to take any action, military or otherwise. It was mainly declaratory.

In the future, Japanese historians would not hold this against the Arabs. If during the First World War and immediately after it successive Japanese governments had expressed sympathy and support for Zionism, during the Second World War Zionism was described as an instrument in the hands of Western colonialism and imperialism. It is interesting to note that after fleeing from Iraq following the failure of the Rashid Ali Al-Kilani uprising against the British in April 1941, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el Husseini, who was expelled from Palestine by the British in 1937 and eventually found shelter in Iraq, escaped to Iran and with the help of an Italian diplomat and found refuge in the Japanese legation in Tehran where he resided from late August 1941 until October 1941. He eventually reached Germany via Turkey and Italy in late 1941. In February 1942, the Mufti was in Rome and proposed to the Japanese ambassador there that some of his radio broadcasts in Arabic produced by the Germans should be aired on Japanese radio channels to incite Muslims living in India, Malaya, and Indonesia against the British and Dutch. In his broadcasts from Berlin during the war, the Grand Mufti called on Arab and Muslim people, wherever they were, to support Japan. The broadcasts could have had some impact on Asian Muslims in India, Malaya, and Indonesia, but most of them had no short-wave radios, and thus never heard them. These broadcasts were not of much help to Japan, either. In 1942 a proposal that Japan join Germany and Italy in issuing a proclamation supporting independence for the Arabs and for India was opposed by Germany, which feared Japan's intentions regarding the oil-rich Middle East. Nothing came of the idea.

# The American Occupation and the Blurring of Holocaust Awareness in Japan

During the nearly seven years of American occupation of Japan from September 1945 to April 1952, the Japanese people were busy rehabilitating their devastated country, coming to grips with the defeat of their empire, rebuilding their destroyed cities, and attempting to reconstruct their shattered economy. They also had to confront the integration of over five million Japanese citizens, both soldiers and civilians, who poured back into the home islands from the vast regions of the former Japanese empire. These newcomers had to be fed, housed, clothed, and employed. The country's

moral and physical devastation did not leave the average Japanese citizen much time or peace of mind to wonder about the fate of European Jewry: they could barely come to grips with what their wartime leaders had done to their own country. For many years, the average Japanese person was unaware of what Japanese troops had done in Nanjing in December 1937, when anywhere from 100,000 to 300,000 innocent Chinese civilians were killed, wounded, raped, or tortured.

The Japanese war trials opened in Tokyo at the end of 1945 and lasted until late December 1948, much longer than the Nazi war trials in Nuremberg that lasted less than a year in 1945-1946. Unlike the Nazi war criminals, among them Alfred Rosenberg, the leading ideologist of the Nazis, who was executed in 1946, the Japanese war criminals were not charged with genocide. Perhaps this explains why the noted Japanese novelist Kenzaburo Oe (1935-), a Nobel Prize winner in literature, could later argue that Japan really never came to grips with the fact that it was a racist nation. It remains unclear even now whether the Japanese developed a guilt complex or guilt feelings, something that typified the Germans more than the Japanese.

In the early years after its defeat, Japan never considered paying reparations or restitution to the tens of thousands of Europeans whom it had victimized in the territories it had occupied, mainly in China and South East Asia. It is hard to find in the contemporary writings any sense of guilt, shame, or even embarrassment about anything connected to the "Great East Asia War" (Dai Toa Senso) or, as the Americans termed it, the Pacific War, or as many Japanese people put it, "that war." The key Japanese argument in both the war trials and the media was that any nation would have done what Japan did, given the circumstances Japan found itself in the late 1930's. As a rule, most Japanese people did not want to talk about the war, because they realized that there wasn't much sense in discussing a war that Japan had never had a remote chance of winning. Since the Holocaust was part of the legacy of World War II, they did not want to discuss it. On rare occasions, one can find the work of a Japanese scholar who attempted to make a clear distinction between Japan and Germany, its wartime ally. At least Japan had never carried out genocide, they argued, and therefore Japan had to be judged differently. As far as many Japanese people were concerned, the Holocaust was a European event, which did not take place in Asia and had no counterpart in Asia. Even the most brutal Japanese soldiers and officers, perhaps with the exception of some of those posted to China, never did to the people of the nations they occupied what the Nazis did to the Jews.

Later, when more Japanese scholars studied the Holocaust in greater depth, they were convinced that even the worst Japanese antisemites were never capable of doing to the Jews what the Germans did, and that even non-violent anti-Jewish sentiments were not as visceral of those that prevailed in Nazi Germany.

The American occupation authorities did everything they could to minimize publication in Japanese about the horrors of the war in Europe, and that included information on the Holocaust. The reason for the omissions may be quite simple—perhaps they were afraid that the Japanese would have asked them embarrassing questions: Why didn't you bomb Auschwitz? How about the rail lines leading there? Why didn't you stop the Holocaust once its dimensions became known? Why did you close the gates of your country to Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany and the countries it occupied, while we Japanese enabled almost twenty thousand of these refugees to reach Shanghai and survive the war there?

