

American Jewry and the State of Israel: How Intense the Bonds of Peoplehood?

Steven Bayme

American Jewish leadership, initially ambivalent about the creation of a Jewish state, quickly formed a pro-Israeli consensus within the Jewish community. The 1950 Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Agreement effectively removed many of the irritants in American Jewish-Israeli relations such as dual loyalty, negation of the Diaspora, and who may speak on behalf of the Jewish people. In turn, American Jewish leadership helped frame the ongoing special relationship between Washington and Jerusalem, especially since 1967. Although tensions remain in relations between Israel and American Jewry, particularly over issues of personal status and religious pluralism, the pro-Israeli consensus has generally held firm over a sixty-year period.

Considerable attention has been given in recent years to the relationship between Israel and American Jewry. The birthright Israel program articulated both the centrality of Israel to American Jewish identity and Israel's responsibility to preserve Jewish continuity in North America. The Israeli security and defense establishments have recently underlined the critical importance of the American Jewish community to the special relationship between Israel and the United States. Lastly, several observers, including former president Jimmy Carter, have questioned the desirability of American Jewish pro-Israeli advocacy.

There are several reasons for this heightened focus. First, Israel and American Jewry not only constitute the world's two largest Jewish communities, but together they encompass approximately 80 percent of world Jewry. Second, at a time in which America has served as Israel's primary friend and ally, greater attention has been given to the unique role of American Jewry in creating and sustaining this "special relationship." Lastly, Jewish forebodings about the toll of assimilation and mixed marriage in the United States have implications both for the future support of Israel and for Jewish peoplehood overall. In other words, the general distancing from matters Jewish connotes distancing both from Israel and from broader Jewish concerns.

American Jewish-Israeli ties have evolved since 1948. That date symbolizes the fact that the Jewish return to sovereignty and statehood irrevocably changed the map and meaning of Jewish peoplehood in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The Birth of Israel

American Jewish support for the creation of Israel was by no means axiomatic. For one thing, influential Jewish groupings and leaders opposed the very idea of a Jewish state. The Reform movement, clearly the most influential of Jewish religious movements, was ambivalent about Jewish statehood. The 1936 Columbus Platform had affirmed Jewish peoplehood and settlement in Palestine but had not called for Jewish sovereignty. Yet even such modest statements were too much for the approximately one-third of Reform rabbis who protested Columbus by raising the banner of anti-Zionism while denying the ties of peoplehood as connoting disloyalty to America. These rabbis, accompanied by influential lay leaders, challenged the drift toward Zionism within

Reform Judaism by creating a new organization, the American Council for Judaism, that expressly opposed the idea of statehood.¹

Even among more mainstream Jewish organizations, statehood evoked considerable ambivalence and some opposition. The American Jewish Committee (AJC), representing the accomplished Jewish elites, determined that it was neutral-refusing to choose between statehood and statelessness. The leadership of the American Council for Judaism, which frequently overlapped with that of the Committee, hoped the AJC would ultimately endorse the Council's position and thereby give it legitimacy within influential public opinion.²

Even more surprisingly, Hadassah, the leading Zionist organization, itself was split on the question of statehood. Heavily influenced by the late founder of Hadassah, Henrietta Szold, and Hebrew University chancellor and American-born rabbi Judah Magnes, some Hadassah leaders called for a binational rather than a Jewish state. Others, closer to the views of David Ben-Gurion, veered away from Szold's teachings and those of the influential Magnes -- notwithstanding the latter's efforts on behalf of Hadassah Medical Center -- to proclaim unambiguously their support for Jewish statehood.³

Lastly, the American government itself was divided. President Truman and his political advisers--notably Clark Clifford and Boston Jewish attorney David Niles--remained steadfast in their commitment to creating a Jewish state. Others--notably Secretary of State George Marshall, perhaps the most influential figure in Truman's cabinet, and Secretary of Defense James Forrestal--opposed the creation of Israel as dangerous for Jews and as an open invitation to Soviet penetration and influence given the socialist character of Jewish society in Palestine. Marshall further opposed the establishment of a Jewish state as portending endless American involvement in Middle Eastern struggles that in turn would threaten oil supplies and embroil America in new and unnecessary conflicts. Doubtless his threat to resign over this issue would have severely damaged the already beleaguered Truman administration.⁴

