



American Jewish Committee  
at **100**

DAVID A. HARRIS

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

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**The American Jewish Committee** protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.

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## American Jewish Committee at 100

This year, the American Jewish Committee marks its centennial anniversary. The organization was created in 1906 in response to the deadly pogroms against the defenseless Jews of Tsarist Russia.

While AJC's founders were all quite successful—in some cases prominent—in their respective careers, they were embarking on a novel experiment in the exercise of Jewish political power in the United States. Although Jews had been part of the American landscape since colonial times, they were certainly not part of the early-twentieth-century “establishment,” and social anti-Semitism was widespread. Their attempt to create an organization for the express purpose of defending the civil and political rights of Jews at home and abroad was surely a dramatic leap into the unknown.

To this day, much is made of the so-called “elite” posture of AJC's founding fathers. (Regrettably, there were no founding mothers, reflecting the gender stratification of the day.) Indeed, these individuals believed that their best chance for success lay in the fact that they were deliberately few in number, and therefore more likely to form a cohesive group, well-educated and relatively surefooted in American society compared to even newer arrivals, and, by dint of their professional achievements and social standing, more likely than other Jews to have an impact on decision-makers. Although it smacked of paternalism to some, there was a compelling logic to their thinking at the time.

### Early Years

Their initial efforts were impressive. Consider these examples: (1) contributing substantially to the Jews of San Francisco to help them rebuild after the devastating earthquake of 1906; (2) urging Wash-

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ington to take steps in opposition to Tsarist Russian discrimination against Jews, ultimately convincing the government to abrogate the 1832 Russo-American Treaty of Commerce and Navigation; (3) protesting in 1911, “when few men dared to speak out”—as recalled by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in a speech to an AJC audience years later—against racial discrimination in public accommodations, recreational resorts, and amusement parks in New York, resulting, according to King, “in the passage in 1913 of a state law which has served as a model for many other states and has thus made possible the extension of dignity for Negroes, Puerto Ricans and other minorities”; (4) actively participating in the creation, in 1914, of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which, to this day, helps Jews in need around the world; and (5) negotiating at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference to assure the protection of minority rights for Jews (and others) in Poland and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. Such bold and far-reaching initiatives underscored the vital importance, and relative effectiveness, of this new organization on the American Jewish landscape.

The challenges, of course, persisted during a tumultuous century. The American Jewish Committee remained true to its founding mission of protecting the civil and political rights of Jews, while adding a key dimension. The important change—already implicit in the early days, as suggested above—was the recognition that the struggle for Jewish security and well-being could not be isolated from larger questions of civil and human rights for all. This two-track strategy, addressing both the universal and the particular, became a distinguishing feature of AJC. It remains so to this day.

Let me offer a few illustrations. (For a fuller discussion of AJC’s major initiatives and accomplishments from 1906 to the present, visit [www.ajcarchives.org](http://www.ajcarchives.org). Also see Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906–1966*, issued by the Jewish Publication Society in 1972, and Marianne R. Sanua’s new history of AJC, published in 2007 by Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England.)

In the 1920s, the U.S. enacted highly restrictive immigration laws, one of whose unstated purposes was to reduce the number of

Jews entering the country. AJC vigorously fought against their passage, and when that proved unavailing, worked to mitigate the impact of the new regulations on would-be Jewish immigrants. At the same time, AJC leaders filed their first *amicus curiae* brief in the U.S. Supreme Court. The case, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, dealt with the right of Catholic parents to send their children to parochial schools in Oregon. The state, under the influence of the Ku Klux Klan, had passed a law in 1922 that all children must attend public schools.

In this situation, AJC understood the inextricable link between the abridgement of Catholic education and the implications for Jews and members of other faith communities whose own educational rights would be jeopardized—and with them the American promise of religious freedom for all, which, together with the defense of the wall of separation between church and state, became signature issues for AJC. As Samuel Rabinove, AJC’s longtime legal director, later wrote, “The Court unanimously struck down the law under the Fourteenth Amendment (the First Amendment had not yet been deemed applicable to the states), holding that it impermissibly denied private and parochial schools the right to do business and, very importantly, interfered with the liberty of parents to educate their children as they chose. This decision has been termed the Magna Carta of parochial schools.”

That same duality of universalism and particularism was again on display in the 1930s. The rise of Nazism in Germany became a central concern for AJC and other Jewish institutions. They sought to help rouse a largely sleeping world that, after the devastation wrought by World War I, was deeply reluctant—with only a few notable exceptions—to face a new global menace squarely, preferring to deny or appease the threat. Moreover, AJC devoted considerable resources to exposing the network of Nazi sympathizers in the United States, in part through infiltration of their front organizations.

There were very few places of refuge for Europe’s Jews, as the gates were largely closed in British-ruled Palestine, the U.S., Canada, Australia, and other possible destinations. While some Jewish groups, including AJC, believed their policy goals could best be accomplished through quiet diplomacy, others felt it would be more efficacious to go public. Either way, the intent was essentially the same; tragically,

so was the result, at least insofar as finding sufficient entry slots for Europe's Jews at a time when flight was still possible.

Fearful of triggering a new wave of domestic anti-Semitism by admitting large numbers of Jewish refugees, and concerned that the looming war in Europe and America's likely involvement might be portrayed by critics as nothing more than an effort to save the Jews, President Franklin D. Roosevelt resisted appeals from AJC and others to take special action to help beleaguered Jews. That policy was not to change until the War Refugee Board was created in 1944, nearly five years after Germany invaded Poland.

The failure of Jewish organizations, including AJC, to move an administration that enjoyed nearly iconic status among the bulk of American Jews has cast a long and painful shadow to this day. Whether American Jewish groups could have done more to save Europe's Jews will be a question asked long into the future. The answer is not immediately obvious.