It can be safely argued that the American occupation authorities did nothing to inculcate among the Japanese the lessons of the Holocaust or to teach them about the horrors committed by their wartime allies. Part of the occupation ideology was that it was necessary to uproot Japan's feudal past, and some American officers may have wondered—not illogically—whether mentioning the Holocaust and its dimensions would elicit a response reminding them of the two atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the closing days of the war, which caused the deaths and maining of over 400,000 Japanese people over the following years. To their credit, Japanese historians refrained from stressing the Jewish origins of some of the key developers of the atomic bomb, key among them Robert Oppenheimer, Edward Teller, Isadore Rabi, Leo Szilard, Max Born, Emilio Segre, Eugene Wigner, Victor Weisskopf, Richard Feynman, and Eugene Rabinowitz. They did not mention Einstein's role at all, apart from his 1939 letter to President Roosevelt warning of the possibility that Germany was developing weapons of mass destruction and could thus win the war. Several years later, questions were being asked in Japan as to why the Americans had not used an atomic bomb against Germany. The questioners did not care to believe that the main reason was timing—the bomb had not yet been tested when Germany had surrendered in May 1945. Rather, they tended to believe that Japan, as an Asian nation, was the preferred target. They thus accused the Americans of racial motivations that led to the use of the two atomic bombs. It is no wonder, then, that the American occupation authorites never permitted the Japanese media

to publish information on the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their aftermath.

To their credit, those Japanese writers who did deal with the American occupation and its impact on Japan did not stress the role of a number of Jewish members of the military government who held key positions in the occupation and were instrumental in shaping its policies and above all in the writing of the MacArthur Constitution. Among them were Colonel Charles L. Kades (whose Hebrew name was Kadish), who coordinated the writing of the 1947 Constitution, and Beate Sirota-Gordon, who was mentioned earlier. Wolf Ladijinsky, a Columbia University graduate, was instrumental in shaping the land and agrarian reforms, which had a massive effect on Japan, ending tenancy, granting land to former tenants, and revolutionizing agriculture. Theodore Cohen was chief of the labor division in MacArthur's team and devised labor laws. Alfred Oppler dealt with legal and judicial reforms, and suggested that Japan create a family court system and civil rights office.

Another reason why the American occupation authorities rarely mentioned the Holocaust had to do with the new realities in East Asia. There was never an attempt to equate the Japanese with the Nazis. After 1947, the United States needed Japan's support because China was about to fall into the hands of the communists, and in June 1950 the United States became involved in the Korean War. The United States now urgently required the friendship and assistance of their World War II enemies Japan and Germany. The United States could argue that in both countries there had been a process of reforms and a transition to democratic regimes, but this would not be entirely accurate. While Germany did undergo a process of some de-Nazification between 1945 and 1949, there had barely been a start to a similar process in Japan, and those who were purged immediately after the war were back in business—and in government, politics, industry, and even education—barely two years after the war. In 1957, a leading politician, Nobosuke Kushi, a member of Tojo's wartime cabinet who was purged after the war, became Japan's prime minister.

Few Japanese people ever considered how Germany successfully rid itself of its Nazi past and became the democratic nation it is today. That achievement can mostly be credited to what was then the Western-oriented and -dominated Federal Republic of Germany, and not to the communist-controlled Democratic People's Republic of Germany. Germany made these changes by engaging in comprehensive nationwide educational programs which openly addressed and acknowledged Germany's responsibility for

the Holocaust. Germany undertook to create a vast and generous restitution system for the Jewish victims of Nazism and in 1952 signed a Reparations agreement with Israel. These policies have helped bring Germany back to the family of nations and earned it much respect in the international community. It also paved the way for the reconciliation between Jews and Germany and Germany and the State of Israel that few thought possible in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The reconciliation culminated in 1970 with West Germany's Chancellor Willy Brandt asking forgiveness on his knees at the site of the Warsaw ghetto. No Japanese leader has ever perfomed an act of this magnitude regarding Japan's actions in China and Korea. Japanese leaders, by contrast, found it very difficult even to admit to their country's use of the so-called "comfort women," mainly Korean and Chinese slaves who served as sex objects for Japanese soldiers during the war.

When the occupation ended in April 1952 and Japan was about to win back its sovereignty the Japanese government initiated steps designed to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. This did not derive from a desire on Japan's part to atone for the sins of their wartime allies, but rather from a sober desire to bring about normalization of ties with all United Nations member states and to improve Japan's standing in the United States, where Jewish power was still perceived to be paramount. The establishment of diplomatic relations and the opening of an Israeli legation in Tokyo in December 1952 did not prevent Japan from observing almost to the letter the strictures of the Arab economic boycott against Israel. This boycott came to an end only in the 1990's, following the signing of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty and the Israel-Jordan peace treaty, and the beginning of negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in the framework of what became known as the Oslo Peace Process. It is perhaps typical that during the first Gulf War (1991), when Israel was attacked by 39 Iraqi Scud missiles, there was no sense in Japan that it ought to help Israel, a victim of Iraqi aggression. A country that did aid Israel economically, politically, and morally was Germany, whose foreign minister even visited Israel in the midst of the war. Few wanted to remember that Germany had supplied Saddam Hussein with the chemicals used by Iraq to develop chemical warheads. Maybe the Scud attacks on Israel reminded some Germans of Auschwitz. Still, as far as Japan was concerned, while this was not just another war because it involved the flow of oil from Iraq to Japan, they could not yet publicly empathize with Israel.