In this context much concern was also voiced about whether American Jews truly desired a Jewish state. American Jewish opinion, however, quickly became evident. Hadassah repudiated Szold, Magnes, and their followers, instead opting to support statehood. At the AJC, President Joseph Proskauer and Executive Vice-President John Slawson persuaded their colleagues that irrespective of their personal preferences, the Jewish people as a whole desired statehood and under these circumstances the Jewish leadership was obliged to follow the communal will rather than seeking to reshape it. This AJC decision effectively deprived the American Council for Judaism of its most likely ally.⁵

The Truman administration itself became persuaded that creating Israel as a Jewish state was both morally correct and consonant with the ardent wishes of Jewish supporters.⁶ Virtually overnight, anti-Zionist views were marginalized inside the Reform movement while the movement itself demonstrated its commitment to Israel as a Jewish state. Within a matter of months, Zionism, or at least the idea of the Jewish state, had in fact "captured the communities."

Building a Relationship: Blaustein-Ben-Gurion

Having secured American Jewry's support for its creation, Israel now had to determine its relationship to world Jewry. Classical Zionism had predicted a "withering away" of the Diaspora, and Israeli emissaries abroad provoked considerable consternation by repeated calls for *aliyah* (emigration to Israel). Prime Minister Ben-Gurion ruffled the feathers of Hadassah's leadership by proclaiming at a National Convention that all that remained for Zionists to do was *aliyah*. The Law of Return itself, by offering immediate citizenship to any Jew anywhere choosing to reside in Israel, both underlined Zionist ideology as a bedrock value of the incipient Jewish state and expressed Israel's claims to represent world Jewry. Non-Zionists naturally took considerable umbrage.

The AJC, having conceded Israel's place within the Jewish people, now found statements of Israel's centrality and calls for aliyah particularly galling. In 1950, AJC president Jacob Blaustein asserted that American Jewry was actually the senior partner in the relationship since Israel's economic wellbeing and security depended on support from a "strong and independent American Jewry."⁷ Ben-Gurion responded with due deference, denying that American Jewry owed Israel any political allegiance and claiming that Israel had the right to speak only on behalf of its own citizens rather than the Jewish people at large. Most important, Ben-Gurion articulated the principle of noninterference: Israel would not interfere in the domestic affairs of Diaspora Jewish communities.

Only on the matter of aliyah did Ben-Gurion assert Israel's right to challenge world Jewry. As the first Jewish state in two millennia in the national Jewish homeland, he argued, Israel naturally wished to see more Jews avail themselves of the Law of Return. In that sense he avowed that calls for aliyah would by no means cease. What he did concede was the need to change the language of appeals for aliyah. Israel should encourage American Jews to come to Israel because "we need their technical knowledge, their unrivaled experience, their spirit of enterprise, their bold vision, their 'know-how.'"⁸

Israel, in effect, needed Western aliyah. In Ben-Gurion's formulation Israel respected the fact that American Jews lived "a life of freedom and...equal status."⁹ Nevertheless, some Jews should freely choose to contribute to the upbuilding of the Jewish state. Carefully Ben-Gurion sidestepped any references to the disappearance of the Diaspora whether due to anti-Semitism or assimilation.

Blaustein responded in kind. He acknowledged Israel as a home for persecuted Jewries and a place where such Jews may "attain their full stature of human dignity for the first time."¹⁰ After the Holocaust, the birth of Israel had done much for Jewish morale and American Jewry's pride and Jewish identity.

Yet Blaustein also reasserted that Israel was problematic for American Jewry, which did not take kindly to Israel's claim to represent the Jewish people or to calls for aliyah. Such statements, he argued, undermined American Jewry's will to give the Jewish state maximal political and economic support. As self-proclaimed senior partner in the bilateral relationship, Blaustein demanded that Israel and American Jewry relate to one another on principles of mutual respect for each other's needs and with a view to preserving the integrity of both communities—a far cry indeed from the Zionist ideology on which Ben-Gurion had been reared.