Those who wish to judge the period from the vantage point of today, however, err. Rather, it must be seen in the context of the times. Anti-Semitism was a significant factor in the United States in the 1930s. President Roosevelt was faced with the daunting challenge of moving a reluctant nation, still reeling from the effects of economic depression, to face the "gathering storm," as Winston Churchill called it, in Europe, only two decades after the American armed forces had been sent to the continent to assist Britain and France in the First World War, with tens of thousands sacrificing their lives in battle. In addition, many German Jewish leaders were unable to muster the imagination to believe the worst—and they were far from alone in this regard—even as the situation deteriorated steadily from 1933 onward. They urged overseas Jewish groups to mute their public voices in the vain hope that things might eventually blow over. Furthermore, American Jews were still, at that time, not nearly as nimble and self-confident about their place in America as they are today, when launching public campaigns and building political support are all in a day's work for Jewish organizations.

At the same time, true to its programmatic bifocalism, AJC did

not neglect other pressing matters. For example, it supported the efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to pass federal anti-lynching legislation, and contributed funds for this purpose. Indeed, the AJC record of active and sustained involvement in the emerging civil rights movement was one of its towering strengths and proudest achievements. Irrespective of what else was going on in the world, AJC did not falter in this commitment, driven by a profound belief that it reflected the highest Jewish values of human equality and dignity as well as the convergent American ideal of equal justice and opportunity for all.

### Postwar Accomplishments

It goes without saying that the existential threat to the Jewish people dominated everything else until the war's end in 1945, after which the plight of displaced persons and the struggle for the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine took over. The history of AJC's evolving attitude toward Zionism requires a separate monograph. Suffice it to say that whatever the initial hesitation or division among its leaders, AJC was fully on board during the 1947–48 effort leading to Jewish statehood. Indeed, as historians have documented, AJC played a critical diplomatic role in achieving this historic milestone.

The late Israeli diplomat Abba Eban noted in a speech to AJC in 1959: "No one will ever forget how you stood in vigilant brotherhood at the cradle of our emergent statehood; and how you helped us lay the foundations of our international status and of our crucial friendship with the government and people of the American Republic." AJC's steadfast commitment to Israel and involvement in its ongoing struggle for peace, security, and international recognition has never been in question; to the contrary, its help has proven essential to Israel on countless occasions. And the effort was enhanced further by the opening, in 1961, of AJC's office in Israel, the first by an American Jewish group, "to foster mutual understanding between Israelis and Jews in the United States and other free countries throughout the world."

Recognizing once again the intrinsic relationship between the Jewish condition and the global condition, even before the war's end, AJC invested heavily in the emerging concept of a world body to replace the failed League of Nations. The overarching goal was to create a mechanism to help achieve collective security and universal protection of human rights. AJC's role in ensuring the human rights provisions of the United Nations Charter was described by Professor James T. Shotwell of Columbia University, who wrote: "Inclusion of a human rights provision in the UN Charter was due to the brilliant leadership of the American Jewish Committee." He went on to say of the role of Judge Joseph Proskauer, AJC's president in 1945, who, together with Jacob Blaustein—who would succeed him as president in 1949—successfully pressed the Roosevelt administration to support human rights clauses in the charter: "Judge Proskauer made the most eloquent and convincing argument that I have ever listened to in my life . . . [It] is destined to become one of the chapters of American history."

Against the war's backdrop, AJC remained laudably perseverant in encouraging new standards for the protection and monitoring of universal human rights. It urged the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention (persisting in the ultimately successful decades-long struggle in the U.S. Senate to achieve ratification of the convention), and, later, promoted the concept of a United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was adopted three decades after first being proposed by Jacob Blaustein.

In the 1950s, AJC became increasingly concerned about the condition of Jews behind the Iron Curtain, a problem that would remain a priority through the ensuing decades. In 1951, Syracuse University Press, under the sponsorship of AJC, published *The Jews in the Soviet Union* by Dr. Solomon M. Schwarz, followed two years later by *Jews in the Soviet Satellites* by Peter Meyer et al. In describing this publishing project, AJC noted that "the aim has been to obtain the first organized body of knowledge, based on a critical examination of all available sources, on the communist attitude toward Jewish problems and

the effect of the Soviet system on Jewish life. This is in line with the policy of the American Jewish Committee to study and make available the facts about the civic and political status of Jews in the contemporary world."

At the same time, AJC's attention was directed at the unique opportunity afforded American Jews—in light of their massive participation in the wartime effort, the GI Bill, and a new social openness in America—to break down the barriers to full participation in American life. It was, after all, in 1955 that Professor Will Herberg suggested, in his seminal book, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, that despite their much smaller numbers, Jews merited full inclusion in the religious trilogy of America, together with Protestants and Catholics—something previous generations of American Jews could only have dreamed of. And consistent with AJC's deeply rooted philosophy, it sought this breakdown of barriers not only for Jews.

Over the course of this decade and the next two, most of the vestiges of overt and covert discrimination, whether in executive suites, universities, exclusive neighborhoods or social clubs, began to disappear. For example, as a *New York Times* article (October 27, 1974) noted: "For a number of years, the American Jewish Committee has been active in combating what it has felt to be discriminatory practices against Jews and other minority groups in the recruitment and promotion of management personnel." The article went on to report on "a cooperative effort" by AJC and AT&T, the telecommunications giant, to recruit "qualified Jewish personnel for management posts."

On the civil rights front, the key advance in the 1950s was the Supreme Court decision in the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Commenting on AJC's role, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said: "Dr. Kenneth Clark's research on the damaging psychological effect of prejudice, which was a major part of the evidence put before the Supreme Court and led to the now famous 1954 decision outlawing racial segregation in public schools, was originally done for the American Jewish Committee."