A number of reasons can be considered for Japan's hesitance to align itself with Israel. Perhaps Israel was seen in Japan as an American ally. Then

too, perhaps Japan, as a pacifist nation, did not view favorably the emergence of Israel as a major military power possessing a large army capable of defending itself and reportedly developing its own independent nuclear capability. During a visit to Israel after the Six-Day war, a Japanese academic was heard to comment that "for centuries we Japanese were samurai, now merchants. For centuries you Jews were merchants, now samurai." It is not clear if this was said in criticism or in appreciation. During the second Gulf War (2003), there were those in Japan who said that America was once again engaging in war in Iraq to appease Israel due to the huge Jewish influence on the administration of President George W. Bush. Once again we see the motif of Jews who control the world through their control of the economy and media of the only superpower left in the world after the end of the Cold War. Once again there were accusations that the Jews were homeless and rootless, materialistic by nature, cosmopolitan and dangerous to the body politic, and always happy to foment wars.

# The Beginnings of Holocaust Awareness in Japan

Two events introduced the Japanese people to the horrors of the Holocaust. The first was the appearance of the Japanese translation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 1952, the same year that the American occupation ended. According to Haifa University scholar Rotem Kowner, the *Diary* sold several million copies, and it became a symbol of the horrors of war and man's inhumanity in general, though it did not become a source of identification with the plight of the Jewish people. Most importantly, *The Diary of Anne Frank* opened the gates for the publication of books and articles that dealt with the Jewish Holocaust. A new generation grew up in Japan that wanted to know more about why their country's leaders joined forces with Nazi Germany in the mid-1930's, when Japan became a party to the Anti-Comintern Pact and even more so in September 1940, when it signed the Axis Pact.

The second major event was the capture by Israeli agents in May 1960 of Adolph Eichmann in Buenos Aires, and later his trial in Jerusalem between April and December of 1961. The trial was covered widely by a number of Japanese correspondents who were dispatched to Jerusalem by their newspapers and who used their stay in Israel to describe the country, its people, Jewish history, antisemitism, and mainly the connection between the rise of

modern Israel and the Holocaust. In the ensuing twenty years, many works dealing with the Holocaust were translated to Japanese, and some became best-sellers. Among these were the works of Elie Weisel, Primo Levy, and Paul Cellan. The timing of the end of the American occupation of Japan, the Eichmann trial, and the growth of pacifist sentiments in Japan, accompanied by radical anti-American sentiments, led to an attempt to equate Hiroshima with Auschwitz. The attempt was unsuccessful in the long run: it became evident to a number of Japanese writers and historians that there was a basic difference between what happened in Auschwitz and what occurred in Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only in terms of the number of casualties but in other aspects as well. Some Japanese writers argued that Auschwitz was a one-time event that was over, while Japanese civilians continued to die of wounds caused by the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—in other words, it was still an ongoing event. Even so, no one ever accused the Americans of committing genocide against the Japanese. While the Japanese still recall the effect of the two atomic bombs on second- and third-generation victims (called hibakusha), they seem to ignore the long-term impact of the Holocaust on the huge number of Jews in Israel and elsewhere who survived that ordeal. Clearly, in spite of the fact that there is a Holocaust museum in Fukuyama near Hiroshima, it is impossible to draw any equation between what happened there and the Holocaust of European Jewry. A few Japanese also voiced the well-known argument that the Jews brought the Holocaust upon themselves because of their special character and inferior race.

#### Holocaust Denial in Japan<sup>3</sup>

From there the road to Holocaust denial was short. Some Japanese writers followed the path of Holocaust deniers in Europe. Among them, the schoolteacher-turned-writer Uno Masami (1942-), who published several best-selling books on the Jews and the Holocaust, stands out. The books sold millions of copies, and their titles are indicative of their content: *If You Understand the Jews You will Understand Japan* (1986), *The Economic Strategy of the Jews* (1992), and *The Hidden Empire* (1993). He claimed that the Holocaust was a fabrication invented by the Jews to justify the establishment of the State of Israel, the expulsion of the native Palestinian Arabs from their land, and the obtaining of reparations and restitution from Germany. On the basis of the same "myth," he stated, Israel later also received billions of dollars from the United States. Another claim he made

was that it was impossible to kill five thousand people a day with Cyclon B gas, which was used in Auschwitz. In general, he argued, Jews wanted to harm Japan because it was Germany's ally during the war. He claimed that in Israel the Holocaust took on a religious stature, immune from criticism, and was offended by the idea that anyone who questioned its existence was accused of being antisemitic. Influenced by the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, he argued that Israel was established by Ashkenazi Jews whose origins were in Khazar and not in Palestine, and therefore they should return to their place of origin in Central Asia. He and others quoted extensively from the works of such known Holocaust deniers as former University of Lyon professor Robert Fourisson and the British historian David Irving. Some researchers attach the rise and later the fall of Holocaust denial in Japan to radical anti-American feelings in that country. Despite these negative feelings, it was easier to blame the Jews instead of the United States, Japan's major ally, with whom it had a defense treaty and which was its major export target. The way to do that was to malign the Jews and to conveniently forget the efforts of Jacob Schiff and other Jewish bankers who had helped Japan eighty years earlier, and to take a swipe at the heads of the American economy and banking world, many of whom were Jews. It is interesting to note, however, that Uno Masami and others were ardent admirers of Israel, and he even visited Jerusalem. In this respect he epitomizes those who are antisemites but at the same time great supporters of Israel