In effect, Blaustein was offering American Jewish largesse and political support to Israel in exchange for modifications in Israel's self-perception as representing world Jewry and as the central nerve in the Jewish body politic. In his view aliyah was acceptable only if couched in the spirit of 1776: building a new society, an experiment in democracy and freedom, rather than the traditional language of Diaspora Jewry's vulnerability. For American Jewry's part, Blaustein's statements—subsequently codified in the Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Agreement—signaled an end to internal Zionist vs. anti-Zionist conflicts in favor of an enduring pro-Israeli consensus.¹¹

The Accord's Implications

The AJC, most prestigious among the Jewish organizations, signaled that the American Jewish secular elites now wholeheartedly stood together with Israel. Given the apparent eclipse of Zionist organizations except for Hadassah, and particularly the leadership of Rabbi Stephen Wise and Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, the AJC's involvement in pro-Israeli activities was particularly welcome.¹² Moreover, as Israel adopted an increasingly pro-American orientation in the Cold War, Jewish leaders dared to make the case for Israel on grounds both of moral principle and of America's strategic self-interest. In exchange for securing Ben-Gurion's respect for American Jewry and promise not to intervene in its domestic affairs, Blaustein was promising Israel continued political support in Washington while rejecting the canard of dual loyalty. The

agreement signaled both a post-Holocaust assertiveness of American Jewry and an end to internal Jewish divisions concerning the desirability of a Jewish state.

For the AJC the agreement became a covenantal document, a statement of mutual responsibility and respect between the world's two largest Jewries. How seriously Ben-Gurion viewed the accord probably is more debatable. The late Charles Liebman cited the accord as perhaps the first successful example of Diaspora Jewish pressure on Israel.¹³ Ben-Gurion allegedly joked, however, by subsequently turning to Blaustein's son-in-law, David Hirshhorn, and saying, "Nu, David-when are you coming to live in Israel?"¹⁴

Clearly the promise of a change of language and the principle of nonintervention were violated repeatedly. On at least two occasions Blaustein and his successors demanded and secured Ben-Gurion's and Golda Meir's restatement of the accord's principles.¹⁵ Yet Israel was rapidly becoming the nerve center of the Jewish people. Israel's capture of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 underlined Israel's claims to be the representative of world Jewry. Israeli spokesmen continued their calls for aliyah, even at times invoking threats to American Jewish security and vitality. One Israeli ambassador to the United States, the late Yitzhak Rabin, was even quoted as advising American Jews for whom to vote in a forthcoming presidential election.¹⁶

Notwithstanding these breaches, the agreement had considerable effects on American Jewish-Israeli relations. The "special relationship" between the United States and Israel rested on a strategic triangle of Jerusalem, Washington, and the American Jewish community. American public opinion remained overwhelmingly pro-Israeli and Jewish leaders and organizations played a far-reaching role in the battle to win over the U.S. public. American Jews identified Israel as an American-type democracy, as a Jewish state, and as a friend of America and argued successfully for American support for Israel as a strategic ally and embodiment of American values. Never mind that Israel's government was socialist; American Jews and Israeli emissaries ignored a tradition alien to American values. Instead they spoke of Israel as fulfilling an American vision of social progress and technological achievement.

More broadly, the Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Agreement effectively removed some of the major irritants to Israeli-American Jewish relations while securing for Israel the support of leading elements in the American Jewish community. Concerns about Israeli "negation of the Diaspora," charges of dual loyalty, and the question of who spoke for the Jewish people at least receded even if they were not fully laid to rest. More important, the American Jewish leadership could now proceed to a more important agenda of building ties with Israel rather than dwelling on the sore points in the relationship.

Political and Economic Bonds

The fruits of these endeavors quickly became evident. Hadassah was perhaps the first Jewish organization to determine that its appropriate political role was to support the policies of the legally elected, democratic government of Israel rather than protest specific Israeli actions. Other organizations quickly followed suit, recognizing that the political influence of American Jewry lay primarily in Washington with the U.S. government. Moreover, the broad pro-Israeli consensus within the Jewish community meant effectively that the broad base of American Jewry supported Israel. The issue of the right to dissent would grow significantly in later decades. At least in the aftermath of the Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Agreement, however, Israel's American Jewish detractors had arguably been marginalized and the energies of the Jewish community appropriately directed toward offering Israel political and economic support.