## The 1960s and Beyond

In the 1960s, the single most galvanizing event for Jews everywhere surely was the Six-Day War. Israel's victory seemed nothing less than a redemptive miracle, and it lifted the spirits and pride of Jews the world over. Some call the war a watershed in American Jewish identity, as both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans generally shared in the admiration for the lightning military triumph of a small but feisty democratic nation that was determined, only 22 years after the end of the Holocaust, to show the indomitability of the Jewish spirit. Jews walked taller and prouder, their neighbors patted them on the back, and it seemed as if a new dawn had come. The impact could be felt throughout AJC's activities.

Another event that captivated the Jewish imagination during that decade was the news from Rome. The adoption by Vatican Council II of *Nostra Aetate* ushered in a veritable revolution in Catholic-Jewish relations, the positive reverberations of which are still being felt today. The deicide charge and the teaching of contempt for Jews were replaced by respect for Judaism and affirmation of the common roots of both religions in the Hebrew Bible.

For AJC, this milestone represented the culmination of more than 15 years of behind-the-scenes interfaith diplomacy in cities around the world, as well as an active presence at the Vatican itself during the council's deliberations. Indeed, the late Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, AJC's longtime interreligious-affairs director, was the only rabbi present as a guest observer at Vatican II. Beyond quietly advocating for such a declaration by the Church, AJC prepared, at the request of the Vatican, three key documents—*The Image of the Jew in Catholic Teaching*, *Anti-Jewish Elements in Catholic Liturgy*, and *On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations*. These were embraced in the preparatory work of the council and, as a 1977 AJC document noted, “were used to frame the Church's new policies toward Judaism.”

The decade of the 1960s also marked the culmination of the civil rights movement, dominated by landmark legislation—the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act—that dismantled the last artifices of structural and systemic racial discrimination in the U.S.

AJC worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the broad civil rights, religious, and labor coalition, whether in the halls of Congress or on the march from Selma to Montgomery. The aim was to ensure that in deed, as well as in word, America would be true to its founding vision.

Following these historic steps, the situation took an unexpected turn, with black-Jewish tensions erupting in the late 1960s over the Ocean Hill-Brownsville face-off between a largely black local school board and a largely Jewish teacher's union; conflicting views regarding the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* case decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978; and growing Jewish concern about data revealing relatively high rates of anti-Semitism among blacks. Even so, active cooperation between mainstream leaders of the black community and AJC continued.

It was in the 1970s that AJC helped spark a new era in American pluralism, in large part as an outgrowth of its National Project on Ethnic America, launched in 1968. In seeking to sensitize the nation to the importance of ethnic factors in America's evolving social tapestry, it created a foundation for greater intergroup contact, understanding, and cooperation. For AJC, an organization that grasped the value of healthy interethnic relations and the need for coalition-building in achieving public-policy goals, this initiative had important ramifications.

Also in the 1970s, the global movement to address the plight of Jews in the USSR, which AJC-sponsored studies as well as meetings with top-level Soviet officials had helped highlight, picked up steam. As more Soviet Jews demanded their right to leave—consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and given additional impetus by the 1975 Helsinki Accords, to which the USSR was a signatory—Jews in the free world stepped up the campaign in support of their oppressed brethren.

AJC was one of the four original founders, in 1964, of the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry. It later provided the first president and executive director of its successor organization, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, established in 1971. Contemporaneously, reflecting its own institutional strengths, AJC also focused heavily on mobilizing support in three other key target audiences—Chris-

tian religious leadership, diplomats from Europe and Latin America, and international human rights activists and legal scholars.

And, to jump ahead, in 1987, the director of AJC's Washington office was asked to organize and coordinate what became the single largest Jewish gathering in American history, when more than 250,000 people, joined by Vice President George H.W. Bush and other dignitaries, gathered on the National Mall to protest the treatment of Soviet Jews, as President Mikhail Gorbachev paid his first official visit to the White House.

Moreover, reflecting the agency's broader concerns, AJC undertook to find ways to support the Soviet dissident community, even though, tactically, the Soviet Jewry movement stayed at arm's length from those seeking political change within the USSR. AJC refused to choose between Ida Nudel, the emigration activist, and Andrei Sakharov, the human rights campaigner, believing that both merited full support in their respective efforts. Yet AJC helped both artfully, in a way that kept the two efforts separate. In large measure, the Soviet human rights campaign was assisted through AJC's Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights.

Another defining issue during this decade was the adoption by the UN General Assembly of Resolution 3379, the so-called "Zionism is racism" resolution. AJC persisted in the long effort to repeal this canard until its successful conclusion. As the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan noted on the eve of repeal, "For more than 15 years, the American Jewish Committee has been at the forefront of efforts to repeal Resolution 3379, the obscene 1975 UN General Assembly resolution which found Zionism to be a form of racism and racial discrimination. This has sometimes been a lonely struggle, considered by many to be quixotic. Some even argued that it was better to keep quiet about this obscene resolution. Overall there has been an inability to understand just how dangerous this resolution was to the State of Israel. But the AJC did understand. And persisted."

The year 1975, this low point in the UN's history, also sparked a basic change in the attitude of AJC, which had been among the UN's earliest and most enthusiastic supporters. With an anti-Israel "auto-

matic" majority in place everywhere but the Security Council, the UN became a mouthpiece for Arab nations and the PLO, intent on vilifying and isolating Israel in the world community. To this day, AJC and others are dealing not only with the consequences of the spate of resolutions routinely adopted by virtually every UN component, but also with the permanent anti-Israel secretariats and standing committees that are embedded within the world body.