Another affair that showed the extent of Holocaust denial in Japan was the publication of an article in the monthly magazine Marco Polo, fashionable among the new Japanese Yuppies. Published in January 1995, the article claimed that there was no evidence that Jews were murdered in the Auschwitz gas chambers, and stated that the Final Solution of Hitler was to settle Jews in Eastern Europe. The Holocaust, it argued, was an invention of the Allies. The article made use of the works of well-known European and even American Holocaust deniers. A storm broke out shortly after the appearance of the article, when a Tokyo Jewish community group monitoring antisemitic expressions in Japan decided to make this a test case but postponed action because of the Great Hanshin earthquake of 1995. Into the fray entered the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, the World Jewish Congress, and other international Jewish bodies. Their dilemma was not easy. If they threatened the magazine with the withholding of advertisements, they would only demonstrate the international Jewish organizations' vast control over the world's economy and their ability to gag those who

disagreed with them and didn't accept their interpretation of the events of the Second World War. This, naturally, would enable Japanese antisemites to claim that they were right and that the rootless Jews now threatened their freedom of expression. After lengthy discussions, the organizations decided not to remain silent. Among those who stopped advertising in the magazine were the German car maker Volkswagen and a number of Japanese firms. The editor of *Marco Polo* was fired, the magazine ceased to appear, and ostensibly the affair died down, but that didn't last long. Several publications in Japan began to ponder why the Jews were so sensitive about the Holocaust, and they published a number of articles on Jewish history and the Holocaust. Inevitably there were attempts to equate Auschwitz with Hiroshima, but that did not succeed any better than it had in the past.

In that same year, 1995, the religious body *Soka Gakkai* mounted an exhibition called "The Courage to Remember: Anne Frank and the Holocaust." The exhibition was shown in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Another matter of note was a series of articles in the popular weekly *Shukan Kinyobi*, in which two writers, one of Japanese origins and the other a Japanese man raised in Austria, attacked Japanese Holocaust denier Kimura Aiji (1937-) for a book he had written called *Disputed Points over Auschwitz*. He sued them for libel. A Tokyo district court initially determined that it was not competent to determine if indeed gas chambers had existed. Three years later, that very court published its final verdict, in which it rejected Kimura's claim for libel, saying that the International Tribunal at Nuremberg determined explicitly that Nazi Germany had indeed murdered vast number of Jews by gas in concentration camps. Japan recognizes this as a historic fact. This destruction of the Jewish people is known as the Holocaust, said the verdict.

Additional reasons for the negative portrayal of Jews in Japan in the 1990's had to do with the severe economic recession that Japan began to experience when the bubble economy collapsed in 1990. Japanese economists attempted to blame the United States for this development, and there were also references to the supposed secret unit 731, which was said to conduct biological tests on human beings in Manchuria, and whose commanders and scientists, at America's insistence, were never tried as war criminals. The Koreans raised once again the issue of the so-called "comfort women," Korean women who were forced to serve as prostitutes for Japanese troops during the war. This issue has finally been resolved in January 2016 reparations, wherein Japan committed itself to indemnifying those Korean "comfort women" still living. New revelations about the atrocities that had

ben committed by Japanese troops in Nanjing in December 1937 also led to indirect charges that Japan was being subjected to an internationally orchestrated attack for its behavior during the war. The death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989 also raised anew the issue of war guilt and responsibility.

A few Japanese historians still maintain an interest in studying the Holocaust, but it is no longer a major issue in the broad public debate. A Holocaust museum called the Fukuyama Holocaust Education Center the only such museum in Asia—was opened in Fukuyama, 50 kilometers east of Hiroshima, in 1995. Its founder and director, Pastor Otsuka Makoto, met with Anna Frank's father Otto when the latter visited Japan in 1965. The center was funded by Beit Shalom, a Kyoto-based Christian pro-Israel organization. It hosts mainly Japanese schoolchildren and overseas visitors. A growing number of publications in Japanese discuss the rescue of Jews by Japanese people during the war and make various attempts to distance Japan from Nazi Germany. Since the 1960s, there was ongoing interest in the Holocaust that may point to inner psychological needs of Japanese society. Japan still has trouble coming to terms with the atrocities its soldiers committed during the war. Perhaps one way of confronting these charges is to demonstrate that other nations—both Japan's allies and its enemies also committed atrocities: the Germans in Auschwitz and elsewhere, the Americans in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the British in Dresden. There remains in Japan to this very day the dichotomy noted throughout this book: great admiration toward Jews (associated with the rescue and protection of many Jews during the war), and fear of Jewish power. That discussion is now limited to several professional historians, whose major efforts are toward distinguishing Japan from its wartime ally, certainly on all matters that pertain to Jews.

In 2014, a Japanese man burned a number of copies of the *Diary of Ann Frank* in various Tokyo public libraries. This led to a vast outcry on the part of the Japanese people and resulted in the replacement of the books, paid for by the Israeli Embassy, by Israelis, and by ordinary Japanese citizens who pooled money in a public fund for the purpose. It was generally opined that the criminal was deranged.

### Japan's Relations with Israel

A detailed discussion of Japan-Israel relations goes beyond the scope of this book, whose main theme, of course, is Japan and the Jews during the Holocaust. Nonetheless, certain key themes should be mentioned. The ties that slowly evolved between the two countries, were initially and only partly indirectly influenced by the Japanese attitude to the Jews during the war and the complete absence of any guilt feeling on the part of the Japanese people as far as the fate of European Jewry is concerned, or for that matter any guilt feelings for the atrocities committed by Japanese troops in China during the Pacific War or the evils committed upon the Korean "comfort women." Japan's policy toward Israel, unlike that of many countries, was not in any way influenced by the Holocaust, since Japan did not feel a need to atone for the crimes committed by Nazi Germany.

