

THE GROWING GAP BETWEEN AMERICAN JEWS AND ISRAEL

Two Views

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There is a widely held belief that American Jewry and Israel, once closely united, are increasingly moving in different directions. This thesis is examined by Ardie Goldman from an Israeli perspective and by Steven Bayme from a North American Jewish perspective.

Just as generations of Israelis have not grown up discussing the current condition of the American Jewish community, most American Jews, apart from the news they gather in the general media, rarely take time to consider current events in the state of Israel. Despite this common lack of interest, the *American Jewish Yearbook 1986* notes, "Almost every study of American Jewry includes references to the place of Israel in the lives of American Jews." Fifteen years later, researchers continue to regularly examine this relationship.

In the late 1980s, when the current Speaker of the Knesset Avrum Burg was Prime Minister Shimon Peres' Advisor on Diaspora Affairs, I was present in Jerusalem when he told a group of graduate students from the Baltimore Institute of Jewish Communal Service, "Israelis and American Jews share a common past; they do not share a common future."

I was shocked by such frankness coming from the Prime Minister's Advisor on Diaspora Affairs, a man who was later to serve as the Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Israel's primary organizational link to world Jewry. Was Mr. Burg's forecast correct?

Take the following, more restrained statement by Professor Bernard Reisman, now professor emeritus of American Jewish Communal Studies and former director of the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University. In an interview given in the summer of 1990, Professor Reisman, who has had a major influence on Jewish professional and communal life during the past 30 years, stated: "There has been a changing American perspective toward Israel. Without

denying the vital importance of Israel, that country will not be the sole basis for Jewish identity, as it was for many in our parents' generation. So while American Jews remain proud of Israel and its great achievements, its image as the epitome of Jewish accomplishment doesn't work as it once did."

Before discussing the implications of the changing American perspective on Israel, it is important to bear in mind two distinctions. The first distinction involves terminology, but it is not merely semantic. To best understand this topic, we must recognize the difference between the terms "Zionism" and "Israelism." Zionism is a highly ideological term full of historical, social, religious, and economic implications; it contains within it a sense of the imperative, both personal and collective. At the personal level, classic Zionism, whether of the secular or religious stream, argues that all Jews should live in Israel and arrange their lives in whatever way necessary to meet this goal. At the group level, Zionist theory deals in great detail with the ideal nature of the Jewish state, its laws, culture, and various other social institutions. Zionism posits that the modern Jewish state of Israel is the single, unique, and unchallenged spiritual and cultural center of Judaism and the Jewish people.

However, as it is commonly used in American Jewish fundraising circles and organizational life, the term "Zionism" has come to merely mean support for Israel or being pro-Israel. This is what I call "Israelism." According to Chaim Waxman, a "pro-Israel American Jew is one who lives in the United States and

supports Israel economically, politically, and even emotionally, but whose primary source of Jewish identification is derived from, and oriented to, the American Jewish community.” Zionism in the Diaspora means supporting the right of the state of Israel to exist as a Jewish state in peace and security. In this sense, anyone, Jew or non-Jew, can rightly be considered a Zionist. Or take the admittedly cynical definition of a Diaspora Zionist as being one Jew who collects money from a second Jew to make it possible for a third Jew to live in Israel. I remember being at a General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations during the 1970s when a proposal was brought to officially recognize the term “Zionist” to mean “any Jew who has visited the state of Israel at least one time.” Not only is the principle behind this self-serving definition outlandish, given the history and achievements of the Zionist movement, but the very notion that the task of defining Zionism might be left in the hands of individuals who would never consider living in Zion—neither themselves, their children, nor grandchildren—is too bizarre to be taken seriously.

The other distinction to keep in mind is the difference between the community elite and the rank and file. The community elite comprises the affluent members of the Jewish community who are among its key decision makers, many of whom are active both on the local and the national scene. High-ranking Jewish academicians, and Jewish communal professionals are also part of this group. The rank and file represents *amcha*, the American Jewish public at large, most of whom today are only marginally affiliated with the organized Jewish community.