By the mid-1970s, after the fall of Saigon, a tidal wave of refugees from Southeast Asia, fleeing communist tyranny, began seeking new homes. Known as the "boat people"—many left their native lands on anything they thought would float—they struck a particularly resonant chord among Jews, who recalled the ill-fated saga of ships like the *St. Louis* and the *Struma*, which had unsuccessfully attempted to take Jews from Nazi-controlled Europe to safe havens. AJC played a leading role in persuading the Carter administration to respond generously to these refugees, many of whom found temporary shelter in other Asian lands but were unable to remain there permanently. The organization also helped spearhead financial support for the refugees while in transit camps, and encouraged American Jewish families and synagogues to sponsor the resettlement of refugee families in the U.S.

### Reaching Out

The decade of the 1980s witnessed many parallel initiatives rather than any one overriding focus. Three notable examples reflected AJC's consistently forward-looking approach and its deep belief in bridge-building.

Having been the first Jewish organization to engage the Federal Republic of Germany, after its establishment in 1949, on issues other than restitution and indemnification, AJC proposed a groundbreaking German-Jewish exchange program. It was launched in 1980, in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and continues today, 26 years later, having directly touched thousands of people on both sides of the Atlantic. It has also inspired similar AJC cooperation with other leading German foundations. As former German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel noted, "The American Jewish Commit-

tee has pioneered the German-American Jewish dialogue.” In all, AJC’s wide-ranging activity with Germany over a span of more than five decades richly illustrates its distinctive, bold, and far-reaching worldview.

The following year, AJC established the Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations. The institute focused on building deeper ties between world Jewry’s two greatest population centers, in the belief that these links were too important to both sides to be left unattended. Once again, this was a prescient decision, taken long before it became obvious that the relationship between these two great Jewish centers was not on automatic pilot, but needed active cultivation—including research, publications, conferences, and exchange programs—in order to maintain healthy and mutually supportive ties.

And in 1989, the Pacific Rim Institute (later renamed the Asia and Pacific Rim Institute) was founded to address the rapidly growing importance of this region and to forge relations between Asians and Jews, which until then had been woefully inadequate. Two years earlier, a spate of newspaper articles about the popularity of anti-Semitic books in Japan had seemingly come out of nowhere, prompting AJC to begin regular visits to Tokyo and, later, to Seoul, followed by Beijing, New Delhi, and other Asian capitals. These travels, and the information they revealed about this vast and dynamic region of the world, led AJC to invest heavily in cementing long-term relationships. The agency’s goals were to combat anti-Semitism, build understanding of Jews in countries where they were numerically insignificant, help strengthen ties with Israel (which at the time were generally either in an embryonic or diplomatically “cool” phase), and contribute to the growing transpacific dialogue.

The effort paid off handsomely. One of AJC’s proudest moments came when the Japanese government, presiding over the world’s second largest economy, reversed course and called on the nation’s companies to stop adhering to the Arab boycott against Israel. The *Jerusalem Report* noted at the time, “According to Hideo Sato, senior official at the Japanese embassy in Washington, the new Japanese policy of opposing the Arab boycott was the result of five years of patient

diplomacy by the American Jewish Committee.” The point was reinforced by David Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa in their book *Jews in the Japanese Mind*. They wrote: “AJC’s efforts to establish an ongoing dialogue paid off. The Japanese government pledged to discourage Japanese companies from complying with the Arab boycott. The AJC’s dignified, low-key approach should serve as a model for future activism.”

Illustrating yet again AJC’s broad approach to the world, the organization was invited in 1984 to participate in an interagency Jewish mission to Ethiopia’s Gondar Province. The goal was to establish contact with Jews there on the eve of Operation Moses, a clandestine rescue effort to bring Ethiopia’s Jews to Israel. But the trip took place while Ethiopia was in the midst of a widespread famine threatening the lives of as many as six million of its citizens. AJC insisted, against the objections of some who felt it would divert attention from the trip’s goal, that the delegation must also demonstrate its concern for the famine by visiting feeding stations and meeting with representatives of relief agencies.

Out of this experience came the first AJC campaign to raise funds for a major international humanitarian crisis. It was to be followed by many others that responded to both natural and man-made disasters, whether in Argentina, Bosnia, El Salvador, India, Indonesia, Israel, Kosovo, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Turkey, or the U.S. In quintessential AJC fashion, the hundreds of thousands of dollars received in donations to help alleviate the Ethiopian famine were distributed to Catholic Relief Services, Church World Service, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, setting an ecumenical example for subsequent disbursements. And, as would occur on other occasions, the recipients of the support represented every race, religion, and ethnic background.

### A Global Perspective

In the 1990s, AJC began a major overhaul of its approach to international relations. It expanded its reach to many more nations; established sustained high-level links with top leaders in dozens of them;

opened offices in several European cities (and later, India); forged closer relations with overseas Jewish communities; merged with the Washington-based Project Interchange, the Geneva-based UN Watch, and the New York-based Thanks To Scandinavia; and sought to bring to its global work a more strategic vision. At the center of this retooling was a desire to be a still more effective advocate for Israel's yearning for lasting peace and security, and to be available to those Jewish communities who could benefit from close contact with a leading American Jewish institution.

Alongside this major effort was an early recognition of the opportunity afforded by the implosion of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the Iron Curtain and Berlin Wall. These unexpected developments opened up entirely new chapters in the lives of local Jewish communities and in state-to-state relations with Israel. They also provided a chance to address a multitude of long-neglected Holocaust-related matters, from remembrance (including AJC's historic cooperation with the Polish government to protect and memorialize the site of the Nazi death camp at Belzec, where more than 500,000 Jews were murdered over a ten-month span) to education to restitution. And just as important, they created an extraordinary moment to extend the reach of democracy, human rights, and integration into the Euro-Atlantic architecture.

AJC was out of the starting gate very fast, establishing links with virtually every country once in the Soviet orbit, including the newly established nations resulting from the break-up of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the USSR. Moreover, it was the first—and among the very few—Jewish organizations in the world to express support for German unification after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. AJC recognized the historic opportunity not only for Germany, but also for the further integration of democratic Europe as well as enhanced relations with Israel and the Jewish people.

