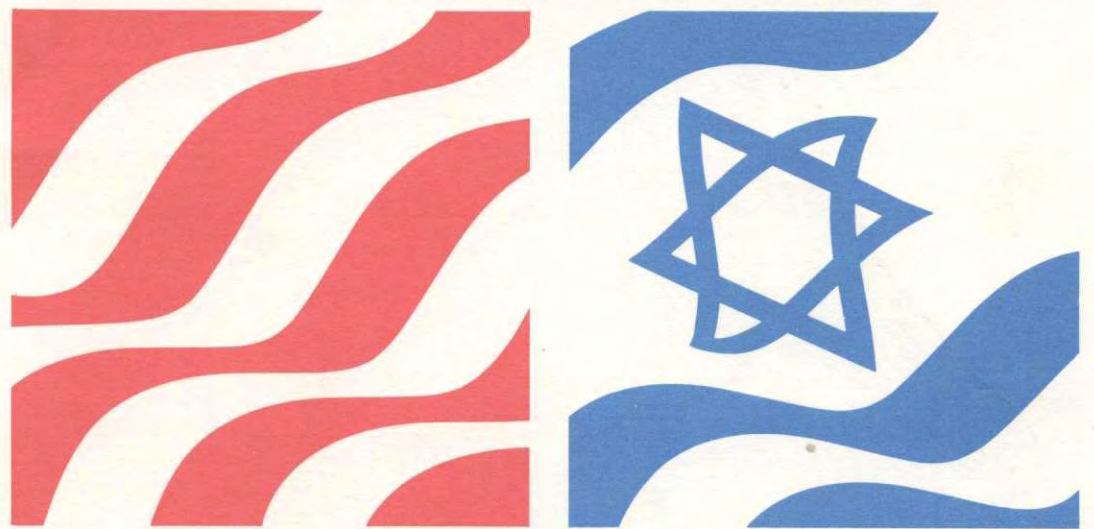


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PEOPLEHOOD AND PLURALISM



RELATIONS BETWEEN AMERICAN JEWS AND ISRAEL



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, Institute of Human Relations, 165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022-2746

**PEOPLEHOOD
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FOREWORD

American Jewish-Israeli relations have emerged as a priority issue for both of the world's two largest Jewish communities. Common concern for the future and vitality of the Jewish people has made close collaboration between us more vital than ever. In recent years, our experience has included some tensions and misperceptions as well as a determination on both sides to improve our capacity for joint efforts. It is imperative now to enhance our mutual understanding and devise practical programs for cooperation in responding to key challenges facing the world Jewish community.

To meet this challenge the American Jewish Committee established in 1986 a Task Force on American Jewish-Israeli Relations. Its charge was to review sources of both tension and creativity in our relationship and to devise a series of policy recommendations and program plans to enhance understanding and joint efforts. Prominent AJC members from around the country were appointed to this task force, which met several times in the United States and undertook a mission to Israel to discuss our emerging ideas with leading Israeli thinkers.

In addition to our national task force, over twenty AJC chapters throughout the country formed task forces that studied American Jewish-Israeli relations from a local angle and reported their conclusions to the national process. In this way, we were able to encompass the views on this issue of Jews living in different size cities and various regions.

Throughout this process, it was our intention not only to study but also to act, to produce not only an analysis of the situation but also a practical program for improving relations.

This publication contains the major products of our study and planning process. It begins with the policy statement outlining our major conclusions and recommendations for action that was adopted at the Annual Meeting of the American Jewish Committee in May 1988. Next is a paper by Gary Rubin, AJC program director and staff coordinator for the task force, outlining the historical background and current issues of American Jewish-Israeli relations. The publication concludes with a report of our mission to Israel.

AJC will now move to carry out the recommendations of our report through our program departments, our Israel Office, and our Institute on American Jewish-Israel Relations. We have a four-decades-long commitment to action in this field. We believe that adoption of this plan will bring our programs to a new stage of involvement and progress.

Sholom D. Comay, *Chair*
AJC Task Force on American
Jewish-Israeli Relations

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE STATEMENT ON AMERICAN JEWISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

Since the founding of the State of Israel, the American Jewish Committee has had a deep interest in relations between the world's two largest Jewish communities. Major events in this area include the landmark public exchanges between Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and AJC President Jacob Blaustein in 1950, the establishment in 1961 by AJC of the first office in Israel linked to a major American Jewish organization, and the creation in 1983 of AJC's Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations.

Several events in the recent past have raised concerns about American Jewish-Israeli relations. These include the Pollard affair, debates on where Soviet Jews should be resettled, the implications of proposed changes in Israel's Law of Return, and the restructuring of the Jewish Agency. Most recent and basic has been the role of American Jewry in responding to unrest in the territories and discussions of the peace process. At the same time, we are encouraged by recent signs of mutual desire to enhance American Jewish-Israeli relations.

In considering these major issues, a task force of AJC has, over the course of the past year, held intensive internal discussions, consulted with AJC chapters all across the country, and traveled to Israel to explore the views of leading Israelis on matters of deep mutual concern. We offer our conclusions as an interim report in an ongoing dialogue which we feel it necessary for our two communities to continue on a regular basis.

In our deliberations, two concepts emerged as key principles which structure our attitudes and program recommendations on American Jewish-Israeli relations: peoplehood and pluralism.

The Principle of Peoplehood

The relationship between Diaspora Jews and Israelis has been a subject of concern since the beginnings of classical Zionist thought in the nineteenth century.

Some classical Zionist concepts still enjoy wide acceptance by Israelis and American Jews. Both communities still see Israel as the major, if not exclusive, refuge for Jews in danger, and as a source of spiritual strength for world Jewry.

American Jews, however, tend to reject the classical Zionist concept of the impossibility

of secure Jewish existence in the Diaspora and the notion that Jews everywhere constitute a single political nation.

What does unite most Jews is a sense of peoplehood -- the idea that Jews everywhere are bound together by inextricable ties of mutual commitment and extended family obligation deriving from four millennia of Jewish experience and that we share a common destiny.

Peoplehood is more than a slogan. It expresses a deep sense of solidarity between American Jews and Israelis. American Jews feel an attachment to Israel beyond just an ideological affinity to a fellow democratic state. There is a fundamental feeling of connection of Jews to Israel. We share her pain in times of torment and her joy in times of triumph.

The American Jewish-Israeli relationship exemplifies this concept of peoplehood. The two communities are bound in a web of social, economic, philanthropic, religious and cultural ties. Though Israel is a sovereign state and American Jews a community within a pluralistic nation, the actions of one have a powerful impact on the other. American Jews' support for Israel is firm and constant, while Israelis care deeply about the state of American Jewry. We each conceive of ourselves as integral parts of a single people.

The Principle of Pluralism

The American Jewish Committee places a high value on pluralism as both an ideal and a practical principle.

Pluralism encompasses not only diversity and tolerance of various points of view but, more fundamentally, a sense that a society is healthy to the degree that differences within it are acknowledged, discussed, and valued.

We associate pluralism with our conception of a just society and of Judaism. We feel very close to an Israeli society that realizes, as Israel does today, the values of pluralism and democracy within the context of a Jewish State. To the extent that there are tendencies in Israeli society toward intolerance or undemocratic modes of behavior, we cannot escape being troubled by them.

Yet, it would be too simplistic to associate all American Jews with pluralism or to make facile comparisons between Israeli and American society. After all, Meir Kahane arose in an American context and much of the religious pressure to amend the Law of Return comes from ultra-Orthodox groups in the United States. Fundamentalism has affected Jews as it has other Americans. We need to be cognizant of shortcomings within our own community at the same time as we remain vitally interested in trends within Israeli society.

We also need to maintain a sense of realism in our relations with Israel. Too often we expect Israel to exemplify values and ideals such as democracy or justice which in the real world no state can invariably realize. Israel has great symbolic meaning for Jews the world over, yet we must not place a symbolic burden on her too heavy for any actual state to bear.

Moreover, any discussion of pluralism in Israel must take into account the enormous diversity of groups within Israeli society and the extraordinary security pressures on the State. That nation has undertaken the challenge of integrating Jews from over a hundred countries encompassing a wide range of ethnic and cultural traditions, of incorporating large groups with

religious orientations as diverse as ultra-Orthodox and militant secular, and conferring voting and civil rights on Muslims and Christians as well as Jews. Great difficulty will accompany policies which seek to address all these diverse elements within a single social framework.

Despite all these difficulties, Israel remains a vitally pluralistic society, and we identify with this aspect of Israeli reality. We have an intense interest in issues of religious diversity, civil rights, democratic education and the rights of Arabs, as well as the security needs of the State. In each instance, we support pluralistic approaches and oppose any movement toward intolerance or theocracy.