More specifically, American Jewry had to wrestle with the question of who spoke on its behalf—especially in Washington political circles, and, in later years, in foreign capitals. One question concerned the multiplicity of Jewish organizations. At minimum one could count four major defense agencies, three major religious movements (each with its own set of congregational and rabbinical organizations), a large network of local Jewish federations, and a fair number of Israeli-

oriented Zionist and philanthropic organizations. Some observers in fact found the array of Jewish organizations a dazzling display of the single most organized community in Jewish history. Others, however, saw needless waste and duplication.

Assistant Secretary of State Henry Byroade stimulated a major shift in the paradigm of communal organization. He explained to Jewish leadership that the president by no means could afford to receive multiple Jewish delegations, each with its own perspective and often at odds with one another. Instead he urged Jewish leadership first to coordinate its position and then to request a meeting with the White House. In effect, Byroade was educating American Jewry that its political influence would be maximized if it spoke in Washington in harmonious rather than contentious tones.¹⁷

To be sure, underlying the desire for unity was the memory of the Holocaust years and the increasingly widespread perception that American Jewry might have accomplished more in terms of rescue efforts had it presented a united advocacy front. Whether enhanced Jewish unity actually would have succeeded in securing rescue initiatives remains doubtful. The real problem was less the absence of unity than the absence of Jewish political power. Nevertheless, the memory persisted that rescue initiatives were made much less effective by the presence of multiple Jewish organizations operating in Washington pressing differing agendas on a reluctant Roosevelt administration. Given the multiplicity of perspectives in play, it became relatively easy to ignore all of them on the ground that American Jewry itself did not know what it desired.

For these reasons, in the 1950s American Jewish leadership took an alternate course. The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, established in 1955, initially served as a forum for Jewish leaders, in consultation with Israeli officials, to determine objectives and then present a united front to the administration. The underlying assumption was that notwithstanding debate within the community, American Jewry stood behind Israel's security needs and was urging that Washington do so as well.¹⁸

By no means was the system foolproof. From the beginning the American Jewish Committee refused to join formally, opting instead for observer status until 1991. In practice, however, rarely if ever did the AJC veer significantly from the strategies recommended by the Conference of Presidents. More serious were the occasional charges that the Conference of Presidents itself was both undemocratic and unrepresentative of unaffiliated Jews. Precisely how unaffiliated Jews felt about Israel and its security concerns was more difficult to gauge given that such Jews rarely if ever participated in communal deliberations. The Conference of Presidents could claim to represent affiliated Jews and those at least minimally involved in Jewish communal affairs. The truly unaffiliated are like the 50 percent of Americans who fail to vote even in close presidential elections yet are governed by whatever administration emerges.

More significantly, over a fifty-year period the Conference of Presidents has worked publicly to enhance the U.S.-Israeli special relationship. The presence of a strong Jewish community actively supportive of Israel has been a powerful ingredient in this relationship and differentiates it from those between Israel and the European democracies. Indeed, Blaustein himself rightly asserted that "for Israel's own security there must be a strong and independent American Jewry."

By the same token, as Blaustein also correctly predicted, American Jewish philanthropy would be critical both to Israel's wellbeing and security. The United Jewish Appeal itself would grow into an entity raising over \$800 million annually for Israel's needs. Adding to this the specific Israeli institutions that solicit money from American Jews (e.g., Hadassah Hospital, Tel Aviv University), by the 1990s American Jews were raising well over \$1 billion annually for philanthropic assistance to Israel. That aid had a twofold significance. First, the funds themselves contributed substantially to social services, higher education, and so on. Second, and perhaps more important, the moneys collected on Israel's behalf constituted a powerful statement of the close ties between American Jewry and Israel. In turn, recognition of those ties was critical to securing broader U.S. economic and military assistance to the Jewish state.