It was noted in earlier chapters that Japan supported Zionism after World War I partly because it was still allied with Britain and thought it both morally right and politically correct to support the Balfour Declaration and the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in and later awarding Britain the mandate over Palestine. However, as Japan pivoted closer to Nazi Germany, it abandoned its support for Zionism in order to avoid angering the Nazis or their Arab allies, such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. The Japanese decision-makers also realized that Britain itself had turned against Zionism when it published the May 1939 White Paper which, if fully implemented, would have doomed the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. Now Zionism had become a tool of British imperialism. This change of attitude toward Zionism did not prevent Japan from helping thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi Germany.

In September 1945, at the same time that the armed struggle of the Palestinian Jewish community against the British mandatory regime began, the American occupation of Japan got under way as well. Japan, devastated and defeated, was not in the mood to follow events in Palestine and think about the struggle of the Jewish community in Palestine to gain independence, or about the attempts of Holocaust survivers to make their ways across the Mediterranean Sea to that country. The Japanese people were engaged in another struggle—a physical one for sheer survival. Even the war trials of Japanese war criminals that opened in December 1945 and lasted until December 1948 barely mentioned the Holocaust or the Jews, let alone not deal with them in depth: someone counted and discovered that the word "Jews" appears exactly 164 times in the more than 60,000 pages of the IMTFE proceedings. The autumn 1947 discussions in the United Nations General Assembly on the proposed partition plan for Palestine elicited little interest from Japan. Japan was still occupied, and had no independent foreign relations; it bore almost no interest for the United Nations in general and less for its involvement in the Palestine question in particular.

The establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, and the ensuing first Arab-Israel War were reported upon in the Japanese press, but there were no Japanese correspondents in Israel at the time and most of the reports came from news agencies.

Unlike the countries of Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, the British Commonwealth of Nations, and the United States, which all supported the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state, Japan during the occupation was not a member of the United Nations. Therefore, it did not have to take a position on the very sensitive issue of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. And there was no reason for it to do so. Japan was not yet dependent on Arab oil. It was evident in 1947 that many countries that voted in favor of the establishment of a Jewish state did so out of guilt feelings for what some of their populations had done to Jews during the Holocaust, but this was hardly relevant to Japan. A number of countries, notably the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and even some Latin American nations, may have harbored guilt feelings over closing their gates to Jews fleeing Nazi Germany before and during the war, but again this was not relevant to Japan, considering what has been discussed in this study. Some governments may have felt that if they gave the Jews a state of their own, some of the Jews in their own countries would immigrate to the new state, thus diminishing Jewish presence in their country and thus reducing antisemitism. This may have been antisemitism in reverse: "Let the Jews go to Israel and leave us alone." Years later a Japanese diplomat told Arab leaders that their country had nothing to do with the partition of Palestine and the ensuing 1948 war. At the same time, Japan could honestly tell Israel that it did not participate in the extermination of Jews during the war. On the contrary, it indirectly helped save some 40,000 Jews who took shelter Japan and the territories under its occupation. As a result, the relationship between Israel and Japan was not loaded with memories of the Holocaust, unlike Israel's relations with many countries in Europe, especially Germany.

## Recognizing Israel: Political and Economic Problems

In April of 1952, on the eve of the end of the occupation of Japan and the restoration of sovereignty, the Japanese foreign ministry dispatched letters to various countries, mainly United Nations members, in which it

announced its impending restoration of sovereignty and expressed its desire to establish diplomatic relations. This was part of the process of bringing democratic Japan back to the family of nations. In Israel this overture aroused a debate within the foreign ministry as to whether it should proceed to establish ties with Japan, a member of the Axis Alliance. As the same time, it could not be denied that Israel was in the midst of negotiating with West Germany for reparations and had already established full diplomatic relations with Italy, another Axis partner. Since 1948, Israel had established full diplomatic relations with Austria and opened embassies in most Eastern European communist nations, some of which, like Romania and Hungary, had actively collaborated with Nazi Germany to exterminate their Jewish population during the war. The decision to establish diplomatic relations with Japan was made by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, and was in line with his policy of expanding Israel's presence on the Asian continent. An Israeli legation was opened in Tokyo in December 1952. It was the first Israeli diplomatic representation on the Asian continent. Israel did not even demand reciprocity, and was satisfied with Japan dispatching a non-resident minister - plenipotentiary to Tel Aviv. Several years later, Japan appointed a full-time minister to Tel Aviv and opened a legation. In 1963 the level of representation was raised to that of embassies. Like all other nations represented in Israel, the Japanese embassy is in Tel Aviv and not in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel.

We have noted that the Eichmann trial received vast coverage in the Japanese media. It was through that coverage that, for the first time, more Japanese people began to understand what had happened in the Holocaust and to acknowledge that Israel had the right to speak for the entire Jewish people and was the country that absorbed the greatest numbers of Holocaust survivors. The Eichmann trial reminded the Japanese people of the trials of their own wartime leaders. The Tokyo trials were and remain highly sensitive in Japan, partly because the emperor was never tried for war crimes even though he approved all of the major moves and key decisions that led to the war. There was some public discussion in Japan on whether Israel had the right to kidnap Eichmann from Argentina, bring him to Israel, and try him for crimes that had not been committed on its territory on people who were not its citizens, and which had been committed years before Israel had become an independent state. Most Japanese writers agreed that Israel had the right to try Eichmann in Jerusalem.

The central issue in Israel-Japan relations until the late 1980's was Japan's almost total surrender to the Arab economic boycott against Israel.