This principle grows out of our own experience as a minority and a beneficiary of American democracy. We know firsthand the necessity for tolerance and appreciation of difference. We associate these ideals with justice and seek to support Israelis who promote these values.

This principle holds not only for Jews but for Americans in general. Political support of the United States for Israel is premised not only on common strategic interests but also on the assumption that we are backing a free and democratic state. Indeed, the closeness of the values of our two nations and our two Jewish communities reinforce one another.

Pluralism also requires American Jews and Israelis to understand the deepest convictions of each community. While we might not always agree, we need to develop an understanding of each other's basic assumptions and self-perceptions.

Most Israelis believe that Israel constitutes the center of world Jewry, the primary place where Jewish destiny today is being fulfilled.

Moreover, Israelis have expectations of American Jewry. Just as Americans identify with a pluralistic Israeli society, so Israelis expect a firm commitment to Jewish identity and continuity and to the Jewish State from American Jews.

At the same time, Israelis must understand that American Jewry considers itself a viable and independent community integrated into the larger society and yet maintaining its ethnic and religious character. It is because we believe in the vitality and creativity of our Jewish life that we have formed and sustained that vast network of communal institutions to which we are so committed.

While American Jews and Israelis will not necessarily agree on these perceptions, pluralism requires that we approach them with mutual respect and understanding.

American Jews and Israelis are moving to a more mature relationship, even when progress requires some struggle. An important recent example that needs to be furthered is the change in the makeup of the Jewish Agency to reflect a greater partnership between Israel and Diaspora communities. Other policy issues in the relationship need to be approached with the same sense of candor and mutual concern.

Policy Issues

In light of these dual principles of peoplehood and pluralism, we support the following positions on issues now affecting American Jewish-Israeli relations:

- The Law of Return in Israel should not be changed to exclude Jews converted to Judaism by the non-Orthodox rabbinate. The Law was written in the aftermath of the Holocaust to express the organic nature of Jewish peoplehood. Its interpretation should remain inclusive rather than exclusive. Passage of proposed changes would reflect insensitivity to American Jews and constitute a serious step away from democracy and pluralism toward theocracy and intolerance. Such basic principles cannot be sacrificed to religious fundamentalism or political expediency.
- Dissent by American Jews from official positions of the Israeli government must be handled responsibly. The level of involvement in Israel inherent in the principle of peoplehood and the respect for diversity of views inherent in the principle of pluralism make predictable the emergence of diverse views on key matters of policy. American Jewish concerns should normally be raised first with Israeli officials, or with the Israeli public through media in Israel. Great sensitivity should be exercised in assessing the practical effects of any public dissent, especially on matters of security. Still, our commitment to Israel carries with it a responsibility to convey our opinions, publicly if necessary, though any statement of criticism should be placed within the context of staunch support for Israel.
- Policy toward Soviet Jewish refugees provides a good example of an issue on which each side must develop a clear understanding of the other. Israel considers it imperative for Soviet Jews to resettle there because of practical needs for increased population and because they leave the Soviet Union with visas for Israel. More fundamentally, Israelis see immigration as a confirmation of the very rationale of the State that it serve as a refuge for Jews everywhere. Most American Jews, on the other hand, support freedom of choice for Soviet Jews to go wherever they can find a haven from persecution, and feel an obligation to provide aid to fellow Jews who decide to settle in the United States. In response to Israel's concerns, we support Israeli efforts at transit points to persuade Soviet Jews to proceed to Israel rather than elsewhere. Indeed, we believe they should be encouraged to go there and we should promote improvements in such areas as employment and housing that would attract more Soviet Jews to Israel. But the ultimate choice of destination must be the refugees' and the principle of peoplehood requires that they be supported in their choice.
- The issue of Aliyah has at times created divisive disputes, with Israelis expressing deep disappointment at lack of American immigration to Israel and Americans arguing that promoting Aliyah undermines the integrity of the American Jewish community. As stated, we firmly believe in the viability of American Jewry. We also believe that it is possible to remove discussions of Aliyah from this ideological context and develop practical programs that will benefit both Israel and American Jews. Experience has proven that a significant time spent in Israel, for example as a student, temporary worker, extended visitor, or owner of a part-time retirement residence, has long-term positive effects on identification with Israel, sometimes leading to permanent settlement. Encouraging these extended visits can only enrich the entire Jewish community. If they result in permanent settlement, Israel will benefit. If, as in most cases, they do not, we will have gained American Jews more knowledgeable about Israeli affairs and more committed to Jewish involvement. We also have a responsibility as American Jews to assist in developing Israel as a more attractive place to live. To this end, we must become the business and professional associates of Israelis, volunteers in the building and enrichment of Israeli society and more frequent visitors and participants in Israeli life.

Program Implications for AJC

American Jewry benefits greatly from our ties to Israel. Jewish cultural life and our ethnic and religious identity draw much from Israeli sources. American Jewish schooling relies heavily on concepts and materials based on Israel. We need to continue and strengthen this relationship of enrichment.

At the same time, American Jewry has developed over many years resources in such areas as education, multi-ethnic cooperation, interreligious dialogue, civil rights, and voluntary organizational life which should be of great interest to Israeli society. Dialogues on these topics could enrich the lives of both communities.

Adoption of the principles and policies outlined above requires a coherent American Jewish Committee program to put them into action. AJC has practical experience in several fields of importance to Israel. In addition to the continued seminal work of our Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations, we believe AJC should adopt programs in the following areas, in priority order:

Institutional Programs

- AJC should step up its physical presence in Israel. We should go there more often, whether through missions of officers, board members, chapters or special projects on issues of pluralism listed below. Our new coordinating committee on Israel should promote these visits.
- We should enhance our efforts to communicate regularly and directly with the Israeli public in Hebrew through the Israeli press.
- The Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations now publishes a highly respected Hebrew newsletter for Israeli leaders on issues generally affecting American Jews. This project should be expanded to include specific AJC views and positions so that our concerns will be communicated directly to Israeli leadership.
- We should strengthen the programs of AJC's office in Israel in the areas of supporting pluralism and positive intergroup relations in Israeli society and American Jewish-Israeli relations.
- AJC's chapters should conduct regular internal and public meetings on American Jewish-Israeli relations and participate actively in missions to Israel.
- At the same time as we place new emphasis on involvement with Israeli society, we need to continue our program to maintain the special relationship that has developed between the Israeli and American governments, to the mutual benefit of each.

Programs on Pluralistic Concerns

- *Education:* Based on AJC's work on pluralistic education in the United States, we should conduct dialogues with practitioners of Education for Democracy in Israel to share our insights and learn from the experience of Israelis. We should also support groups in Israel promoting educational pluralism in the schools, the Army and other key institutions.

- *Religion:* Our work on intra-Jewish dialogues in the United States has placed the issue of Jewish unity high on AJC's agenda. We should extend this work by forming supportive relationships with various forms of Judaism in Israel. Materials we are developing for dialogues in America providing objective descriptions of various Jewish denominations' positions on several issues should be shared with Israelis. We should also bring the experiences and perceptions of groups in Israel to the attention of intra-Jewish dialogue groups we have formed in America.
- *Immigration:* Both Israel and the United States are committed to generous immigration. Both face the challenge of acculturating newcomers to mainstream society while preserving their unique heritages and talents. AJC has done much work in this area; we could both share our findings with Israelis and learn much from their experience. We should also develop close relations with Israeli immigration and acculturation organizations such as the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel.
- *Civil rights:* Israeli law is now considering new concepts in civil rights, which it must merge with its own legal traditions and its special security concerns. Dialogues with American Jewish organizations experienced in this field could prove helpful.
- *Jewish education:* In our programs on American Jewish education, we should promote the importance of instruction in Hebrew language and Israeli culture and history so that American Jews will be better able to understand and relate to Israel.
- *Volunteerism:* A vital society requires active and independent voluntary organizations dedicated to social and civic causes. Israelis have traditionally placed much emphasis on public-sector activities. Voluntary private organizations are now starting to develop on several matters of importance to Israeli society. We should reach out to these organizations and enhance ties between voluntary groups in Israel and American Jewry.
- *Breadth of contact:* Many meetings between Israelis and American Jews encompass only narrow parts of each community. We should aim to include Israelis of both Ashkenazic and Sephardic backgrounds, from all regions of the country, various ages, both genders, and different religious perspectives in our dialogues. We should also endeavor to present to Israelis a full picture of the diversity of American Jewry.
- *Business:* We should work with organizations such as the Committee on Economic Growth in Israel and the Israeli Forum that seek to promote business contacts between Israeli and American firms and investment opportunities for Americans in Israel. AJC chapters should serve as key meeting points for business-to-business activities.
- *Travel:* We should do all we can to promote travel to Israel, group tours, extended stays, part-time residential and retirement arrangements and visits by non-Jews as well as Jews. Physical presence of American Jews in Israel is the most concrete evidence of our commitment to her flourishing.