Only in the matter of aliyah did American Jewry disappoint the Israeli leadership. Ben-Gurion had promised Blaustein a change in the language of aliyah but not a reduction in the appeals for American Jews to come to Israel. These appeals continued but largely fell on deaf ears. In no year before 1967 did the aliyah rates exceed one thousand annually, and they exceeded five thousand only in the years between the 1967 and 1973 wars. Of these small numbers as many as one-third returned to the United States primarily for economic or family reasons.¹⁹

Moreover, only within the Orthodox sector of American Jewry did aliyah obtain any status or significance due to already strong personal and familial ties between American Orthodox Jews and Israel. For most other American Jews, historical rules of Jewish migration continued to apply: economic opportunities and fear of persecution were the main stimulants. Within the secure borders of America, Jews experienced very little of these "push and pull" factors. The AJC finally reversed its position and endorsed aliyah as an option only in 1995, but few in the organization perceived aliyah as a realistic alternative either for themselves or their progeny.²⁰

Tensions within the Relationship

American Jewish-Israeli ties greatly intensified after 1967. In particular, the month of May 1967 fostered unprecedented bonding between the two communities. Daily threats to eliminate the Jewish state, coupled with the silence of the churches and the liberal world, evoked memories of the Holocaust years and reinforced the belief that Jews could rely only on one another.²¹

As a result, the 1970s marked the high tide of "civic Judaism." The Holocaust and Israel became the primary symbols or myths of American Jewry. Federations became far more Israel-oriented, and Jewish identity was often expressed primarily as support for Israel. This trend prevailed through the Yom Kippur War and, though somewhat shaken by the victory of Menachem Begin and the Likud Party in the 1977 elections, clearly was sustained through the treaty negotiations with Egypt.

Efforts by minor Israeli political figures to rally American Jewry against the peace treaty with Egypt and the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula came to naught. Conversely, left-wing groups such as Breira, protesting American Jewish support for Israel's settlement policies and opposition to a Palestinian state, were quickly marginalized.²² By the early 1980s, American Jewry appeared fully persuaded not only that its fate was indissolubly linked with Israel's but that its primary responsibility lay in supporting Israel's quest for peace and security.

The 1982 [Lebanon](#) War again ignited the question of dissent from Israeli policies. Prominent American Jews signed media ads criticizing what was termed Operation Peace for Galilee. Yet Israel was enduring such negative coverage in international media that many committed Jews, otherwise skeptical of Israel's decision to go to war, either withheld public comment entirely or noted how the international media had accepted PLO propaganda virtually uncritically while portraying Israel in the worst possible light.

Nevertheless, during that decade American Jews seemed to part company with Israeli policies on several fronts even while defending Israel in the international arena. Already in the 1970s there was serious disagreement concerning Soviet Jewish immigration. Soviet Jews who left the USSR on Israeli visas yet opted to settle in the United States became known as *noshrim* (dropouts). Israel claimed that American Jewry was unfairly competing with it by offering benefits to Soviet Jewish immigrants far exceeding what was available to them in Israel. American Jewish leadership, particularly the Jewish federations, insisted on maintaining freedom of choice for immigrants on where to settle.

This divide plagued Israeli-American Jewish relations until the late 1980s. By that time fewer and fewer Soviet Jews were leaving the Soviet Union for reasons of Zionism or Jewish peoplehood so much as for economic reasons. When the U.S. government stopped matching federation subsidies to immigrants on a dollar-per-dollar basis, the Israeli view prevailed, and the

overwhelming majority of immigrants in the 1990s settled in Israel. This development would have great demographic significance for Israel in the twenty-first century.²³

In 1985, an American Jew with access to classified information, Jonathan Pollard, was convicted of spying for Israel and sentenced to life imprisonment. The incident again sparked tensions between American Jewry and Israel. Many were angry that Israel would recruit an American Jew for espionage. Precisely how much damage Pollard, a Defense Department specialist, actually inflicted may never be known. Some Israelis, notably Prof. Shlomo Avineri, a distinguished political scientist and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, denounced American Jewish fears of "double loyalty" as classical Diaspora politics and undue concern for what the "goyim" would say.²⁴