Studies carried out over the years have found significant differences between the feelings or attitudes of these groups on a range of Jewish issues, especially when it comes to Israel. Typically, the leaders of the American Jewish community tend to be more involved and more knowledgeable about Israel, but at the same time, are often critical. In turn, the rank and file is generally less informed and less knowledgeable about Israel, but at the same time less critical of the state. Therefore,

it is of great relevance to specify the sector of the community when discussing the feelings and attitudes of American Jews toward Israel.

HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AMERICAN JEWRY AND ISRAEL

There have been four main phases in the relationship between American Jewry and the state of Israel:

1. 1948–1967: Indifference—The beginning of Jewish national independence evoked a brief flurry of Zionist enthusiasm, at least among some sectors of the community, which was followed by a prolonged period of American Jewish detachment from Israel.
2. 1967–1977: Avid Identification—The Six-Day War elicited an impassioned identification with the Jewish State that lasted for a decade. Israel’s impressive victory resulted in a significant rise in American Jewish tourism and immigration. The annual Salute to Israel Parade up Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, the ubiquitous falafel alongside kosher pizza, Israeli folk dancing, and Yom Ha’Atzmaut celebrations became regular features of American Jewish life.
3. 1977–1992: Criticism—Menachem Begin’s election as prime minister in 1977 engendered a heretofore unknown crescendo of American Jewish criticism of Israel. The late prime minister’s experiences as a pre-State Underground leader, his defiant Jewish pride, including constant references to the Holocaust, and his policy of building new Jewish communities on the West Bank introduced a new dissonance into American Jewish-Israeli relations.
4. 1992/Oslo to the present: Split—More than at any time in the past, the American Jewish elite aligned themselves with one of Israel’s two political camps. On the political left, there are American Friends for Peace Now and the New Israel Fund, with a significant overlap in membership

between these two organizations, the latter acting de facto as the philanthropic arm of the former. On the political right are found the Zionist Organization of America and Americans for a Safe Israel. Other American Jewish organizations may lean to the right or left, but they do not expressly admit to having a political agenda.

The American Jewish community has long been the subject of surveys seeking its opinions and attitudes on topics tied to Jewish identity, anti-Semitism, and Israel. According to Eytan Gilboa of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the first poll of American Jewry on attitudes toward Israel was probably conducted by Elmo Roper in September 1945, barely a few months after World War II. Roper asked a cross-sectional sample of American Jews to state their views on the following proposal: "A Jewish state in Palestine is a good thing for the Jews and every possible effort should be made to establish Palestine as a Jewish state or commonwealth for those who want to settle there." About 80 percent of the respondents approved of this statement, 10 percent disapproved, and 10 percent gave no opinion. Two months later, a Gallup poll found upward of 90 percent support.

In May 1948, just a few days after the birth of the State of Israel, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), based at the University of Chicago, asked the Jews of Baltimore this question, "The Jews have set up a new Jewish state in part of Palestine. Do you approve or disapprove of this action by the Jews?" Ninety percent approved of the establishment of Israel, and a similar percentage thought that the United States was correct to recognize Israel.

Since the beginning of the state, over 90 percent of American Jews have almost consistently indicated their strong support for Israel. In fact, the only time this support level dipped slightly below 90 percent was in the immediate aftermath of Israel's entry into Lebanon during the summer of 1982. Similar results continue to be found in surveys through the end of the 1990s, including the National

Survey of American Jews sponsored by the American Jewish Committee.

In the early 1990s, Steven Cohen, also of the Hebrew University and one of this generation's most noted researchers of the American Jewish scene, took the position that the perception that American Jewish support for Israel was beginning to wane was mistakenly based on the outspoken criticism of the community's elites. At that time, he wrote:

The 1970s witnessed only isolated instances of public criticism by what were, in effect, fringe intellectuals in the Jewish community. But by the 1980s, expressions of demurrals from Israel government policies were voiced by increasingly mainstream American Jewish leaders. Four major flashpoints are noteworthy: (1) the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in September 1982, (2) the arrest of Jonathan Pollard in 1986, (3) the first Intifada in late 1987 and early 1988, and (4) the post-election bargaining in the winter of 1988-1989, which (again) raised what became known as the "Who is a Jew?" question.