These principles, policy positions, and programs represent the conclusions we have reached after a year of reflection and dialogue. We aim to continue this process in both the United States and Israel so that we can continually explore, deepen and mutually enrich our relationship.

Adopted at the AJC Annual Meeting, May 13, 1988.

AMERICAN JEWISH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

History, Current Issues, and the Role of the American Jewish Committee

By Gary Rubin

American Jewish-Israeli relations, a topic that engages the intense interest of Jews in both communities, has a history that dates back a century to the beginnings of modern Zionism. Recent debates over who is a Jew or where Soviet Jews should be resettled are but the latest manifestations of an ongoing dialogue between American Jews and their European and later Israeli co-religionists. To understand present ties between the world's two largest Jewish communities, it is necessary to have some familiarity with the history of the relationship and the basic assumptions that each side brings to it.

As in most relationships, concern about the ties between American and Israeli Jews is greatest during times of tension. Since the founding of Israel, disputes involving religious authority, loyalty, political and financial obligations and the viability of Jewish communities in the Diaspora have generated much attention in the general and Jewish press. Yet an analysis confined to such disputes and their resolutions would distort the true nature of the relationship.

The one constant theme running through the history of American Jewish-Israeli relations has been the deep attachment of each community to the other. Indeed, the source of concern when differences of opinion do break out is the recognition on both sides that the two communities share a common destiny. However, it is necessary to understand the assumptions and self-perceptions of both partners if their relations are to proceed on a more enduring and mutually supportive basis.

Zionism

Zionism encompasses both a rationale for the State of Israel and a theory of the relation of Israeli Jewry to the Diaspora. It is made up of several assumptions, some of which are shared by Israeli and American Jewry, others of which are not. For Israelis, Zionism stems directly from the period of the systematic formulation of classic Zionist thought in the two decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century. The intellectual founders of the movement shaped their theories around five components:

Anti-Semitism: The early Zionist thinkers saw the Gentile world as unalterably anti-Semitic. In no country, in their view, could Jews become a part of the general society.

This conviction stemmed from more than theoretical assumptions. After a period of progress toward integration into Western European society in the mid-nineteenth century, Jews found themselves increasingly excluded from important social and economic positions by century's end. The Dreyfus trial in France in 1894, in which a Jewish army officer was found guilty of treason due to the perjury of his peers, signaled to many Jews, including Theodor Herzl, that they could not fit into even liberal Western societies. The pogroms and persecutions in czarist Russia after 1880 snuffed out any hope of Jewish advancement in Eastern Europe.

To be sure, assessments of anti-Semitism differed among Zionist thinkers. The liberal and Westernized Herzl believed that European countries would accept and promote Zionism as a reasonable solution to their "Jewish problem." Eastern Europeans such as Leon Pinsker and Ahad Ha'am (the Hebrew pen name, meaning "one of the people," of Asher Ginsberg), who experienced much more massive and violent attacks on Jews, believed that the outside world felt an implacable hatred for them. Any progress toward Zionist goals, in their view, would have to come from the strenuous efforts of Jews themselves and not from the goodwill of others.¹ Still, Herzl, Pinsker, and Ahad Ha'am were united in their conviction that Jews could not find acceptance in the countries of modern Europe.

Anti-Semitism has been a force behind Zionist ideology throughout the twentieth century. Rival nationalisms, culminating in war and Holocaust, proved to Zionists that Jews can find no haven in a hostile world save Israel. Discussing contemporary Israeli fiction, for example, Conor Cruise O'Brien finds the following theme: "The Holocaust is not an aberration. It is a vast paroxysm of deep-seated and apparently incurable disease: Gentile rejection of Jews. It is in that perspective that strong Zionists, and most Israelis, see the matter."²

Nationalism: Anti-Semitism proved a potent spur for Zionism, but it was not a sufficient condition in itself to ensure the movement's growth. After all, Jews had faced persecution for centuries, yet only in the later 1880s did it provoke a Zionist response. For this to happen, anti-Jewish feeling had to combine with another factor, the upsurge in nationalism.

Nationalism, with its emphasis on "ethnic identity, self-determination and the idea of the nation-state," took hold all over Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century.³ At first, it was a force inclusive of most of a country's inhabitants, and Jews could legitimately aspire to share in the newly emerging national consciousness of their countries of residence. After a few decades, however, it began to focus on race and the notion of ethnic homogeneity, thereby excluding Jews and other minorities. As Alan Dowty has noted, "one could not convert to a new ancestry."⁴

The choice left to Jews wishing to fit into the spirit of the times was to develop a nationalism of their own. "Stripped of the right to share in the mystic essence of the 'national soul' of Russia or Poland, or Romania or the Ukraine," Amos Elon writes, "Jews preserved their dignity by insisting upon the singularity of their own national archetype."⁵ Zionism was the result.

The nationalistic strain in Zionist thinking varied among different writers. Herzl's was essentially a rational nationalism whose logic other nations could recognize and whose goals they could support. This belief underlay Herzl's strategy of meeting with international leaders to persuade them to support the establishment of a Jewish homeland. Ahad Ha'am saw nationalism in much more mystical terms. Influenced by German romantic philosophers, he conceived of a national quasi-biological will-to-live, which in the case of the Jews he identified with moral idealism.⁶

What these thinkers had in common was the identification of the Jewish people everywhere as one nation. No matter where they lived, Jews could never assimilate to other cultures. They had to build their own movement based on their national identity. It was even hoped by many that, once asserted, nationalism would make Jews essentially like all other nations and would therefore end anti-Semitism by conferring on them a "normal" status in the world.

Refuge: Whatever the ideological disputes over nationalism or relations with other groups, one stark fact remained evident to all Zionists: an increasing number of Jews needed a refuge since conditions in their countries of residence were steadily deteriorating.

Many Eastern European Jews were spurred to Zionism by the resurgence of pogroms and persecution after the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II. No longer could they hope for a safe refuge in Russia. The first of the great migrations to Palestine began.

Still, most Russian Jews fled not to the Holy Land but to the "Golden Land." Over 2 million entered the United States between the czar's assassination and the years immediately following World War I. Jews who needed a refuge had found one, it seemed, in America, not Palestine. •

But the American refuge proved unreliable. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, a nativist movement arose that charged new immigrants with stealing Americans' jobs, bringing strange religions and cultures into the country, and threatening its sense of unity. Most alarmingly, these restrictionists borrowed from European nationalist theories in claiming that Jews and other East Europeans were racially unfit to contribute to American society. Their agitation reached its climax with the passage of immigration legislation in 1920 and again in 1924 that effectively barred Russian and Polish Jews as well as other non-Western Europeans from entering the country. The American haven⁸ closed down -- not even refugees from the Holocaust could penetrate it -- for over four decades.

Subsequent years demonstrated the awful price Jews were to pay for lack of refuge. Holocaust survivors could find nowhere to go in large numbers, including Palestine when it was under British control, until the founding of a Jewish state. North African and Ethiopian Jewry were also rescued by Israel and would likely still live in danger today if not for the existence of a Jewish state. Refuge is a critical component of Zionism, and one that enjoys the support of nearly all Jews.

Spiritual Center: Judaism aspires to more than physical survival. It is also a culture and a way of life. Early Zionists saw Palestine not merely as a refuge but as the locus of a thriving community of ideas that would revitalize the Jewish spirit through renewal of the Hebrew language, promotion of the dignity that would come from working the land, and the development of a just and vital society.

Many Zionists shared this vision, but chief among them was Ahad Ha'am. Of all the early thinkers of the movement, Ahad Ha'am was least anxious for mass Jewish migration to Palestine. Jews had put up with anti-Semitism for centuries in countries where they lived and could continue to do so. What was critical for him was the establishment of a spiritual center of intellectually and culturally committed Jews in Palestine that would renew Jewish life for the masses in the Diaspora. Critical to Ahad Ha'am was not the size of the settlement in the Holy Land but its quality. A well-organized elite there could provide the inspiration to save Judaism as a community of ideas and values.⁹

This approach anticipated many of the debates of later Zionism. For all his pessimism about relations with Gentiles, Ahad Ha'am envisaged long-term Jewish settlement in the Diaspora to be spiritually renewed by a Jewish center in Palestine. This provided a model for continuous Jewish residence in other countries as opposed to the call by practical Zionists for mass movement to Palestine. American Zionist thinkers were to elaborate on this theme as a rationale for maintaining permanent Jewish communities outside of Israel.