The reason was obvious: Japan's growing dependence on oil and predominantly on Arab oil, which soon accounted for some 70% of its energy imports. Israel did not wish to deal with the matter directly, as the Japanese government argued that it could not compel Japanese companies to trade with Israel. Israel decided to leave the handling of the matter to international and mostly American Jewish organizations, such as the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League. This once again provoked the old canard about wealthy American Jews trying to dictate Japan's policy toward Israel and consequently to embroil Japan in serious tensions with the oil-producing Arab states. That, it was suggested, would endanger the country's economic development and could undermine its fragile democracy, pushing Japan back to the ultra-right-wing nationalism that had brought about its disastrous defeat in the Second World War.

Another issue that separated the two countries was their respective attitudes to nuclear weapons. These attitudes were shaped by the traumas experienced by both nations during the Second World War: the Holocaust for Israel and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for Japan. The two drew totally distinct lessons. Japan replaced its militaristic regime with a liberal democracy, renounced the use of war as a tool of national policy, and made a strategic decision not to pursue nuclear weapons. It swore that under no circumstances would it ever resort to employing nuclear weapons. Israel drew the opposite lesson. It too said "Never again," but in Israel's case that meant pursuing a nuclear option to ensure its existence and survival. The alleged bomb, which Israel has never confirmed possessing, became known as Israel's "insurance policy" or "the bomb in the cellar." Many Japanese writers on the left criticized this Israeli policy and saw in it a dangerous precedent that would encourage other nations in the Middle East to adopt similar insurance policies.

On the eve of the Six-Day War, many Japanese correspondents arrived in Israel. Some of them wrote of the possibility of another Holocaust and the abandonment of Israel by the rest of the world, a feeling that many Israelis experienced at the time. The pacifist –leftists in Japan, meanwhile, were terrified of another war, regardless of its causes, and argued vehemently over Israel's decision to pursue it in this case. Some left-wing writers even claimed that Israel was in any case a tool of American imperialism designed to thwart Arab nationalism. The swift Israeli victory in the June 1967 war only deepened fears in Japan over what some writers called Israel's unbridled nationalism, and led them to claim that Israel was the root cause of all the problems in the Middle East. Some stressed the special

ties between Israel and the United States and repeated the old conspiracy charge that presented Jews as bent on controlling the world. Only a few Japanese Christians were delighted with the unification of Jerusalem under Israel.

Relatively few Japanese people understood the connection between the Jews and their ancient capital Jerusalem and the Land of Israel, and few bothered themselves with the questions of why Jerusalem was a divided city between 1948 and 1967, and why one of the first acts of Israel after the Six-Day War was to effectively annex East Jerusalem and tear down the barriers that divided the city until then.

The next time Israel figured prominently in the Japanese consciousness was when three Japanese terrorists, members of the Sekigunha (the Japanese Red Army) carried out an attack at Lod International Airport near Tel Aviv in May 1972. The men arrived from Rome on board an Air France plane and retrieved automatic weapons from their luggage while it was still on the conveyer belt. They then opened fire and killed some twenty-three innocent civilians, most of them Christian pilgrims from Puerto Rico. One of the terrorists, Okamoto Kozo (1947-) from Kumamoto, was apprehended by the Israeli authorities. It turned out that he had trained in a terrorist camp in Lebanon run by the Palestine Liberation Organization. He was tried in Israel, and the trial was extensively covered by Japanese media. Some Japanese supporters even raised funds to help defray his defense costs. A few weeks later, the government of Japan dispatched a special emissary to Israel to express its apologies for the massacre and offer to compensate the families of the victims. Some Japanese leftists later criticized this humane act.

Several months later, in September of 1972, 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team were captured by Palestinian terrorists and murdered in the Munich Olympic Village following a failed attempt to rescue them. In a memorial service held in the Olympic stadium in their honor, Japan was represented by one athlete, while other countries were represented by their entire delegations. Japanese pacifists never ceased to remind the Japanese people that Israel was engaging in the development of nuclear capability, stressing that Japan was the only country that had ever been attacked by atomic bombs. A few mentioned the fact that the Japanese prime minister at the time of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Suzuki Kantaro (1868-1948), had rejected the July 26, 1945, Potsdam ultimatum calling for Japan's surrender before the bombs were dropped as unworthy of consideration. The two bombs forced the Japanese decision-makers to accept the

Potsdam Ultimatum and surrender before other Japanese cities were totally obliterated.

Japan came under massive pressure during the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, which was accompanied by an Arab oil embargo on countries that were deemed to either have diplomatic and economic ties to Israel or to support the Jewish state. The prevailing feeling in Japan at the time was that the United States, which two years earlier had established contact with the People's Republic of China without prior consultation with Japan, could never abandon Japan in favor of China. Now Japan was faced with a major problem: the Arab states demanded that Japan sever its diplomatic relations with Israel, as twenty-four African nations in fact did. Many in the Japanese government and business community were prepared to accede to the Arab demand, and Japan was on the verge of caving in. At the last moment it was deterred from doing so by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1923-), who feared that an isolated Israel would continue fighting even after a cease-fire was proclaimed between Israel, Egypt, and Syria. Continued fighting could undermine his new Middle East strategy, which called for a working cease-fire, the beginning of a partial Israeli withdrawal in the Suez Canal sector, and the lifting of the Arab states' oil embargo. Japan was torn, as it were, between Arab threats and American pressure. Kissinger explained that Japanese moves against Israel would harm sensitive American interests and could even damage Japanese-American relations. A face-saving formula was finally agreed upon: the Japanese Cabinet Secretary issued a statement in which Japan called for total Israeli withdrawal from territories captured in the Six-Day War, stating further that it did not recognize the Israeli occupation of these territories and did recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinians on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions. The only reference to Israeli rights was a call made to all parties to honor the territorial integrity of all nations in the Middle East.