In truth, most Americans either never heard of Pollard or perceived him as an individual guilty of a crime but not as reflecting the overall loyalty of American Jews to America. Nevertheless, American Jews' disappointment with Israel was real. Israel had shown poor judgment in recruiting Pollard and then abandoning him once his cover was blown, while rewarding his superiors notwithstanding their errors. Pollard's supporters kept his cause alive in the media through the 1990s, and many American Jews who disapproved of his actions did question the severity of his punishment.²⁵

The "Who Is a Jew" Issue

Yet the sharpest tensions between Israel and American Jewry crystallized during the "who is a Jew" controversy that followed immediately after the 1988 Israeli elections. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, anxious to include ultra-Orthodox parties in his coalition, offered them the prospect of amending the "who is a Jew" clause in the Law of Return to specify that Jewish status existed only by halachic criteria—meaning children of Jewish mothers and those who converted to Judaism "in accordance with Jewish law."

To be sure, the proposed amendment had mostly symbolic significance. The Law of Return itself was quite liberal offering immediate citizenship both to Jews and non-Jewish family members. A change in the definition of who is a Jew would affect the citizenship rights only of converts who were not married to Jews. Most converts seeking to come to Israel, and there were not many in any case, already had close family ties to Jews primarily through marriage.

Yet the proposed change symbolically delegitimized Reform and Conservative Judaism. For one thing, conversion to Judaism was the primary solution to mixed marriage. Statements from Jerusalem that these conversions were invalid undermined efforts to respond to mixed marriage seriously by encouraging conversion to Judaism and thereby forming wholly Jewish homes. Moreover, by attacking conversions performed under Conservative and Reform auspices, Israel in effect was telling these movements that their rabbis were not rabbis, or, as one ultra-Orthodox group of rabbis put it, that these movements were "not Judaism at all."

In truth, matters were considerably more complicated. The ultra-Orthodox parties had been clamoring for a change in the "who is a Jew" clause since at least the Shalit case in 1970.²⁶ Energized by a strong showing at the polls in 1988, they miscalculated the effects of their actions on Diaspora Jewish leadership.

Nor were the liberal movements free of all blame. Jewish leaders had long claimed that any change in the Law of Return would weaken American Jewish-Israeli ties. They ignored, however, the Reform movement's 1983 decision to recognize as Jews individuals with a Jewish parent of either gender, the so-called patrilineal-descent decision, which had already constituted a break between Israel and the United States on the "who is a Jew" matter.

Jewish federations spared no effort to prevent the proposed change. By admonishing Shamir that American Jewish support could not be taken for granted, they may well have done him a favor, stimulating a broader coalition with the Labor Party so that he no longer depended on ultra-

Orthodox support. In turn, Shamir seized the offensive by convening the heads of the major American rabbinical schools to work out a common approach to conversion. Although these efforts also stagnated, no doubts remained that Israeli-based "who is a Jew" legislation mattered dearly to at least the leadership of American Jewry and that governmental efforts to appease ultra-Orthodox parties could well damage Jewish unity in the long run.²⁷

The issue continued to fester into the twenty-first century. If anything, the laws of personal status, long an Orthodox monopoly, encountered greater resistance as the number of Russian immigrants of nonhalachic or problematic halachic status increased significantly in the 1990s. In 1996, an effort to delegitimize conversions by non-Orthodox rabbis within Israel was launched with the support of the then prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who proclaimed that this was an internal matter for Israel and of no concern to Diaspora Jewry. By the twenty-first century the Israeli Chief Rabbinate was seeking to delegitimize all conversions performed in the Diaspora, claiming each case needed to be adjudicated individually. Most observers saw these efforts as thinly veiled attempts to delegitimize the non-Orthodox movements in the Diaspora without saying so explicitly.