Ideology: To Jewish intellectuals, especially in Eastern Europe, Zionism represented more than a quest for physical security or spiritual renewal. The society they aimed to build in Palestine would embody the idealism of their age.

Primary among the ideologies embraced by the new Zionists was socialism. In Russia at the turn of the century, the enemy was seen as capitalist repression, and opposition to it was incorporated into many new movements of the time, including Zionism. Many of the early leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine came from this background, and they dominated Israeli public life for decades.¹⁰

The other prominent Zionist ideology stemming from its origins in Eastern Europe was Orthodoxy. Most Orthodox Jews rejected Herzl and his goals because they believed redemption and the return to Zion would happen miraculously through God's intervention. Conversely, most of the early Zionists were secularists. A small group of Orthodox Jews, however, saw the possibility of merging religious and nationalist goals and, indeed, perceived this synthesis as necessary for the unity of the Jewish people. They founded the Mizrahi movement, which continues to wield influence in Israel today.¹¹ These various components of Zionism are of more than historical interest. They help explain differences in perspective of contemporary Israeli and American Jews. Many Israelis continue to adhere to all five points as critical to Zionist ideology in the present. Americans tend to stress Zionism as refuge and cultural center, while placing less emphasis on anti-Semitism, nationalism, and ideology. This approach has deep roots in American Jewish history.

American Versions of Zionism

In the United States, Zionism adapted to the norms of American culture. While European immigrants sometimes attempted to establish Zionist groups in the New World on the same principles they had learned in the Old, their efforts were overtaken by a group of American Jewish leaders who steered the movement to compatibility with dominant social norms. This meant rejection of European Zionist assumptions about Jews as a separate nation and Gentiles as implacably anti-Semitic and a new emphasis on the practical building up of Zion as a refuge for Jews in danger.

Early attempts to establish Zionism in the United States met with great difficulty. Leadership of the movement tended to derive from new immigrants who had little prestige in the social or organizational environment of the new land. Even their newcomer peers were more interested in socialism and trade unionism, which had an immediate impact on their lives, than in Zionism, whose concerns seemed remote.

Just before World War I, this changed for two reasons. First, war made communication among Zionist activists in various parts of Europe extremely difficult, forcing Americans to assume much of the leadership of the movement. Second, Louis Brandeis, the prominent lawyer, Progressive, and confidant of President Wilson, agreed to become head of the Zionist movement,

lending it a prestige and rootedness in the larger culture that it had previously lacked. Brandeis articulated a Zionist platform that conformed to the ideals of the American Progressive movement of which he was a key leader. Major points that he emphasized included:

- The economic development of Jewish settlements in Palestine would be a primary Zionist concern, just as for American Progressives the economic development of American small businesses in urban centers stood out as a key aim.
- Jewish Palestine would embody the ideals of social justice, freedom, and independent economic organization that were cherished by American Progressive activists.
- The structure of the U.S. Zionist movement would conform to rational organizational principles, with a strong executive and adherence to common goals among the movement's chapters and members. This concern derived from the "scientific management" movement popular in America in the early twentieth century.
- The Zionist movement would be based on democratic rather than elitist principles.¹²

Brandeis and his associates sought to reformulate Zionist activities along these lines. During World War I they fought for the convening of a democratic congress of American Jews to formulate Jewish aims in a peace settlement and, after prolonged negotiations, secured the participation of reluctant establishment groups such as the American Jewish Committee in this plan. They also created a centralized structure for the Zionist Organization of America and focused its program on fund-raising and building viable Jewish settlements in Palestine. After Brandeis resigned his official connection with the ZOA due to his appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, his group faced much opposition from rank-and-file Eastern European immigrants who wanted a more nationalistically oriented organization. Brandeis and his supporters prevailed, though not without considerable struggle.

Perhaps the clearest example of a characteristically American Zionist organization is not the ZOA but Hadassah. Led by Henrietta Szold, it adopted classically American Progressive positions. Hadassah did not focus on political or ideological debates on the nature of a Jewish state or homeland. Rather, it concentrated its energies on practical activities, especially the establishment of well-organized health services in Palestine¹³ -- a program that appealed to American-born, college-educated, social-work-oriented women.

Several points of dispute emerged between American Zionists guided by Brandeis and Europeans following the lead of the Russian-born English Zionist Chaim Weizmann:

- During World War I, Weizmann publicly and vigorously pushed the British government to commit to establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Brandeis used his influence to the same end with President Wilson but in a much less vocal way. In part, this was because Zionist aims fit in with British imperial ambitions in the Middle East, which allowed Weizmann to advocate his position strongly, while American interests in the region were more ambiguous. But the difference also established Weizmann as a more open and aggressive advocate for the Zionist cause than his American counterparts.
- After the war, Americans and Europeans disagreed on priorities in supporting Jewish settlement in Palestine. Europeans wanted to promote a full range of activities, including education, cultural expression, and economic development, while Americans pushed for a more narrow focus on practical settlement, especially health-related activities.

- European Zionists endorsed building up support from Jewish communities throughout the world through a program of raising Jewish nationalist consciousness in the Diaspora, while the American wing vigorously opposed this program as a violation of their national identity as Americans.
- European Zionists considered all funds raised for the cause as a single resource for the Jewish people, while Americans insisted on strict accounting procedures to prevent the commingling of invested and donated funds.

In short, the European Zionists, personified by Weizmann, stressed the nationalistic and cultural aspects of the movement and vocally promoted political objectives. The Americans, who followed Brandeis, rejected Jewish nationalism and focused on practical and fund-raising activities for a Jewish refuge in Palestine. They supported a Zionism that was fully compatible with their American identity.

Analysts have differed in their assessments of the development of American Zionism. The Israeli sociologist Yonathan Shapiro sees it as a truncated movement in which Americans compromised the heart of Zionism because it clashed with their aspirations to acquire status and respect in the New World. American Zionists' insistence on fiscal responsibility and proper organization and their disavowal of nationalism reveal, according to Shapiro, a willingness to jettison Jewish values in conflict with the general culture. "In order to adjust to American culture," he concludes, "the status 'Jew' had to be restricted. A new status, that of 'American,' took over many of the rights and duties which belonged to the Jewish status in the old country."¹⁴

Quite another view is expressed by the American historian Melvin Urofsky. He characterizes the American version of Zionism as a successful synthesis of Jewish and American ideals. Indeed, he argues, Zionism would be impossible as a significant movement if it clashed with leading values of American society. Brandeis's achievement lay in his adaptation of Zionism so that American Jews could participate meaningfully and constructively. Far from compromising the movement, he strengthened it by providing for it a majority-culture context. "Brandeis made Zionism acceptable to American Jewry," Urofsky argues. "His emphasis on practical work in the rebuilding of Zion gave American Jews the concrete task they needed, the one way they could transform a Zionist philosophy into terms relevant to them."¹⁵

While Brandeis transformed Zionist organization, religious leaders such as Mordecai Kaplan focused on providing a spiritual rationale for American Zionism. Writing in 1934, Kaplan argued, "It is a fact that the Zionist movement has brought about a renaissance in Jewish thought and activity and has helped to render Jewish life creative." He argued for the importance of a center for Jewish life through "the only medium through which adequate expression is possible to any civilization -- a land of its own." The full flowering of Jewish culture -- Kaplan's ultimate goal -- was possible only if it could draw on the strength of the Holy Land. "All Jewish activity throughout the diaspora which bears a constructive character and has in it the promise of permanence derives from the inspiration of Palestine." Kaplan's distinctively American version of Judaism adopted wholeheartedly the core Zionist concept of Israel as spiritual center.¹⁶

Events both without and within the Jewish community strengthened American Zionism in the 1930s. The anti-Semitism of Hitler's Germany coupled with the closing of doors to Jewish refugees all over the world, including the United States, made the establishment of a Jewish refuge a matter of urgent necessity. At the same time, the British governors of Palestine,

under Arab pressure, were increasingly restricting Jewish immigration and backing away from the pledge Britain had made in 1917 to establish a Jewish homeland. Non-Zionists, who supported Jewish settlement in Palestine but not a state, joined with Zionists in this period to form the Jewish Agency and raise funds for Jews developing the land. Though many struggles took place over control and distribution of funds, a consensus on behalf of supporting settlement developed.