Understanding that successful transitions from dictatorships and command economies to democracies and market economies were by no means guaranteed, AJC went far in its support of an active U.S. role, expansion of NATO, graduation of several former communist

countries from the strictures of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, promotion of robust civil societies, and cooperation with Western-oriented political and social forces in the various countries. Czech president Vaclav Havel, speaking at a White House state dinner given in his honor by President Bill Clinton, said: "Let me acknowledge those who have substantially contributed to the creation of an order of security and peace in Europe, such as the American Jewish Committee." The point was further buttressed by Solomon Passy, Bulgaria's foreign minister from 2001 to 2005, who commented: "The American Jewish Committee has brought Eastern Europe closer to the United States and Israel, thus reawakening Jewish life in this tormented and promising part of the world."

In the first years of the twenty-first century, AJC has continued along the dual track charted by the agency's founders.

The outbreak of Palestinian violence in the fall of 2000 unleashed a new and tragically bleak chapter in Israeli-Arab relations—a far cry from the brief eruption of hope generated by the 1993 Oslo Accords, the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, and the Middle East and North Africa economic summit meetings that brought together Arab and Israeli businessmen.

The unremittingly bad news began with what was dubbed the second intifada, but in reality was far closer to a planned conflict than a spontaneous Palestinian uprising. It was followed by Chairman Yasir Arafat's rejection of a tantalizing two-state peace offer to the Palestinians made by Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, with the support of U.S. president Bill Clinton; the frustratingly weak leadership of Mahmoud Abbas following Arafat's death, which squandered a chance to advance the peace process; the daily rocket attacks from Gaza on southern Israel after Israel's dramatic unilateral withdrawal in 2005; the election of Hamas, the terrorist group, to govern the Palestinian Authority; and, most recently, the unprovoked Hezbollah assault, across an internationally recognized border, on northern Israel. Taken together, these events create a sense that the region has reverted back to 1947–48, when Israel was struggling to establish its sovereignty and international legitimacy.

Moreover, oil-rich Iran's aggressive nuclear program, its deep-pocketed support of Hezbollah and other terror groups, and its oft-stated goal of "wiping Israel off the map" added significantly to the dangerously combustible mix, as did Syria's regional role as mischief-maker par excellence and steadfast partner of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas. As if this were not dismaying enough, large swaths of European political parties, the intelligentsia, media, labor unions, and public opinion issued a constant chorus of criticism of Israel, in some cases returning to the fundamental question of the Jewish state's very right to exist. And to make matters still worse, anti-Semitism in various guises, new and old, brazenly reasserted itself, particularly in the Islamic world and Europe, leaving Jewish communities in France and other countries wondering if their governments were prepared to defend them and whether they had a secure future.

The deadly terror attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent spate of revelations about the extent of Islamist cells, preachers, "charities," recruitment centers, training camps, and fund-raising activities around the world—including in virtually every major Western country—were a wake-up call for many, though by no means all, to the threat faced by democratic and moderate Muslim countries alike. AJC had warned of this threat for years in capitals around the world, including Washington, to little avail.

In innumerable ways, these issues—the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the rise of anti-Semitism, the assaults on Israel, and the growing assertiveness and violence of exponents of radical Islam—have dominated AJC's activities both internationally and domestically since 2000.

From utilizing the extensive resources of AJC's unique Division on Middle East and International Terrorism, to pursuing a diplomatic full-court press on every continent and at the UN; from engaging in the vigorous U.S. debate on the balance between national security and civil rights concerns, to ratcheting up Web-based, radio, television, and print messages; from reinvigorating AJC's early campaign, started in the 1970s, to decrease U.S. energy dependence on Middle East oil, to exposing the anti-Western, anti-Christian, and anti-Jewish themes

coursing through the veins of the Saudi school system; and from expanding the scope of AJC's Project Interchange to take American, European, and Asian influentials on missions to Israel to see the situation for themselves, to testifying before the U.S. Congress, the French National Assembly, the UN Commission on Human Rights, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, AJC was fully mobilized and engaged—in each of the organization's 33 chapters across the country, in every national program department, in all eight overseas office—to confront these defining, indeed all-encompassing, issues.

Even so, the agency never faltered, even in this difficult period, in its commitment to the needs of others. For instance, AJC members responded generously to appeals for financial assistance to address the calamity in Asia resulting from the tsunami. Funds were distributed in India and Sri Lanka, including underwriting an Israeli relief team to provide lifesaving assistance in the region and building a vocational center in an affected Indian fishing village. The disbursement of funds in the American South in the wake of Hurricane Katrina also underscored AJC's distinctive approach. In addition to providing assistance to a range of damaged Jewish institutions, AJC devoted a significant share to helping rebuild Christian houses of worship and faith-based African American universities. President George W. Bush singled out AJC as one of three Jewish groups that responded to the devastation wrought by Katrina.

### Keys to Success

AJC's robust organizational picture was very much on display at the gala dinner in May 2006, when the organization marked its centenary with an overflow crowd of more than 2,000 members and guests in attendance, including hundreds of young Jews from dozens of countries. The unprecedented presence of three world leaders at a Jewish gathering—President George W. Bush of the U.S., Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, and Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the UN—together with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel, Prime Minister John Howard of Australia, and President Lech Kaczyński of

Poland via video, spoke volumes about AJC's place in the world.

It is worth reflecting briefly on some distinguishing traits that have permitted AJC to develop over the past century. After all, it's not every institution that makes it to its centenary birthday, much less that can claim, with some justification, that it reaches this milestone at the peak of its institutional health and well-being.