Conclusion

With some notable exceptions, the pro-Israeli consensus has held remarkably well over a sixty-year period. The two primary centers of Jewish opposition to Israel-classical Reform and Satmar Hasidim-have long been marginalized. The American Council for Judaism became little more than a paper organization after 1967. In turn, that pro-Israeli consensus was instrumental in strengthening the U.S.-Israeli relationship over the decades-a special relationship that has transcended party politics and been sustained irrespective of Democratic or Republican, or Labor or Likud, governments. A strong and politically active Jewish community set America apart from the other democracies. By asserting that American Jewry stood with the Israeli government on matters of security, American Jewish leadership succeeded in cultivating a close strategic alliance between Israel and America built on a commonality of values and strategic interests.

More recently that special relationship has come under assault. Two academics, Stephen Walt and Charles Mearsheimer, have charged the "Israel lobby" with hijacking American foreign policy and holding it hostage to Israel's interests. Jewish organizations in turn have been placed in the uncomfortable position of, on the one hand, seeking to influence American policy, yet claiming that detractors like Walt and Measheimer fall into a trap of anti-Semitism when they ascribe great power to Jews.²⁸

Generally, a minority can only secure its will when it can demonstrate consonance between its interests and values and those of the majority society. That is precisely what the pro-Israeli American Jewish community has sought to demonstrate: that support for Israel both represents American interests and gives meaning to the shared values of American Jews and the broader American society.

Second, when minorities succeed they in turn encounter detractors. Powerlessness may engender some sympathy, but it is hardly a desirable state. On the contrary, the main difference between the postwar period and the 1930s in American Jewish history is precisely the degree of power and influence Jews have attained in the former. The story of American Jewry's relationship with Israel represents in many ways the fruit of attaining power as a minority within a pluralist and democratic America.

In the face of assaults such as Walt and Mearsheimer's, therefore, the Jewish community cannot have it both ways. It cannot simultaneously claim power and influence yet wave a banner of powerlessness in the face of external critics. Instead it needs continuously to engage the ongoing battle of ideas; assert the right of minorities to attempt to influence policy; and acknowledge that, while success may well foster resentment, the sympathy engendered by powerlessness hardly is worth the cost.

Lastly, Jews and Americans alike need to understand the centrality of Israel to the identification of Jews as Jews and with the broader Jewish people. Given both the place of Zion in Jewish history and thought and the transformations in the Jewish tradition wrought by Zionism, the American Jewish-Israeli relationship cannot rest solely on strategic interests or even, for that matter, shared values. Instead the relationship rests on being a Jew and being part of the Jewish people in the twenty-first century. In that sense, denying the Jews the opportunity to support Israel is to deny them the opportunity to be themselves. Although the question of whether American Jewry will triumph in the battle of ideas must, of necessity, remain open, the fates of these two Jewries-America and Israel-remain inextricably bound by ties of peoplehood, history, and Jewish teaching.

* * *

Notes

1. Samuel Halperin, *The Political World of American Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961), 76-92; Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), Chs. 2-3.
2. On relations between the American Council for Judaism and the American Jewish Committee, see Menahem Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 99-100. See also Kolsky, *Jews*, 40-41; Marianne Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 23-27.
3. On Magnes and Hadassah, see Zvi Ganin, *Truman, American Jewry, and Israel, 1945-1948* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 175. On the split within the Hadassah National Board, see Ganin, *Truman*, 95-96, 100; Allon Gal, *David Ben-Gurion and the American Alignment for a Jewish State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 125-30. On the relationship of Szold and Magnes, see the biography of Szold by Joan Dash, *Summoned to Jerusalem* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 296-99.
4. See Ganin, *Truman*, 149-63; Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 212-15. So memorable was the debate within the Truman administration that many years later Clark Clifford chose to open his memoirs with an account of his battle with Marshall. See Clark Clifford, *Counsel to the President* (New York: Random House, 1991), 3-25. See also David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 1992, 595-620.
5. For the American Jewish Committee's support for partition, see Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, Ch. 8, and 324-30. See also Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong*, 23-27; Kolsky, *Jews*, 103-04.
6. Truman's motivations have been subject to some debate. See Ganin, *Truman*, 178-89. For a somewhat more critical assessment of Truman, see Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 253-81.
7. Cited in Charles S. Liebman, *Pressure without Sanctions* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977), 122.
8. *Ibid.*, 123.
9. *Ibid.*, 124.
10. *Ibid.*
11. The most extensive treatment of the Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Agreement may be found in Zvi Ganin, *An Uneasy Relationship* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), Ch. 4. See also Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong*, 58-66; Liebman, *Pressure*, 118-31.
12. Wise died in 1949. On his eclipse from Zionist leadership, given his clash with Silver and his perhaps excessive identification with the Roosevelt administration, see Melvin Urofsky, *A Voice that Spoke for Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 339-46. Silver lived until 1963 but after 1948