Zionists in the 1940s felt emboldened to go further. Meeting in 1942, four major Zionist groups adopted the Biltmore Program, which called for the formation of a Jewish fighting force in Palestine under its own flag and the creation of a Jewish commonwealth. It also called on all Jewish groups to meet to endorse this program. After much hesitancy, especially on the part of the American Jewish Committee, an American Jewish Conference convened in 1943. Though a compromise was attempted there between Zionists and non-Zionists, the Conference, under the strong influence of Abba Hillel Silver, endorsed the Biltmore Platform and called for a Jewish state, causing the American Jewish Committee to withdraw. Still, the Committee continued to support Jewish settlement in Palestine and, after a United Nations commission recommended partitioning Palestine into Jewish and Arab sectors, accepted the idea of a Jewish commonwealth. In the aftermath of the war and the Holocaust, with the single exception of the American Council for Judaism, a consensus in support of Israel took hold among American Jews.¹⁷

Just as Weizmann could not have persuaded Britain to support a Jewish national home in Palestine if that goal had not advanced British interests, American Zionists could not have achieved their program without the backing of non-Jewish fellow citizens. Recognizing the necessity for broad-based endorsement of their movement and the sympathy created by the Holocaust, they launched in the late 1940s a campaign that successfully reached "non-Jewish clergymen, educators, labor spokesmen, and local, state and national political leaders, including 80 percent of the American Congress."¹⁸ As always, Zionist activity had to fit into a supportive cultural environment.

This has remained a central organizing principle of American Zionism ever since. In supporting legislation on foreign aid or arms sales or in endorsing pro-Israel candidates for public office, American Jewish groups have always stressed the interests of the United States. The notion of Israel as a compatible democracy or a strategic asset in the region lies at the core of American advocacy on her behalf.

This stance has deep roots in the general Jewish population. Sociological studies of the Jewish community conclude that concern for Israel is now one of the "principal means by which American Jews express their Jewish identity."¹⁹ Intense interest in and advocacy on behalf of Israel, which have increased dramatically since the 1967 Six-Day War, remain solidly within an American context. American Jews "are nearly unanimous in denying any contradiction between their pro-Israelism and their American identities."²⁰

In short, Zionists in America chose those elements of original Zionist philosophy which fit into their culture. They rejected the notions that anti-Semitism would prevent the integration of Jews into any host society, that Jews constitute a separate nation, and that ideological socialism forms a key component of Zionism. They embraced the concepts of Israel as a refuge for Jews in danger and a spiritual center for the regeneration of Jewish culture. Though it would shock the founders of the movement, Zionism has become a mode of expression of Americanism.

The American Jewish Committee and Zionism

The American Jewish Committee has always played a special role in discussions of American Zionism. Representing the most acculturated segment of the Jewish community, it has consistently insisted that all Jewish actions regarding Israel conform to the standards and values of American society. As Zionists tried to rally American Jews to their cause, it became increasingly important to them to involve AJC at least in their fund-raising and support activities, for without it they could not claim to speak for all major segments of American Jewry. AJC used its role as confirmer of the consensus to exert a powerful influence on the evolution of activities on behalf of Palestine and Israel.

In the World War I period, most AJC leaders viewed the growing Zionist movement in the United States with some suspicion. They feared that promotion of a Jewish state would detract from the status of Jews as Americans. Nevertheless, even in this early period, they supported the fledgling Jewish settlement financially. When the war threatened to cut off European funding for Palestine, AJC leaders arranged for a special free-loan fund to promote Jewish enterprises there. Many also joined the boards of newly established institutions such as the Haifa Institute of Technology and the Bezalel Arts School.²¹

The announcement by Britain of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 promising a Jewish homeland in Palestine made it necessary for AJC to issue its first official pronouncement on the Zionist idea. Committee leadership reacted to the Declaration with mixed feelings. As Naomi Cohen describes their response, "Grateful that England and France sanctioned Jewish settlement in Palestine, it remained wary of the phrases 'a national home' and 'Jewish people.'"²²

AJC issued a statement welcoming the Declaration "with profound appreciation" and pledging support to those "who seek to establish in Palestine a center for Judaism for the stimulation of our faith, for the pursuit of development of literature, science and art in a Jewish environment, and for the rehabilitation of the land." At the same time, the statement noted, "the Committee regards it as axiomatic that the Jews of the United States have here established a permanent home for themselves and their children."²³

This statement established the classic non-Zionist position which AJC was to follow for the next three decades. It rejected both anti-Zionism, the opposition to any Jewish settlement in Palestine, and Zionism, the movement for a Jewish state. It sought on practical grounds both to support Jews in Palestine and to affirm the rootedness of Jews in the United States.

Through the 1920s and 1930s AJC followed this strategy consistently. After extensive discussions between AJC leaders led by Louis Marshall and Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, the Committee participated in 1925 in the formation of the Palestine Economic Corporation and in 1929 in the enlargement of the Jewish Agency to include both Zionist and non-Zionist supporters of Jewish settlement. During this period, AJC also vigorously petitioned the British government to allow free Jewish immigration into Palestine and to resist Arab pressure to curtail Jewish entry.

The early 1940s was a time of growing support for a Jewish state. Early in this period, AJC leaders held a series of discussions with Zionist groups aimed at working out an agreement to support a Jewish commonwealth while renouncing the idea of Jewish nationalism. These discussions broke down, however, because of both internal opposition in AJC to the idea of a Jewish state and the decision taken by American Zionists in the Biltmore Conference of 1942 to move on their own toward statehood. In 1943, AJC issued a clarification of its views in

which it reaffirmed "our deep sympathy with the desire to cooperate with those Jews who wish to settle in Palestine" and its conviction that this could best be accomplished not through a state but by putting Palestine under an international trusteeship responsible to the United Nations. This statement did not satisfy anti-Zionists among AJC's membership, who left to form the American Council for Judaism, or those pushing for a Jewish state. It did reaffirm AJC's commitment to the practical building of Jewish settlement.²⁴

Later that year, AJC was invited to participate in an American Jewish Assembly on issues relating to Palestine. AJC joined after the title of the meeting had been changed to American Jewish Conference so that it would not appear to be a legislative body acting on behalf of all of American Jewry. AJC hoped that the Conference would reach a reasonable agreement with non-Zionists on a plan for developing Palestine but instead it vigorously endorsed the concept of a Jewish state. AJC withdrew from the Conference despite stinging criticism from other Jewish organizations and continued its independent efforts to promote Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine.²⁵

The desperate conditions of Jews in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East in the middle and late 1940s forced a reconsideration of this position. Britain remained adamant in restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine and Arab pressure reinforced this position. The U.S. government and the United Nations were moving toward acceptance of a partition plan that would place part of Palestine under Jewish rule. After being assured of State Department support for the plan, AJC endorsed partition and then worked closely with the Jewish Agency to push for United Nations endorsement.

AJC's support of partition was an important moment in the history of the struggle for the Jewish state. Its endorsement confirmed an American Jewish consensus on the need for a state. As Dean Acheson, later U.S. secretary of state, noted, "A great Jewish organization which had not committed itself to the ideology of statehood could render a great service by supporting the partition plan."²⁶ AJC's independence made more credible its encouraging the Truman administration to stick to its advocacy of partition and then to recognize the State of Israel.

Once Israel was established, AJC moved in two directions. First, the Committee worked to assure an adequate level of economic aid for Israel, from both private and public sectors in the United States and from the Federal Republic of Germany in the form of reparations. It also sought to gain support for the defense needs of the state, to combat the Arab boycott of Israel, and to maintain ties of cooperation between Israel and the United States.²⁷

Second, it placed special emphasis on relations between Israel and American Jews. In welcoming the establishment of the state, AJC president Jacob Blaustein declared, "Citizens of the United States are Americans and citizens of Israel are Israelis ... just as our government speaks only for its citizens, so Israel speaks only for its citizens."²⁸

To clarify this relationship, Blaustein went to Israel for discussions with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. The results of their meetings were considered at the cabinet level in Israel and then made public at a landmark official meeting. Ben-Gurion stated, "The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America." Moreover, he declared, "Any weakening of American Jewry, any disruption of its communal life, any lowering of its sense of security, any diminution of its status, is a definite loss to Jews everywhere and to Israel in particular."