To many elite figures, American Jews' adverse reaction to these four events signified a growing disenchantment, not just with certain Israeli leaders but with Israel as a state and, even more significantly, with Israel as a Judaic symbol.

Accepting the opinions of the elite as being representative of the rank and file was misleading, Cohen said. He argued that the Jewish public's feelings remained strongly pro-Israel. However, it appears that Cohen has revised his view on this subject. In a 2000 book entitled *The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America*, which he co-authored with Arnold Eisen of Stanford University, Cohen now maintains that both "quantitative and qualitative evidence... in line with numerous other indicators, supports the notion that American Jews have been experiencing increasing alienation from Israel." Undoubtedly fueling this sense of alienation, they note, are such issues as the peace process, with its many disappointments, along with the ongoing "Who is a Jew?" contro-

versy. American Jews who identify with the Reform, Conservative, or Reconstructionist movements are resentful of the denial of equality and legitimacy of those movements by successive Israeli governments.

However, Cohen and Eisen add, "It appears that this alienation is exacerbated but not caused by recent political and religious events, and that the original cause is more deep-seated." In other words, the dissonance created by these and other painful issues rested atop something even more basic. Consider that a major concern of American Jewish life has always been to demonstrate the undivided allegiance of Jews to the United States of America. Most American Jews today, even if they have difficulty articulating this idea, consider the American component of their Jewish-American selves as being the more significant of the two. Consider also that with the passage of time and generations, American Jews and Israeli Jews share fewer significant characteristics that link the two communities in any meaningful way. In fact, significant socioeconomic factors seem to be driving the two communities further and further apart (see Table 1).

The first three factors are significant in that they provide the two communities the framework for a common identity. They allow American Jews and Israelis to share certain symbols, stories, concepts, and terms. The last four factors, however, have a practical significance that bear upon the daily lives of Americans and Israelis. It is these latter factors that influence most directly the two communities' true relational dynamics.

Consider also that American Jewish identity is religio-ethnic. This way of looking at being Jewish is consonant with the way America manages its plethora of racial, ethnic, and religious groupings. For many American Jews, the state of Israel conjures up religious feelings and has religious connotations. In contrast, Israeli Jewish identity is religio-national or national. Among completely secular Israelis, their Jewish religious identity has, in fact, been replaced by an Israeli national identity. In the United States, Jewish identity and affiliation are voluntary, free from any state influences or demands. In Israel, Jewish status, if not Jewish identity (which still remains a purely a personal and individual matter), is enshrined in the laws and statutes of the country.

As small as Israel is, its Jewish population, Ashkenazi and Sephardi combined, constitute the host society whose culture is dominant. In contrast, in the United States, Jews make up a tiny minority, now about 2 percent of the population. The unofficial cultural milieu is Christian. To this day, most Americans have never met a Jew. The Jews are not in charge.

As a result of only knowing Jewish life from the perspective of an ethnic and religious minority, some American Jews appear to have difficulty grasping the concept of Jewish sovereignty. Some even see Israel as nothing more than a client state of the U.S. administration, being so heavily dependent on American military, financial, and political aid. Those less sophisticated seem to view Israel as just some very large Jewish communal undertaking that

Table 1. Socioeconomic Factors Shared and Not Shared by American and Israeli Jews.

| <u>Factors</u> | <u>Share</u> | <u>Do Not Share</u> |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| History | ✓ | |
| Religion | ✓ | |
| Blood lines/family ties | ✓ | |
| Geography | | ✓ |
| Language | | ✓ |
| Economy | | ✓ |
| System of government | | ✓ |

belongs, symbolically or in part, to all those who make an annual contribution to United Jewish Communities (formerly the UJA).