As a result, Japan did not suspend its diplomatic ties with Israel. It now began to tread very carefully between the Arabs, Israel, and the United States. Japan-Israel relations were now seen as a function of Japanese-American relations. The policy of the Japanese government was supported by the industrialists, by the foreign and finance ministries, by MITI (Ministry for International Trade and Industry), by pro-Palestinian intellectuals and academics, and by anti-American elements. In 1976, the government of Japan permitted the opening of a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office in Tokyo, and five years later Arafat was invited to Japan as a guest of the Parliamentary League for Japan-Palestine Friendship.

### Relations after the Start of the Peace Process in the Middle East<sup>5</sup>

Since the late 1980's there has been a marked improvement in Israel-Japan relations. This is due to a number of major developments, among them the signing of the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty of 1979, a slight decrease in the importation of Middle Eastern oil to Japan due to its increased use of nuclear reactors to generate electricity, and the growing importance of the Israeli market for Japanese products, mainly automobiles. In the fall of 1987, a Japanese foreign minister paid an official visit to Israel for the first time since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. In February of 1989, Israel reciprocated with President Chaim Herzog representing his country at the funeral of Emperor Hirohito and later attending the coronation ceremonies of Emperor Akihito. That same year, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens visited Japan, but in a balancing act, Yasser Arafat was also invited, to parallel his visit. In April 1991, the Japanese car manufacturer Toyota lifted its ban on the sale of its cars in Israel, possibly due to the impact of the First Gulf War and massive American pressure. More Japanese officials and opinion-makers realized that to continue caving in to the Arab demands for economic boycott of Israel would anger American Jews, but to abandon the boycott efforts would anger the Arabs. The First Gulf War, in which Israel was hit by 39 Scud missiles without responding in kind, provided Japan with another reason to change its official attitude to Israel.

The serious economic crisis in which Japan found itself beginning in the early 1990's, with the bursting of the "bubble economy" that foreshadowed what would happen in the United States and other parts of the world in 2008, once again led to an outpouring of antisemitic feelings in Japan. We have discussed briefly the popularity of Uno Masami's books, which achieved huge success in Japan and sold millions of copies. These books found an echo in Japan's traditional fear of foreigners and animosity against America, and since it was assumed that the Jews ruled America, this distaste led to increased anti-Jewish feelings. However, in the 1990's it was more difficult that it had once been to convince Japanese intellectuals, academics, and journalists that the Jews were the root of all evil and were the people primarily to blame for Japan's deepening economic crisis. The Jews had never filled, and still do not fill, any signifanct role in Japan's economy. They were never part of any major Japanese conglomerates, while many Jews play key roles in the American and global economies. When matters

of economics arise in the Japanese media, mention is often made of the fact that during Bill Clinton's presidency (1993-2001) the American secretary of the treasury, its overseas trade commissioner, and chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank were all Jewish.

The 1990 economic crisis, however, was purely home–made, resulting from the collapse of the real estate market, the absence of regulation over banks that lent money to cover mortgages, and the corruption of some Japanese politicians. The connections between the large business conglomerates and the Japanese politicians who were funded by them was evident. It was also obvious that since Jews played no significant role in the Japanese media, universities, or political and cultural life, they could not be blamed for the current ills of Japan. The thrust of anti-foreignism was to to blame America, but since bashing America was not politically correct, the Jews were an easy, better-defined defined target.

Major events that took place in the Middle East following the First Gulf War had a vast influence on Japan-Israel relations. Among them were the Madrid Peace Conference of October 1991, the election of Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister of Israel in June 1992, the signing of the Israel-Palestine Declaration of Principles in September 1993, the evolution of what became known as the Oslo Peace Process, the signing of the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty in October 1994, the restoration of diplomatic relations between Israel and now the Russian Federation, and the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and India and between Israel and the People's Republic of China, both in January 1992. As part of the Oslo Peace Process, Japan became part of what was known as the Multilateral Negotiations Track, which was involved in discussing such issues as water, refugees, arms control and reduction, the environment, and economic development. Japan now wanted to play a growing role in international relations, partly because of its passive stand during the First Gulf War, to which its major contribution was 13 billion dollars to help cover the war's costs. This was referred to derisively in the West as "Checkbook Diplomacy," insulting Japan. The Western powers told Japan that if it wanted to play a more active role on the world stage and even be considered for a permanent seat in the Security Council, it would have to become more actively involved in international peace-keeping efforts and take a clear stand on the resolution of international conflicts, among them the Arab-Israel conflict.

The first Japanese prime minister to visit Israel was Muruyama Tomiichi, who was the official guest of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1994. This milestone visit was followed by Japan's decision to participate in Middle East regional projects, including the development of the Jordan River Basin in cooperation with Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. Foreign Minister (and future prime minister) Taro Aso (1940-) signed a number of agreements of that nature during his visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories in 2007. Japan's policy statement on Israel and the Palestinians issued on November 24, 2007, stated that it accepted the principle of two independent states living side by side whose borders would be along those of the pre-1967 Israel. The Palestinians, the policy statement said, must engage in face-to-face negotiations with Israel, while the latter was asked to freeze settlement-building in the occupied territories and to abide by United Nations resolutions on the matter. Japan also expressed support for the peace efforts of the Quartet (that is, the US, the UN, the EU, and Russia) and offered to assist the parties to the conflict in creating confidence-building measures. This statement reflected Japan's new Middle East policy, its attitude to Israel, and its constant attempt to steer a balanced course that did not exceed the framework determined mainly by the United States and accepted by the international community. Since then, Japan's relations with Israel have been on an even keel in spite of some shrill voices from the Japanese radical left and ultra-nationalist antisemitic right. Both countries have an interest in expanding their ties with cooperation in new spheres, particularly science and technology.