In response, Blaustein stated, "For hundreds of thousands in Europe, Africa and the Middle East [Israel] has provided a home.... In all Jews it has inspired pride and admiration...." At the same time, it needed to be understood that "American Jews vigorously repudiate any suggestion or implication that they are in exile.... To American Jews, America is home." Future relations between the two communities need to be built on "the preservation of the integrity of the two communities and their institutions." In the years following the statement, concern was raised by some high-ranking Israeli officials questioning the legitimacy of continued Jewish residence in the Diaspora. This led Blaustein and Ben-Gurion to reaffirm their statements in 1961.²⁹

AJC also took a deep interest in democracy and pluralism in Israeli society. It expressed strong reservations about Israel's nationality law which provides Jewish immigrants automatic citizenship, since it regarded this provision as undemocratic. It also supported integration in Israeli society for Jews from Arab lands and civil rights for the Arab minority. In addition, AJC consistently criticized the religious monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate on matters of personal status and fought measures to abridge religious pluralism.³⁰ To promote these interests and inform Israelis about American Jewish concerns, AJC established an office in Israel in 1961.

These positions, established at the beginning of Israeli statehood, remain the major bases of AJC's program today. The Committee's founding of the Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations in 1982 grew out of its long-standing interest in furthering understanding and constructive ties between the two communities. Its concern for pluralism forms a mainstay of its program in both Israel and the United States. It continues to advocate support for Israel with both Congress and the American public. It also maintains its independence of action; it never adopted full membership, for example, in the Presidents' Conference of Major Jewish Organizations.

The issue of Zionism no longer divides American Jewry. The Arab-Israeli wars, especially of 1967 and 1973, and the notorious canard that Zionism is racism propagated by the United Nations, have spurred significant organizational efforts to defend Israel. Maintaining the viability of the state and its economy, service network, and culture forms a major priority for AJC and other Jewish organizations.

The Committee's current support of Israel is consistent with its history. AJC, along with most American Jews, rejects the classic Zionist concepts of Jews as a separate nation and the impossibility of overcoming anti-Semitism in other countries. It does much to advance the notions of Israel as a refuge and cultural center. In short, the Committee's commitment to Israel's security is irrevocable and for many members is a major ingredient in their Jewish identity. But it also maintains that the American Jewish community is creative and viable and that Jews have a positive future in the United States.

Current Discussions on American Jewish-Israeli Relations

Recent discussions have narrowed somewhat the gap in understanding between American and Israeli Jews, but differences in perspective remain. At times, especially in periods of tension, these differences find sharp expression. In responding to the Pollard espionage affair, for example, Israeli political scientist Shlomo Avineri invoked classic Zionist concepts to question the viability of the Diaspora Jewish community in the United States. "Your exile," he told American Jews, "is different -- comfortable, padded with success and renown. It is

exile nonetheless." In direct counterpoint, Brown University professor Jacob Neusner argued that Jewish life is richer in America than anywhere else, including Israel. "If there ever was a promised land," he concludes, "we American Jews are living in it."

This degree of polarization was perhaps more a reflection of the tensions of the moment than a serious exchange. Yet when serious exchanges do take place, real differences in perspective still emerge. A good example is a recent set of papers and discussions sponsored and published under the title *Zionism Today* by AJC's Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations.³¹

Israelis in this symposium at first appear to move somewhat from classic Zionist principles toward accepting the permanence of Diaspora life. Anita Shapira, professor of the history of Zionism at Hebrew University, for example, states, "One cannot ignore the fact that Diaspora life is a constant of Jewish existence, and it derives its legitimation from its very existence."³²

Avraham Harman, chancellor of Hebrew University, agreed that "the Zionist does not negate the Diaspora; it exists."³³ There seems here a new acceptance of the concept of a Diaspora Jewish community.

But the Israelis do not see the American Jewish community as a viable, independent entity. Unlike the classic European Zionists, they do not perceive it as threatened by anti-Semitism as much as by its opposite, assimilation. According to them, Jewish life in the United States is so weak as to be unable to survive on its own; its only hope lies in regeneration of Jewish identity through identification with Israel. Shapira, for example, asks, "What hold does the American Jewish community have today on the Jews of America? They are just drifting away, swallowed up by the suburban life style, by the immensity of the country, the loosening of family ties." In response to this problem, "the only subject that carries a real meaning to the secular Jews is Israel.... If American Jews want to retain their Jewish identity, they have to recognize the centrality of Israel."³⁴ Harman agrees, "One of the major purposes of Zionism today must be to counteract the forces of assimilation."³⁵ To take a final example, sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt of Hebrew University estimates that "60 or 70 percent of the Jewish younger generation simply don't care very much ... about being Jewish" and that to counteract this, ways must be found to "connect these American Jews with Jewish life -- and this can only be done in relation to Israel"³⁶

The existence of Jews in America is accepted, in short, but not their viability; they can survive only through connection to Israel. As Harman states, "There is a radical difference of Jewish significance between living as a Jew in Israel and living as a Jew in America," since "it is in Israel that the destiny of the Jewish people will be worked out."³⁷

American Jews, on the other hand, have very different perceptions. In the United States they have evolved what historian Henry Feingold has called "a Zionism of a particularly American variety, by and for American Jews." It relies for its Jewish identity heavily on the spiritual strength of its connection to Israel, but it cannot see itself as diminished by total dependence on the Jewish state. "A centrality [of Israel] that means the diminution of the community with which the American Jew has cast his lot, coupled with a rhetoric that consigns American Jewry to certain doom, cannot be imbibed as part of an ideology he calls his own." Moreover, American Jews have developed values of their own which they wish to see realized in their relationship with Israel. American Jews' "priorities are given to rationalism and tolerance." Therefore, the "Zionism American Jews would best relate to understands fully the need for defense and security of the state, but it eschews a fanaticism that can

lead to expansionism or religious exclusivity." In short, American Jewry has distinctive values and standards which it would want to see upheld in its relation to Israel.³⁸

Jews in the United States have a sense of themselves as stable, contributing members of world Jewry. As Columbia University philosopher David Sidorsky wrote in the AJC symposium, "The American Jewish community, unlike, for example, the Jewish community in Taiwan or Korea, does not view itself as a transient congregation but as a permanent community committed to creative survival through generations." Indeed, Sidorsky states, "In a sense the American Jewish community has adopted the competing concept of 'affirmation of the Diaspora,'"³⁹ though in partnership with, not as a substitute for, Israel.

While Israelis see a weak Jewish community in severe danger of assimilation and dependent on an infusion of energy from Israel, American Jews perceive themselves as an important entity in their own right, one that has been able to mobilize significant political power on behalf of Israel and to make its own cultural contributions to the Jewish people.

Yet, as Sidorsky argues in his paper, real practical opportunities exist now for creative exchange between Israeli and American Jewry. Certain bedrock points of consensus have been achieved. Almost all Jews recognize now the centrality of Israel in Jewish life and the importance of Israel to the ethnic and religious consciousness of American Jews. They also understand that the American Jewish community, whatever its long-term prospects, is not withering away and will remain an important force for some time to come. There are, according to Sidorsky, "deep roots of conflict between American Jewish communal perspectives and Israeli perspectives." Without denying these difficulties, we must "chart and improve achievable modes of pluralism between Israel and the American Jewish community."⁴⁰ These involve a full range of political, cultural, social, and religious exchanges between the two communities.

Recent public opinion polls in both Israel and the United States sponsored by AJC's Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations confirm both the different perceptions of Israeli and American Jews and the possibility for constructive work in this area.

Mina Zemach, in examining Israeli public opinion in 1986, found significant support for classic Zionist positions. Israelis worry that anti-Semitism and, even more, assimilation pose serious threats to American Jews. By a 54-to-32-percent margin, they feel that American Jews can lead a fuller life in Israel than in the United States. By about the same proportion, they believe that American Jews who refuse to consider moving to Israel are doing something wrong. Sixty percent hold that Israelis should urge American Jews to move to Israel.

While these positions support classic Zionist stands, Zemach is also impressed with the significant minority of Israelis who do not agree with them. She concludes that about 55-60 percent of the Israeli public can now be considered "Classical Zionists." Given that these principles underlay the founding the state, this represents a significant erosion of the ideological formulations of the founding generation. A more flexible population is growing in Israel that may be more prone to dialogue with their American counterparts.⁴¹

A similar development appears underway among American Jews, as a 1986 poll by Steven M. Cohen indicates. They too are worried about anti-Semitic and assimilationist threats to American Jewish life, again with the emphasis on the latter. But they are confident of the viability of their community. By an almost eight-to-one margin they evaluate Jewish life in America as "vital and dynamic." Only one in ten agreed that they could lead a fuller Jewish life in Israel. A large majority defined Zionism not as an obligation to move to Israel but a

recognition of the centrality of Israel to the Jewish people or support for the Jewish state.

The notion of Israel as a cultural center finds significant support in Cohen's poll. Those American Jews who have been exposed to Israel in any way -- through education, travel, relatives, etc. -- have stronger Jewish and pro-Israel feelings. Israel has definitely emerged as a key element of American Jewish identity and a topic of immense interest.⁴² This bodes well for the future dialogue.