In their most current analysis of this topic, Cohen and Eisen attribute the growing gap between Israeli and American Jews to the triumph of individual identity over collective identity. It is another consequence of what they refer to as the growing popularity of private Judaism over public Judaism. They write, "The priority for American Jews is individual Jewish meaning, and the question is whether Israel enhances or detracts from the meaning." The ascendancy of individualism in recent time works hand-in-hand with the socioeconomic factors cited above to promote the continued distancing between Israeli and American Jews.

Strong, meaningful ties between Israel and American Jews are dependent upon the survival of the tribal, or extended family, ethos. This, in turn, is dependent upon maintaining an ethnocentric or Judeocentric worldview, the same worldview that tied a Jew in Tunisia to a Jew in Frankfurt to a Jew in Lodz for many centuries. I am referring to none other than the classic "But is it good for the Jews?" view of the world. Certainly among most American Jews, this worldview has long fallen out of favor; it is ridiculed as narrow-minded, prejudiced, and politically incorrect. It is a worldview that has diminished, understandably, in accordance with a perceptible decrease in anti-Semitism in many countries and societies.

Yet, this historic Jewish worldview incorporates the entire Jewish experience. Within this experience floats the Jew, who, like a fish surrounded by water, is dependent on breathing in this liquid for his or her very survival. In viewing the world, this Jew naturally peers out through this suspension. Other objects may enter this realm, but they first must be absorbed or at least learn to float within the Jewish experience. I posit that religious-Zionism, as it is lived in Israel, is the best example of this model. Haredi Judaism, within or outside the state of Israel, is also fully surrounded by the Jewish experience, but chooses to ig-

nore or at best rationalizes the political sovereignty of the modern state of Israel.

Secular Jews living in Israel are not part of this experience. And neither, of course, are most secular, nor even most non-Orthodox Jews abroad. Rather than floating within the Jewish experience, they exist outside of it. However, they reach through its soft outer membrane from time to time, as it suits them, to pull out one of the floating Jewish objects. This can be anything from reading a book or magazine of special interest to Jews, observing one of the holidays, participating in a Jewish life-cycle event, consciously choosing to inject a Yiddish term into one's discussion, or even taking a trip to Israel. This is what I call the practice of Jewishness, not Judaism.

Jewishness is voluntary; it lacks a sense of imperativeness. A sense of imperativeness, today most commonly though still not exclusively religious in nature, is what motivates a minority of Jews to leave a comfortable home and surroundings and emigrate to Israel. The more typical individualist, on the other hand, feels no routine sense of obligation to the entire Jewish people or to the Jewish state. Like most people in the world, American Jews are motivated by personal security and comfort. Their loyalty to the United States is based on their strong belief that no society in history has willingly provided Jews with more security and comfort.

CONFLICT BETWEEN AMERICA AND ISRAEL

What would be the likely reaction of American Jews if the interests or policy adopted by the government of Israel publicly conflicted with the interests or policies of the United States? In that situation, it is not difficult to imagine American Jews casting Israel in the role of an errant child or some other family member who has acted out inappropriately. Perhaps at first the official response of the Jewish community would be to deny any conflict, followed by a request for clarification and analysis. But at the end of the day, there is no question in my mind that, if forced to choose between American interests and

Israel's interests, most American Jews would choose the former. American Jews are Americans first.