Another visible expression of Japan's warming relationship with Israel was the visit of Japanese prime ministers to Israel. Muruyama, as was mentioned, visited in 1994 as a guest of Yitzhak Rabin, and he was followed by Junichiro Koizumi in 2006 and Abe Shinzo in 2015. During his visit, Abe signed a series of agreements with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (1949-) dealing with scientific, economic, and cultural ties between the two countries. All of Israel's prime ministers since 1990 have visited Japan during their terms of office, including Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir (1914-2014), Yitzhak Rabin (1923-1995), Ariel Sharon (1928-2014), Ehud Olmert (1945-), Ehud Barak (1942-), and Benjamin Netanyahu. President Shimon Peres (1923-) was also a much-honored guest in Japan. By 2015, Israel-Japan relations were very cordial and the "forty wasted years" (1952-1992) were slowly forgotten.

#### Conclusion

And this brings us back to the central theme of this study: Japan and the Holocaust. Seventy years after the end of the Second World War, more and

more Japanese people are beginning to understand what befell European Jewry, the magnitude of the disaster that was inflicted upon the Jews by Japan's wartime ally. Do the Japanese people make the link between Israel and the Holocaust? Do they agree with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statement that "If the State of Israel is lost, the Jewish people are lost"? Do they understand that the existence of the Jewish people is conditioned upon the continued existence of the State of Israel?

Perhaps North Korea's growing nuclear development and nuclear weapons tests as well as its missile tests fired over Japanese territory, and the growing military might of the People's Republic of China might sensitize the Japanese people to Israel's fears of a nuclear-armed Iran, led by a Holocaust-denying regime, calling incessantly for the annihilation of Israel.

On the other hand, the global economic crisis that started in 2009 and hit Japan badly also spurred renewed theories about a global Jewish conspiracy that was aimed at either subjugating the entire world to Jewish rule or bringing about the collapses of rich countrys' economies, Japan's among them. While it was obvious that Israel could not be faulted for the economic slump of the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Jews, and especially American Jews who held senior positions in the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations or headed vast American financial conglomerates such as Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brothers, could once again become easy targets.

Did Japan learn anything from the Holocaust about the need for the Jewish people to have a state of their own? The response to this question seems to be positive. At a time when there are growing voices in the West calling for the de-legitimization and perhaps even for the dismantling of the State of Israel, arguing that its establishment was a historic mistake, few in Japan question the right of the State of Israel to exist as a separate, free, sovereign Jewish and Zionist entity. There is criticism of Israel's foreign policy on certain issues, such as settlements and the continued occupation of what are seen as Palestinian territories, but few people in Japan question Israel's right to exist.

Perhaps in the seven decades since the Second World War and the Holocaust, more people in Japan have come to understand what happens when an enlightened, progressive, and technologically and scientifically advanced people like the Germans of the 1930s falls victim to fanatic and even deranged leadership and allows it to carry out genocide. Japan cannot be immune to the almost daily calls emanating from Tehran calling for the destruction of Israel, stating that the country will be wiped off the map.

Increasing numbers of Japanese people are becoming aware that even an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement will not necessarily solve all of the problems of the Middle East, which include such issues as poverty, lack of education, the rise of Islamism and Jihadism, and the absence of democracy and rule of law, to name a few. In 2015 Japan felt the wrath of extremist Islamic fundamentalism when two Japanese citizens were beheaded by ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) fighters. Perhaps this more than any other event in recent years made more Japanese people understand that there are many other causes for the perennial unrest, tensions, and conflicts in the Middle East other than Israel.

Most Israelis hope that the decision-makers and shapers of public opinion in Japan will entirely disabuse themselves of the illusion that the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict will automatically lead to the resolution of all other regional conflicts. Perhaps the Japanese people have now learned that what befell Japan in the Pacific War was the direct result of their own leaders' policies with virtually no resistance from the Japanese people, whereas the Jews were the victims of a regime that championed an ideology of virulent antisemitism that not only justified persecuting the Jews but in fact sanctioned genocide. It is hoped in Israel that there are more responsible leaders in Japan who understand Israel to be the quintessential and only haven for the Jews, even for those who do not reside in it, as many Jewish leaders and individuals do. Perhaps they will better understand why Israeli and Jewish leaders often pounce on any expression of antisemitism not only in Europe but throughout the world—and that includes Japan as well. Combatting antisemitism and Holocaust denial is not only the duty of Israel and world Jewry, but the duty of all peace-loving people in the world, and that certainly includes Japan.

Beyond the typical relations that exist between Israel and Japan, two nations on the fringes of the Asian continent, there stands one basic fact that cannot be denied, and that has an enormous moral lesson: at the time of the greatest disaster that ever befell the Jewish people, the attitude of the government and basically the people of Japan towards the persecuted Jews under their control was by and large fair and even humane. At that time this fact was hugely significant and even today it is an event that the Jewish people will not quickly forget.