First, from its earliest days, AJC did not define itself only as a defense organization, even though defense was integral to its mission. It took to heart the Jewish notion of *tikkun olam*, repair of the world, and set forth ambitiously, with its ever-growing toolbox of institutional resources and experience, to participate in some of the most compelling—and challenging—issues of the times. Moreover, it refused to succumb to an agenda based solely, or even principally, on fear; rather, consistent with Jewish teaching, it believed in the possibility of positive change, and acted accordingly.

Second, just as it sought to attract to its ranks distinguished lay leaders—and the roster over the past century has been impressive—so, too, did AJC early on come to recognize the importance of recruiting the best professionals to its staff and giving them running room to build a reputation in the larger community, both Jewish and non-Jewish. And rather than tip the scales toward either the volunteers or staff, as many other nonprofit agencies have done, the organizational culture evolved into a true partnership, the result of which, more often than not, was that the total became greater than the sum of its parts.

Third, AJC has taken a long-term approach to complex issues, recognizing that in pursuing its lofty goals and confronting a range of political and social pathologies, there are seldom shortcuts, quick fixes or over-the-counter remedies. This often goes against the grain of prevailing American culture, especially in recent years when an attention-span deficit and demand for instant gratification and immediate results seem to dominate our society.

Fourth, the agency has always placed a high premium on top-notch research and analysis to inform advocacy. Indeed, the record here is particularly impressive. AJC's intellectual contributions to the Jew-

ish and broader communities are notable—from the *American Jewish Year Book, Commentary*, and landmark projects such as the five-volume *Studies in Prejudice*, to the Blaustein Library's treasure trove of information, AJC's widely cited annual polls on the views of American Jews, and the scores of influential studies written or commissioned by AJC's Department of Contemporary Jewish Life (formerly Jewish Communal Affairs) and its William Petschek National Jewish Family Center.

Fifth, in the spirit of the previous point, AJC values the power of ideas. Discussion, deliberation, and debate have long been hallmarks of the agency's decision-making process. By attracting an informed range of views, the agency enjoys the benefit of thoughtful and often competing perspectives. Because of a hard-earned reputation for the quality of its "products"—be they reports, polls or position papers—AJC is able to have its views seriously considered in the public-policy marketplace.

Sixth, AJC has anticipated and adapted to changing trends. The agency has had an impressive record of adjusting itself, both structurally and programmatically, in response to evolving circumstances. Some examples in recent years have been AJC's establishment of four regional institutes covering Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America; innovative programs in Latino-Jewish relations; early outreach to Soviet-born Jews living in the U.S.; a separate division on international terrorism; emphasis on Muslim-Jewish dialogue; extensive diplomatic contacts in the Arab and larger Muslim worlds; 22 association agreements with Jewish agencies around the world; and an array of new initiatives to engage young Jews.

Seventh, AJC long ago understood that to have a friend one needs to be a friend. As a numerically small community, Jews must have partners in order to have impact. But this requires a willingness to reach out, to be sensitive to the objectives of others, to be involved in matters beyond the parochial, and, at the end of the day, to be willing to help others in the expectation of being assisted in return. AJC has been a trailblazer, domestically and internationally, in finding friends by demonstrating friendship toward others.

And eighth, AJC has known when to push the mute button in the service of a larger purpose. This special skill enhances AJC's image as a reliable and responsible interlocutor and partner. In a high-decibel, chattering, tell-all world, that is a rarer commodity than it should be.

When, for example, Professor Deborah Lipstadt of Emory University was sued in British courts by the notorious Holocaust denier David Irving, AJC undertook the chairmanship of an effort to raise funds to support her resoundingly successful, if costly, legal defense. For three years, AJC worked energetically to help raise the required money, but never uttered a public word about its role, even though publicity might have served institutional purposes. The professor's lawyers feared that Irving might otherwise use the fact to depict himself as a victim of a "worldwide Jewish campaign" and thereby gain sympathy and support.

Or, more recently, AJC approached the president of a country sitting on the UN Security Council to ask for reconsideration of his country's voting record in support of anti-Israel resolutions. He was told that the facts on the ground and the strong bilateral link with Israel merited a different position. Importantly, the president had more than once asked AJC for assistance in Washington on matters important to his own agenda—and received it. After one face-to-face meeting and two additional phone calls, he gave new instructions and the vote was changed. In private conversations, Israeli leaders gave full credit to AJC. But nothing was discussed publicly. AJC understood that in this case, taking credit was less important than having that country do the right thing—and not be embarrassed by the suggestion that it did so at the behest of an outside group.

The successes have been many, but the record, of course, is far from perfect. To be sure, errors in judgment were made along the way. How could it be otherwise? The fields of human relations, diplomacy, and public policy are imperfect sciences; not every action produces the desired reaction. Good intentions do not always translate into good results.

### Agenda for the Next Century

On Wall Street it is said that past performance is not necessarily an indicator of future performance. Clearly, however, the AJC is well-positioned to confront the challenges that lie ahead. Whether it ultimately succeeds shall be determined by future essayists in the *American Jewish Year Book*, but the institutional vital signs are strong. And, no doubt, the agency's foundational values and unique mode of operation will benefit generations of American Jews to come.

What are likely to be some of the most pressing challenges on the agenda of AJC and, by extension, that of the Jewish community, in the years ahead? While the unknowable factor is always present—who in 1906 could have foreseen the First World War, the new nations that emerged in its aftermath, the rise of Nazism, fascism, and communism, the Final Solution, the atomic bomb, decolonization, an end to legalized racial barriers in the U.S., full Jewish participation in American life, Jewish statehood, a virtual end to Jewish life in Arab countries, the European Union, cyberspace, satellite technology, and so much more?—certain issues have crystallized and doubtless will loom large for quite some time.