became increasingly distant from Zionist leadership circles. See Marc Raphael, *Abba Hillel Silver* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989), 178-84.

13. Liebman, *Pressure*, 131.

14. Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong*, 63.

15. In 1960, Ben-Gurion stated, "whoever dwells outside the land of Israel is unclean." Years later Prime Minister Golda Meir warned that "whoever becomes assimilated [in the Diaspora] no longer exists for us." Eric Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 149.

16. Rabin's exact words, in the fall of 1972, were that President Nixon "has done more than any other chief executive to sustain the existence of the State of Israel." Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 410.

17. Howard Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 726.

18. Daniel J. Elazar, *Community and Polity*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 305-06.

19. Chaim Waxman, *American Aliya* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 81-82, 169.

20. American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish-Israeli Relations: Continuity and Change*, Jerusalem: 1995, 11.

21. J. J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), 136-38. Chaim Waxman argues that the Six Day War did not noticeably transform American Jewish relations with Israel. Although Waxman may be correct regarding American Jewish attachments to Israel, Israel clearly assumed a much higher priority on the American Jewish agenda after 1967 and, as Goldberg argues, the memory of May 1967 functioned as a bonding agent between American Jewish leaders and Israel. See Waxman, "The Limited Impact of the Six Day War on American Jews," in Eli Lederhendler, ed., *The Six Day War and World Jewry* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000), 99-116.

22. On Breira, see Jack Wertheimer, "Breaking the Taboo: Critics of Israel and the American Jewish Establishment," in Allon Gal, ed., *Envisioning Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 397-408. See also Goldberg, *Jewish Power*, 205-07. Americans for Peace Now represents a somewhat different case as an organization that grew out of an indigenous Israeli movement whose policies were largely co-opted by the Israeli government after 1993. See Goldberg, *Jewish Power*, 53. On Israel as a symbol for civic Judaism, see Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 76-80.

23. See Fred Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), esp. Ch. 8. See also Henry Feingold, *Silent No More* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 284-88.

24. See Daniel J. Elazar, "The Lessons of the Pollard Case," in Eliezer Don-Yehiya, ed., *Israel and Diaspora Jewry* (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991), 39-44.

25. Wolf Blitzer, *Territory of Lies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 280-300.

26. In 1970 Benjamin Shalit, a psychologist serving in the Israeli navy, requested that his children be registered as Jewish by nationality notwithstanding that his Polish wife was not a Jew. Shalit's children were admitted under the Law of Return by dint of being family members. However, the definition of who is a Jew within the law was specified as children of Jewish mothers or converts to Judaism. This attempt at a compromise did not satisfy the religious parties, which wanted a further specification that converts to Judaism were considered Jewish only if their conversion was "in accordance with Jewish law." As a result Shalit's attempt eventually failed.

27. See David Landau, *Who Is a Jew?* (New York: American Jewish Committee; Ramat Gan, Israel: Argov Center, Bar-Ilan University, 1996), passim.

28. Stephen Walt and Charles Mearsheimer, "The Israel Lobby," *London Review of Books*, 23 March 2006, 1-27. See now idem, *The Israel Lobby*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

* * *

STEVEN BAYME is director of the Contemporary Jewish Life Department of the American Jewish Committee and of the Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations. He also is visiting associate professor of history at the Jewish Theological Seminary. His publications include *Understanding Jewish History: Texts and Commentary* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav and American Jewish Committee, 1997), a survey of the Jewish historical experience, and *Jewish Arguments and Counter-Arguments* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav and American Jewish Committee, 2002), a volume of essays on contemporary Jewish life.