In sum, Zionist ideology has undergone significant recent revision. Notions of Israel as refuge and cultural center now enjoy strong endorsement in both Israel and America. While anti-Semitism has receded as a presupposition of Zionist ideology, it has to some degree been replaced by the conviction that Diaspora Jewish communities are under serious threat of assimilation. How viable and integral a partner in world Jewry the American Jewish community can become arouses spirited debate. But there is also increasing receptivity to dialogue on the part of both American and Israeli Jewry.

Current Issues

To illustrate the interrelationship between the two communities, it is useful to consider ways in which official actions of Israel directly affect the status of American Jewish interests. Six categories of issues can be outlined, ranging from greatest to least impact:

1. Actions that directly affect the *overall* status of Jews in American society. This is a rare category, best illustrated by the recent Pollard espionage case, which raises the issue of where basic Jewish loyalties lie. When it does arise, American Jews make clear their political identity with the United States and the necessity to support Israel within the overall context of American interests.

2. Actions affecting the status of *world Jewry*. When Israel asks that all Jewish refugees be directed to Israel, not to the United States, or when it assumes the role of spokesman for world Jewry, for example in condemning synagogue bombings in the Diaspora, it asserts a primacy that puts other Jewish communities in a secondary role.

3. Actions that affect the *internal* structure of the American Jewish community. This type of action is illustrated by the "who is a Jew" controversy in Israel, which speaks directly to the religious legitimacy of the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements in the United States.

4. Actions that affect the *political* standing of American Jewry. American Jewish political power rests to a large degree on the community's ability to influence Congress, the administration, and candidates on Israel-related issues. To the degree that Israeli policy conforms, as is the norm, to American interests, this power is enhanced; if divergences emerge, it is weakened.

5. Actions of Israel that affect *civil or human rights* interests in the United States. Israel's actions toward the Arab minority in the original state or the territories and its relations with South Africa have become issues discussed in America and elsewhere. This is no different than human-rights issues raised by the policies of other nations that have within them significant minority populations or that do business with questionable regimes.

6. Actions involving *internal* Israeli matters. There still remains a large set of issues, ranging from economic decisions to internal-security matters, that are clearly Israel's own concerns as a sovereign state and do not have implications abroad.

Conversely, trends in the American Jewish community vitally affect Israel's interests. The integration of leading Jews in the structures of both political parties makes a real difference in prospects for support of Israel. Economic trends have implications for American Jewish philanthropy for Israel. The amount of American Jewish travel to Israel is an important factor in the closeness each community feels toward the other. Jewish education in the United States has much to do with the creation of a next generation of Jews committed to Israel. In short, the communities are now bound in an intricate web of interrelationships so that events in one directly affect the other.

Out of this web of interrelationships, a few issues have emerged as priorities on the current agenda of American Jewish-Israeli relations. These include:

Refugees: What role should each community play in the rescue of endangered Jewish populations? Are both countries potential sites of resettlement, or should the American Jewish role be limited to supporting refugee movement to Israel?

Pluralism: What is the proper attitude of American Jews toward proposed changes in Israeli law that would give more power to the Orthodox rabbinate in ways that call into question the legitimacy of the Conservative and Reform denominations to which the great majority of American Jews belong?

Dissent: When, if ever, should American Jews voice dissent with official Israeli policies on West Bank settlements, the peace process, or other issues?

Philanthropy: Who will have control of the dollars raised by American Jews for Israel, and what accountability exists to assure their use for their intended purposes?

Political loyalties: The Pollard affair raises questions of how much mutual understanding exists on the political roles and attachments of American Jews.

Aliyah-yeridah: Does the encouragement of aliyah -- emigration to Israel -- necessarily entail an attack on the integrity of the American Jewish community? How should American Jews react to Israelis who come to live in the United States?

In addition, a number of areas of mutual exchange between American and Israeli Jewry raise the potential for deeper relationship. Areas that could be investigated for enhanced activity include:

Economic exchanges: How can business and investment activities be enhanced to strengthen the Israeli economy?

Educational initiatives: How can both countries' Jewish communities, which polls show are both vitally interested in but largely ignorant of one another, learn more about each other's nature and needs?

Professional exchanges: Much contact between the two communities involves formal institutions such as philanthropies or policy-oriented discussions. Opportunities also exist for

enhancing dialogues of professional groups such as lawyers working on constitutional issues in both countries, artists, journalists, etc.

- *Organization issues:* Questions on the structure of organizations where Israeli and Diaspora Jewry come together have been raised. This is particularly true of the Jewish Agency, which has traditionally been a major meeting place for Diaspora and Israeli Jewry, and which is now being criticized for not allowing sufficient interchange between the two communities. How to make these effective instruments for mutual exchange needs greater exploration.

American Jews live in a pluralistic society, enriched by their contacts with others but in danger of assimilation. Israelis live in a majority culture where Jewish life, both secular and religious, can reach great levels of intensity, but where the danger exists of isolation from others. In dialogue with each other, they may enhance each community's strengths and alleviate its weaknesses.

Notes

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**SUMMARY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS
OF THE TASK FORCE MISSION TO ISRAEL**

February 22-25, 1988

AJC's Task Force on American Jewish-Israeli relations felt it necessary, as an integral part of our process, to meet with Israelis and hear their views on matters of importance to our communities. For this reason, after two substantive meetings of the task force in the United States, we traveled to Israel to share our emerging positions with people there and hear their reactions and recommendations. This paper outlines both the substantive concerns of Israelis with whom we met and possible specific directions for AJC to take in our Israel programming.

The Political Situation

The political situation in Israel is not merely divided. There is hardly any political dialogue in the country at all.

Each side publicly accuses the other of policies that will lead to Israel's destruction. Labor charges that Likud's stance of retaining the territories would inevitably lead, if followed, to the end of the democratic and pluralistic character of Israel. Likud claims that Labor's policy of territorial compromise would, if adopted, result in greatly enhanced chances of an Israeli military defeat. These are not argued by fringe political figures, but by the mainstream of each party. Few options exist for a centrist political dialogue. Some even predict civil war if a territorial compromise were reached that would not be accepted by West Bank settlers.

In this situation, it is important to create some possibility for dialogue. Statements made by American Jewish organizations, whether seeking to promote peace, gain support for Israel, or analyze a particular policy, should endeavor to demonstrate their understanding of each side of the Israeli political spectrum. Mutual understanding needs to be enhanced and our own statements should demonstrate an ability to speak to the concerns of all Israelis.

We saw nothing in Israel which would encourage optimism for any quick solution on the territories issue. On the contrary, there are some factors which could exacerbate the situation. The Arabs in the territories have not yet used firearms, for example, and if they do the violence could escalate dangerously. The idea that Arab populations should be "transferred" out of the territories is starting to gain a respectable hearing. Less speculatively, the coming elections in Israel will likely be the dirtiest in the country's history and add to the already serious polarization there.

In this difficult situation, Israelis need to be assured of the interest and support of American Jews. They need to know that their suffering is shared by other Jews and that they will not be abandoned because the State is experiencing severe difficulty. American Jews can criticize particular policies, and, indeed, are urged to do so by many Israelis, but general support is essential. Israelis are worried about travel cancellations or other signs of American Jewish diminution of interest in Israel. They have to see missions coming to Israel, interest in the territories issue, and a feeling of real involvement in Israel's plight by American Jews.

The Social Situation

While much of the news coming out of Israel focuses on the Arab-Israeli conflict, this is also a time for testing for Israeli society.

Brig. Gen. Nechemia Dagan, the army's chief education officer, summed up this issue when he stated to our task force, "In most Western countries, the natural tendency of events is toward democracy. In the Middle East, events tend toward totalitarianism. We have to work hard to protect democracy here."

In several of our meetings, the feeling was expressed that democratic and pluralistic values need support in Israel, especially now at a time of severe national stress. This idea surfaced when we heard from Jews seeking religious pluralism, especially for Reform, Conservative, and secularist versions of Judaism; from educators trying to implement pluralistic curricula in the schools, especially on Arab-Jewish relations; from immigrant groups seeking recognition from the absorption bureaucracy of organizations newcomers themselves have founded; from citizens seeking to establish a civil-rights tradition in Israeli law; and from groups working for better relations with Israeli Arabs.