Take the Pollard fiasco as a case in point. Today, almost two decades after Jonathan Pollard's arrest, trial, and incarceration, most major American Jewish organizations publicly support his release. But that is today. In the months and years following his sentencing and imprisonment, Pollard was, for all intents and purposes, *persona non grata* in the American Jewish community, particularly among the major American Jewish organizations. He was considered too hot, too dangerous. Not only were Israel's interests completely ignored, but so were the interests of justice, given the unreasonably severe sentence meted out to Pollard at the time. Thus, in spite of all the respect, power, and influence presumed to be wielded by the American Jewish community, its leaders still tread carefully, instinctively knowing how far they can go and which lines they cannot cross, regardless of what might be at risk. Such was the case with the American sale of AWAC aircraft to Saudi Arabia in the early 1980s, and more recently, with Israel's declaration of intent to sell sophisticated military technology to China. After sufficient pressure by the Defense Department and the Clinton administration, Israel backed down, and as far as we know, the sale to China was dropped. But at no time during this episode did the American establishment publicly lobby for Israel's right to this sale, treating it as a matter between governments.

THE FUTURE

The growing crisis in Israel-Diaspora relations is reflected most recently in news reports of personal funds being committed by an elite group of American Jewish millionaires "to improve the image of Israel." As reported in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* (March 5, 2001), "The idea behind the public relations campaign is to halt the decreasing involvement of Jewish communities in Israel and developments there."

Demographers predict that, given current

trends, within 20–25 years the numerical relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community will be reversed. As the long-term effects of intermarriage, currently more the rule than the exception, become palpable and the Jewish population of Israel begins to overtake that of the United States, we will see a concomitant shift in the center of Jewish institutional and cultural life.

In terms of sheer numbers, personal relationships between American Jews and Israelis are now forged mainly through intense and costly programmatic efforts, primarily youth programs run by the Jewish Agency and the dwindling Zionist youth movements. Today's premier and seemingly last-ditch effort in this area is the birthright Israel program. The very name of this program connotes a fundamental family-based connection between Diaspora Jewish youth and the state of Israel. Yet, as Sylvia Barack Fishman of Brandeis University points out:

When American Jews send children to Israel to be enculturated to a vague notion of Jewish commitment, they are not sending them "back" to a familiar culture that produced their own parents or grandparents, but "over" to a different language, Jewish culture, and identity. Above all, few American Jews have wanted their children to leave America and to live in their new Israeli homeland. For most American Jews, Zionism does not obviate a passion for the adopted homeland, America. Nevertheless, Israel continues to play an extremely important role in the education of American Jews, and in the broader issue of American-Jewish identity.

Irrespective of the quality of the youth programs or the earnestness of the work being done by the major American Jewish organizations, the fact is that they have very little impact on the lives of most American Jews. Paradoxically, a diminishing American Jewish community will have fewer economic resources available for these programs. This will lead to even fewer opportunities for American and Israeli Jews to establish meaningful ties. Some social trends are simply

inevitable.

Babylonia and Jerusalem existed side-by-side and competed vociferously with one another until eventually both disappeared from the scene. While Jerusalem was physically destroyed, the Jewish exilic community of Babylonia, later Iraq, simply lost its former glory, never to be restored. The ability of Jerusalem to re-emerge some 2,000 years after its destruction and to reassume its position as the capitol of the Jewish people is certainly a

miracle. Today, Israel's status may seem challenged by the incredible wealth and position of the American Jewish community. Both communities constitute significant and separate spheres of intellectual, spiritual, and financial resources. Both still share significant interests. But as other fundamental interests continue to diverge and powerful social forces continue to intercede, a different future, as Mr. Burg predicted two decades ago, might be unavoidable.



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Ardie Goldman's article, "The Growing Gap between American Jews and Israel" is a thoughtful if perhaps overstated formulation of the widely held thesis that American Jewry and Israel, once bound together at the hip, are increasingly moving in alternate directions. Much of Goldman's analysis is trenchant, and we are indeed witnessing the specter of the world's two largest Jewish communities becoming increasingly divided from one another owing to differences of language, culture, religion, and politics. Yet Goldman's generalization that American Jewry and Israel have drifted so far apart that they no longer share aspirations for a common Jewish future is far too sweeping. Similarly, he is far too dismissive of efforts currently underway to strengthen ties between American Jewry and Israel.