Leading the list is the likely marriage, sooner or later, between radical Islamic states and non-state actors, on the one hand, and weapons of mass destruction, on the other. The potential consequences are nothing short of catastrophic. Pakistan today has a nuclear bomb. Its leader, a relative moderate, has been the target of repeated assassination attempts. Should Pakistan one day fall into the hands of extremists, the geopolitical tsunami would be felt around the world. And those who seek comfort in the belief that the cold-war theory of mutual assured destruction will prevent the use of such weapons could be misreading the airtight theological mindset of the extremists. Martyrdom and sacrifice are central to their worldview, as has been illustrated more than once. There is no greater strategic challenge facing the democratic world, including the U.S. and Israel, as well as moderate Arab and other Muslim-majority nations, all of whom find themselves in the crosshairs of the jihadists.

Closely connected is the question of the future of Islam. Nearly

20 percent of the world's inhabitants consider themselves Muslim. They are to be found in significant—and growing—numbers on every continent. To be sure, they are not a monolithic community, far from it. Ultimately, the direction of Islam—and the ratio of forces within it—will be determined by Muslims themselves. Outsiders do have a role to play, but it is necessarily subordinate to what takes place among the religion's adherents. Whether those who espouse a moderate, peaceful, and pluralistic vision can prevail over those who assert a triumphalist, exclusivist, and apocalyptic approach may well determine the direction of the twenty-first century as much as any other single factor.

Further, the migration of radical Muslims to the four corners of the earth has profound implications for democratic societies, including their Jewish communities. In 2006, not a single European country's birthrate reached replacement level, illustrating the desperate need for immigrants to fill the gap and prop up the economy. Those immigrants are overwhelmingly Muslim. In recent years, the challenges have been on display in Western Europe: the thwarted terror attacks in the United Kingdom in the summer of 2006; the successful attacks in London a year earlier; the large-scale riots in largely Muslim French neighborhoods the same year; the violent reaction to the publication in Denmark of cartoons considered blasphemous by many Muslims; the terror attacks in Madrid in 2004; the disrupted terror attacks in Germany this year and previously; the killing of Theo van Gogh in Holland and the death threats to his cinematographic partner Ayaan Hirsi Ali; and, of course, the hundreds of documented anti-Semitic incidents in Britain, France, and other countries, some perpetrated by the far right but many emanating from within the Muslim community.

But it is not only the physical threat that constitutes the danger. As some Muslim groups grow in confidence, they are already seeking in a number of Western countries the modification of existing societal norms that embody deeply entrenched modern values, such as gender equality and separation of church and state. And what will happen when these groups can claim, with justification, that their con-

stituents make up a significant electoral force? We have already begun to see, in the United Kingdom and France in particular, the effects of this recognition, as political parties and politicians running for office increasingly take into account this voting bloc. Of course, the countervailing forces of acculturation and assimilation may also be at work, as they should, instilling the values of the adopted countries, so it remains to be seen whether the forces of integration or separation will prevail. One thing, however, is not in doubt: the sociodemographic makeup of Western Europe is changing rapidly, and will continue to do so as long as the shortage of workers continues, and also as long as the region is surrounded by failed or failing states, especially across the Mediterranean Sea, offering little hope to their young people.

For now, the bulk of Jews in Europe are staying put, though there are increasing signs of Jews on the move—whether families making aliyah to Israel or at least buying property there, or young people exploring educational and professional opportunities in North America. Will this process accelerate in the years ahead? Depending on how European countries deal with their internal challenges, if Jews feel increasingly marginalized and at risk, the answer could be yes. That, in turn, would have profound implications for the countries affected as well as the countries of destination of the relocating Jews.

Israel's yearning for a stable and secure peace seems more remote from reality today than at any time in the recent past. Of course, it should be added that in 1967, as the Six-Day War raged, it would have been difficult to believe that, ten years later, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat would make an historic journey to Jerusalem, culminating in 1979 in an Egyptian-Israeli peace accord. In that spirit, hope must be sustained, but chances are that Jewish groups will be faced with the ongoing need to help generate understanding and support for Israel for many years to come.

In particular, as long as Iran is in the hands of those who believe Israel should be destroyed, the Jewish state will not be able to lower its guard. And recent events in relation to Lebanon and the inconclusive end to the month-long conflict with Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 reveal the intrinsic dangers in the region, the threat

posed by missiles and rockets to Israeli population centers, and the ability of a small but highly disciplined group to avoid wholesale defeat at the hands of Israel's highly regarded armed forces. No less dangerous is the potentially destabilizing effect of Muslim extremists on such Arab regimes as Egypt and Jordan, the latter dependent for its very survival upon Israel's tacit strategic support.

All this, in turn, may have a long-term impact on the perception of Israel's deterrence capability, which has always been one of its key strategic assets in the rough-and-tumble region. If that perception is punctured, it could invite further acts of aggression against Israel.

The conflict also revealed once again the centrality of the unique relationship with the United States as a pivotal factor in Israel's strategic, diplomatic, and political doctrine. But is that U.S. role guaranteed for eternity, or could it come under review by a future American administration? And if it did, where would that leave Israel? Could it fill any vacuum created by a U.S. decision to reevaluate its special link with Israel? Where would it turn? Might there be a possible future for Israel in the European Union? Or, perhaps, in a Middle East bloc, should a core group of democratic and market-based countries one day emerge? And, in another direction, are closer links between Israel and NATO both feasible and mutually desirable?

In this connection it is also worth asking whether another special relationship, that between Israel and Germany, born of Berlin's responsibility to the Jewish people after the war, will be sustained. For Israel, this is another vital and seemingly irreplaceable link. Will future generations of German leaders feel the same obligation as their predecessors to continue it, or will they allow it to become more rhetorical than real, while integrating German foreign policy more deeply into the quest for a broader European common foreign and security policy?