We met with many people dedicated to promoting a democratic and pluralistic Israel. Perhaps most impressive was the officer corps of the army. We were taken to Nablus, the capital of Samaria, and met there with the district deputy commander. As his two-way radio crackled with news about responding to riots, moving military personnel, and supplying ammunition to troops, he explained to us the principles on which his command operates. The army does not set political policy or negotiate peace treaties, but it aims to keep order in the territories with the minimum force necessary and to make life possible for all residents. Excesses in beatings and responses to demonstrators occur, but army policy promotes restraint and discipline. For all the problems they cause, this colonel was in favor of maintaining media access to the territories since Israel is a democracy which must protect a free press. Most impressively, in the midst of responding to riots he kept a human perspective on the Arabs, noting that they were trying to achieve what the Jews accomplished in 1948. His mission is to maintain order, while governments work out a solution. In the most trying of circumstances, he and other officers we met struggled to maintain the values of decency and humanity which the Israeli army has always upheld.

Others exemplified these values as well. In every field -- education, the press, the law, immigrant absorption, religious movements and philanthropy -- we met people committed to democracy who worried that the pressure of events in the territories would threaten Israeli values which they are committed to uphold.

They need the active involvement of American Jews in their work. Not one of these people told us that pluralism is an internal Israeli concern in which outsiders should play no role.

All asked for our vigorous support in maintaining pluralistic attitudes in Israel. They challenged us, if we are truly interested in democracy and pluralism, to develop programs that would strengthen in Israel the values we all share.

Points in Need of Further Dialogue

Among our meetings, we had intensive discussions with Israelis on the major principles and assumptions underlying relations between our communities. In these sessions we stressed the importance placed by American Jews on social and religious pluralism, our notion that American Jewry is a mature and independent community and a full partner in the relationship, and our goal of creating practical programs to improve relations between us.

In these discussions, Israelis brought up several points in disagreement or elaboration of our positions, which they asked our task force to explore further, including:

- Many Israelis still see American Jews as a "marginal" community in that Jews participate in the larger society as Americans, not as Jews, and spend a relatively minor part of their lives involved in Jewish organizations or synagogues. By contrast, they said, Israelis are Jews in every aspect of their lives and so only Israel is a true center of Jewish identity. We explained that the American concept of pluralism promotes the idea of being Jewish even as one participates in the larger society and that American Jews feel simultaneously strongly American and strongly Jewish. There remains much work to be done in conveying to Israelis American Jews' conviction of the viability of our community.
- Israelis suggested that we develop a greater appreciation of the challenge of pluralism to Israeli society. There exists much more diversity of groups in Israel than in the United States. Israel, for example, has absorbed close to 95 percent of the Jewish communities of countries like Iraq and Yemen at the same time as it has taken in immigrants from Europe, America, South Africa, and Ethiopia. Religiously, it includes large groups of adherents of ultra-Orthodoxy and extreme secularism. It must also relate to a significant community of Arabs. There are many tensions produced by this diversity of groups. We can, therefore, make no simple analogy between the pluralism of American Jewry and pluralism in Israel. While we promote this value, we need to do so with a sense of the real difficulties pluralism presents to Israeli society.
- We were also asked to be more realistic in describing the dedication of American Jews to pluralism. Most American Jews do support pluralism, both for the United States and for Israel. But there are real exceptions that have to be acknowledged. Kahane, for example, is an American product. American Orthodox sparked the campaign in Israel to amend the Law of Return. American Jews have their own intra-Jewish tensions. It is too simplistic to present an American Jewish community uniformly committed to pluralism urging this value on Israelis. We need to have a sense of our own shortcomings in this area.
- Soviet Jewry emerged as a key concern for Israelis. To them, the flow of Soviet Jews to the United States, supported by American Jewish philanthropy, is a fundamental challenge to the rationale of the Jewish State. Israel was created to rescue Jews. If they go elsewhere this is a blow to the State's basic self-conception. Moreover, Israelis feel that Soviet Jews are safer Jewishly in Israel. If Soviet Jews come to

America, in their view, they may be saved now, but within five generations their families may assimilate. In Israel, their families will be Jewish forever. At the very least, we should state a strong preference that Soviet Jews go to Israel, even if we cannot control their flow. We tried to explain that American Jewry aids Soviet refugees in the United States not as a challenge to Israel but as a fundamental Jewish response to other Jews asking for help. This issue remains extremely delicate and one on which both sides need to demonstrate an understanding of each other's concerns. (On this subject, it also must be noted that many Israelis saw the December 6 demonstration for Soviet Jewry in Washington as a landmark event in which, to their pleasant surprise, American Jews stood up strongly for a Jewish cause.)

- Israelis asked that American Jews be more realistic in their attitudes toward Israel. We often look to Israel to embody fundamental Jewish values such as justice, democracy, mutual aid, etc. In the real world, any state will fall short of these ideals. Israel has great symbolic meaning to Jews the world over, but we must not place a symbolic burden on the State too heavy for any actual country to bear.
- It is important to say that a sense of peoplehood unites Jews in America and Israel, but it is not enough, according to many Israelis. For this to be more than a slogan, the term "peoplehood" needs definition. We cannot say we support Israel simply because it is democratic, for example. By that standard, we would be just as attached to England as to Israel. Rather, Israel has a specific historical, cultural, and religious claim on us and we have to integrate these points into our concept of peoplehood.
- In our comments on the Law of Return and religious pluralism, we were asked to be sure not to degrade the concept of Jewish law. Reform and Conservative Jews, after all, seek not to jettison but to apply Jewish law to current circumstances. Jewish law has held the community together for centuries and, if interpreted with care, holds the promise of providing a unifying force for Jews at a time when we are threatened by communal fragmentation.

Program Ideas for AJC

Our meetings also produced specific program ideas to improve American Jewish-Israeli relations for our task force to consider recommending to AJC. These include:

- *On religious pluralism:* We would support recognition of all forms of Judaism in Israel. Specifically we could share some of the materials we are developing in the United States to explain various denominations' positions on several issues with Israelis.
- *On pluralistic education:* We could support Education for Democracy in Israel and develop dialogues on our American experience with ethnicity and values education in the schools and their relevance to the Israeli context.
- *On the Sephardic community:* Since most dialogue between American Jews and Israelis takes place within the Ashkenazi (European-origin) community, programs should be developed to stimulate contacts with Israelis of Sephardic (Oriental) origin.
- *On aliyah:* Many discussions on aliyah have broken down over whether supporting immigration to Israel represents an attack on the integrity of the American Jewish

community. But we found opportunities for supporting programs with practical value that avoid this ideological trap. Israelis have developed the concept of *aliyah b' shlavim* or aliyah in stages. Aliyah has a better chance of succeeding if a person has spent significant time in Israel, for example as a student, extended visitor, or temporary worker. We can promote these extended visits. If they result in aliyah, Israel will benefit. If not, and a person remains in the United States, we will have gained an American Jew more knowledgeable about Israeli affairs and committed to Jewish involvement. We can also encourage senior citizens looking for part-time retirement homes to consider Israel rather than the American south, while they retain an American residence as well. In these ways, we can support interim stages of aliyah without becoming involved in the divisive ideological conflicts the issue often generates.

- *On immigration:* Both the United States and Israel are committed to generous immigration. Both face the challenge of integrating new populations into the mainstream in ways that preserve newcomers' cultures and recognize their initiative and talents. AJC's work on the acculturation of new immigrants may be relevant to the Israeli experience, and we could establish joint programs on the issue.
- *On the Israeli press:* Israeli journalists told us that the Israeli public is interested in our opinions, but to reach this audience we must communicate through the Israeli, not the American, press. We could make greater communication efforts in this area.
- *On civil rights:* Civil-rights activists reported that Israeli law is based on East European, Turkish, British, and Jewish sources, and does not include a strong tradition of civil rights. They suggested the involvement of American organizations with experience in this field in establishing a legal basis and public support for civil rights in Israel.
- *On business development:* While appreciating American philanthropy, many Israelis would like to see greater business investment in Israel and suggested we support programs aimed at stimulating economic cooperation.
- *On the Jewish Agency:* Several Israelis saw as very positive and still fragile recent American attempts to insure that philanthropic dollars are spent wisely and efficiently in Israel and that they go to a broad range of beneficiaries, not just to organizations with political clout. They suggested we support efforts in this direction, especially within the Jewish agency.
- *On travel:* Israelis, especially in these difficult times, need assurance that American Jews are vitally concerned with the Jewish State. They need our physical presence there, through increased AJC missions of both national and chapter participants, stimulation of individual travel, and using our ethnic and religious contacts to promote non-Jewish visits to Israel.

None of these programs is one-sided. In areas such as education, religion, immigration, and business, we have much to learn from Israelis in addition to offering to them our own experience. Any programs we decide to develop should exemplify the principles of partnership and mutual respect which we hope to stimulate generally in American Jewish-Israeli relations.

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