To be sure, Goldman is undoubtedly correct to register concern over the increased distance between American Jewry and Israel, or, put another way, the eclipse of Israel as compelling myth for American Jewry. The distancing is real, albeit not for the precise reasons Goldman enumerates. First, the attraction of Israel as compelling myth for American Jewry rarely consisted of an idealized Israel that could do no wrong. Rather American Jews were attracted to Israel as an inspirational

symbol of return of the Jews to homeland and sovereignty—a Jewish success narrative in which the Jews had indeed "pulled it off." This was coupled with memories of the Holocaust and a recurring image of Israel as a little America, a fellow democracy that shared liberal values and ideals. Zionism as aliyah and personal fulfillment as a Jew, by contrast, as Goldman notes, was rarely operational for American Jewry except within the limited circles of religious Zionism.

Although Goldman quite correctly agonizes over the diminished power of the myth, he understates the myth's achievement—a pro-Israel consensus within the Jewish community that has lasted through both Labor and Likud governments, and Democratic and Republican party administrations and that has marginalized once-powerful voices such as the American Council for Judaism. Indeed, continued American Jewish support for Israel over so many decades constitutes a critical ingredient in securing American governmental support for Israel and preserving the special relationship between Israel and America. In all probability, were it not for the pro-Israel consensus among American Jews, which Goldman acknowledges but is too quick to dismiss, American policy toward Israel would likely resemble more that of the European democracies than the contin-

ued support America has given Israel in both good times and bad.

To be sure, over the course of a 50-year relationship, there have been strains between Israel and American Jewry. But Goldman here may be missing the forest for the trees. The larger picture is one of continued American Jewish support and a pro-Israel unity within the Jewish people. At times, this consensus has frayed around the edges, including but not limited to the Oslo years. With the collapse of the peace process, threats to Jewish security have intensified, in turn creating greater bonding between Israel and American Jewry. Goldman and others correctly decry the fact that we seem incapable of bonding with Israel out of joy and optimism in the Jewish condition and can do so primarily when we perceive Jews as vulnerable or threatened. Yet this reality should by no means lead him to minimize the degree of unity that does exist, enhanced, tragically, by continued Arab intransigence and extremism in betraying the promise of Oslo.

More importantly, Goldman attributes the decreasingly compelling force of Israel for American Jews to disappointment over Israel's handling of specific issues, namely Oslo and religious pluralism. Aside from questioning what more Israel could have offered to secure peace with the Palestinian Authority, I believe Goldman here has overlooked the most critical factor in American Jewish distancing from Israel: assimilation and the drifting away from Judaism. Survey after survey documents that the more committed Jews are to Judaism, the more committed they are to Israel. Conversely, the root cause of alienation from Israel lies more in assimilation than in any specific action Israel undertakes or fails to undertake.

Note, for example, the difference between Conservative and Reform Jews in travel to Israel. Representatives and rabbis of both movements harbor significant grievances as to how they are treated by Israel. Yet where 28 percent of Conservative Jews have been to Israel once and 19 percent more than once (repeat visits are probably more accurate barometers of commitment to Israel than single visits), only 22 percent of Reform Jews have

visited Israel once and only 14 percent more than once (AJC, 2000). Members of both movements share a common image of Israel as rejecting religious pluralism, yet Conservative Jews demonstrate significantly greater involvement in Israel, suggesting that it is not so much Israel that is causing the distancing to take place at present, but rather the progress of assimilation within the respective religious movements.

Special mention must be made in this context of birthright Israel, which Goldman characterizes as the premier and seemingly "last-ditch effort" to restore ties between Israel and American Jewry. He misses the significance of birthright serving as a critical signal of Israel's responsibility to preserve and enhance Jewish life in North America. In that sense, birthright symbolizes a profoundly positive change in how Israel views the Diaspora. Again, Goldman may be missing the forest for the trees in focusing on the debatable question of what birthright will accomplish for Jewish teenagers while missing a larger picture of increased bonding between Israel and American Jewry.