Jews are a static population in the U.S. at best, and destined to slowly decline, given present marriage, fertility, and commitment patterns. But the overall U.S. population continues to grow and is expected to reach 450 million by mid-century, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That could mean Jews will constitute barely one per-

cent of the American population. Would the Jewish voice in domestic and foreign policy continue to be heard? Would it have any impact? Would Jews be able to forge productive coalitions with other groups, including surging numbers of Latinos and Asians? Would Jews increasingly find themselves alone with evangelical Christians and political conservatives in support of Israel, portending a redefinition of the pro-Israel movement from one that is politically bipartisan to one identified primarily with the right-of-center?

And what about the Arab and Muslim communities in the U.S., which, through immigration and high birthrates, are growing? Again, while not monolithic—many Arab immigrants are Christians fleeing increasingly inhospitable conditions in Arab countries, a topic seldom discussed in the media—the groups that have emerged by and large seek to counteract and neutralize pro-Israel organizations, and thereby shift America's foreign policy orientation away from its close ties with Israel.

Needless to say, should the improbable happen and a comprehensive and lasting peace accord be achieved in the Middle East, many of these concerns would no longer be relevant. Regrettably, however, the chances look slim from the perspective of 2006.

### Facing New Realities

In assessing the future role of American Jews, whether regarding support for Israel or any other core concern, an overarching question must be asked: What will the Jewish community look like in the decades ahead? Will the passion to support Jewish institutions and Jewish causes be there, or will it have petered out in an increasingly assimilated population? Will Israel be at the center or the periphery of American Jewish thought and action? If the still-fresh memories of the immigrant experience in the U.S., the Holocaust, Israel's birth and wars for survival, and the drama of the Soviet Jewry and Ethiopian Jewry sagas fueled recent generations of American Jews, what will serve as galvanizing forces in the years ahead?

If, as some sociologists suggest, the future makeup of the American Jewish community will be increasingly Orthodox, how will that

affect communal structures, public-policy advocacy, and intra-Jewish relations? And how will organizations like the American Jewish Committee, which until now have had relatively few Orthodox members, if a significant presence on staff, accommodate themselves?

In the second half of the twentieth century, Jews worldwide came to rely on the leadership of the United States and its identification with Jewish aspirations. It was the U.S. that took an active interest in the fate of Jews in the USSR, Syria, and Ethiopia, that led the struggle against the “Zionism is racism” resolution in the UN, and that walked out of the 2001 UN-sponsored so-called Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, when it turned into an anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist hatefest. And Jewish communities globally have known that they can count on the U.S. embassy to be alert to reports of harassment, discrimination or persecution. American Jewish groups, notably including AJC, have benefited from this unique and welcome American role. Moreover, there has been a collateral benefit: overseas governments have paid attention to the views of these groups, believing that they draw power from the standing and stature of the U.S. and can therefore reward or, if necessary, punish.

But the world of the twenty-first century may not necessarily resemble the past 60 years. Professor Paul Kennedy, a Yale University historian, has discussed the experience of Europe’s major powers over the past five centuries in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. It is a sobering reminder that just as states can ascend, so can they decline.

While sports references may be a stretch, their symbolic value should not be underestimated: who would have believed 20 years ago that the finalists in the 2006 world baseball and basketball championships would not include the U.S. team?

In the case of the United States, to be sure, the issue is less the prospect of a fall than the need to accommodate others as great powers, principally China, India, and the European Union. And other regions, including Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, by dint of their population growth, seats in the UN and other international bodies, and potential growth, together with Japan and especially Russia—fueled by massive reserves of oil and gas and the political lever-

age and economic wealth they generate—also seek a greater role in international decision-making. If this occurs, as seems likely, it may impact on the ability of the U.S. to project its unique strength. And that would surely have consequences for Israel and for American and world Jewry.

Consequently, it is vital for the American Jewish community to develop a better understanding of the global forces at work and to build long-term relationships with emerging nations, even as it seeks to help ensure America’s leading role and competitive edge. And speaking of competitive edge, there may be some good news. Jews, who for centuries constituted a leading force in opening trade routes, building economic and cultural links across borders, and developing cultural sensitivities, are well-positioned in today’s globalizing world to play a similar role. This has been on display, in fact, in recent years, whether in Asia or in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the years ahead AJC will confront a world where the Holocaust will perforce be a fading memory as the last of the survivors, eyewitnesses, and liberators pass away; where America’s population will both grow and change in its sociodemographic make-up; where Jews who wish to be heard will have to be even more politically nimble and skilled than their predecessors; where Jews outside Israel and the U.S. will constitute numerically small and in some cases statistically insignificant, segments of the population; where European nations will include ever larger Muslim communities; where developing nations will increasingly seek to flex their political muscle; where Israel will continue to face regional challenges while striving to overcome potentially insoluble internal fault lines between religious and secular Jews, and between Israeli Jews and Arabs; where nuclear proliferation will pose an ever-present menace; and where the United States is unlikely to be viewed any longer as the lone superpower.

Such a world will pose enormous challenges to groups like AJC and all those committed to Jewish well-being and security, as well as to democratic values, peaceful conflict resolution, and mutual understanding among diverse racial, religious, and ethnic groups.

Then again, the world didn’t look terribly inviting when a small

group of American Jews gathered in New York in 1906 to form the American Jewish Committee. They, too, faced a steep uphill climb. Their ambitious vision was not entirely fulfilled, but, notwithstanding the unimaginable horrors that engulfed the twentieth century, at the end of the day they accomplished more than they might ever have imagined.

The twenty-first century is off to a rocky start, to say the least. But just as the American Jewish Committee can look back on great accomplishments since 1906, it is surely not a vain hope to believe that, when an author is assigned, in 2106, the privilege of writing an essay for the *American Jewish Year Book* on “American Jewish Committee at 200,” that person will report on a world—and a Jewish people—enjoying improved conditions over those who lived in 2006.

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