Perhaps most one-sided are Goldman's comments concerning American Jewry and the Pollard affair. Goldman, as did Shlomo Avineri, the renowned Israeli political scientist and former Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, indicts American Jewry for failing to rise to Pollard's defense for fear of the old canard of dual loyalty (Rosenthal, 2001). In other words, in Goldman's and Avineri's view, the Pollard affair exposed the lingering insecurity Jews have about their identities as Jewish Americans. Goldman charges American Jewry with insensitivity both to Israel's interests and to justice for Pollard personally, given the severity of the sentence he received.

Yet strangely Goldman fails to underscore what Pollard actually did, or what American Jewry had done in other cases involving charges of dual loyalty. Pollard was convicted of betraying his country, thereby endangering a strategic alliance between Israel and America. Successive Secretaries of Defense, including those from different parties and those most friendly to Israel, have consistently upheld the severity of Pollard's sentence. Goldman does

not consider the gravity of Pollard's crimes, which in turn may explain why American Jewry has been so reluctant to rise to his defense, nor does Goldman even acknowledge Jewish communal efforts to secure any reduction in Pollard's sentence.

Conversely, Jews had no problem supporting Senator Joseph Lieberman during his recent campaign for the vice-presidency. Nor did they express anxiety that a Lieberman vice-presidency may have incurred charges of dual loyalty. Rather, Jews have argued quite successfully that, like other Americans, they possess multiple loyalties and that those loyalties strengthen America as a pluralist democracy rather than weaken it.

Goldman does state correctly that Israel and American Jewry are diverging over questions of Jewish identity. American Jews are looking to the synagogue and the religious movements for answers to their quest for a spiritual Jewish identity. Israel, by contrast, outside of limited Orthodox circles, looks to secular frames of reference and membership in the collective whole of the Jewish people to define Jewish identity. However, even in this instance some measure of commonality does exist. In both societies a small but important "Back to the Sources" movement seeks to engage Jewish texts as sources of meaning. Currents of individualism and spirituality may well compel Israelis to question the adequacy of secular Jewishness, a category that is virtually absent from the American scene. The final results of these phenomena are by no means clearly predictable, nor are they necessarily favorable. Yet they do signal a more complex and nuanced portrait of relations between Israel and American Jewry than the one-sided distancing that Goldman fears.

Goldman concludes on the sweeping note that "no question" exists that were there real divergence between Israel and America, American Jews would place America's interests over Israel's. American Jews prefer to answer this question by ensuring its inapplicability. They have underscored constantly over the decades the commonality of interests and values between America and Israel. The process is by no means uniform; there have been many ups

and downs along the way. Yet it is fatuous to dismiss the real efforts Jews have mounted to strengthen ties between Israel and America. Similarly, it remains a very open question whose side American Jews would join if there would exist a real conflict between Israel and America over interests and principles.

The atrocities of September 11 in New York and Washington will clearly alter the Jewish agenda much as they have already altered the American and global agendas. Inside the Jewish community, the immediate response has been one of increased bonding between Israel and American Jewry and identification with President Bush's call for a war against terrorism. These responses should occasion little surprise. Indeed, as noted earlier, the historical pattern has been that of Jews worldwide uniting in times of danger or vulnerability. The larger question, however, is whether the Jewish world will return to a posture and self-perception of defensiveness. Part of the promise of Oslo was that Jews might liberate themselves from the defensive posture embodied in models of perceived anti-Semitism and external hostility and be free to focus on the meaning of Jewish identity today and the nature of Jewish interrelationships with the larger society. The September 11 terrorism suggests that the reality of evil in the world today is far greater than anyone imagined and that Jewish vulnerabilities are by no means rooted exclusively in Jewish paranoia. In short, it is probably premature to close the book on Jewish defensiveness. By the same token, however, it is therefore also premature to close the book on Israel-American Jewish bonding. While the trends of distancing of American Jews from Israel are clear, events in both the Middle East and America can and often do serve to bind Jews together.

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