

## AMERICAN JEWS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

At this juncture of history, the fate of American Jews and Israeli Jews and most other Jews in the world -- not to mention the social values they cherish -- depend heavily on the public policies of the United States government.

American economic, diplomatic and military-supply assistance is vital to Israel's survival. It is American public policy favorable to Israel which primarily prevents American Jewish activity on behalf of Israel from stirring currents of anti-semitism in this country. American public policy is crucial to the fate of Soviet Jewry. It is American public policy which must save the idea and the reality of free societies in the world, probably the only kind of modern societies in which Jews can survive. It is certainly American public policy which guarantees that first-class citizenship for American Jews which allows them not only to flourish -- out to exercise their due influence on American public policies.

Under those conditions, the role of American Jews as American citizens is awesome. What are the ways in which American Jews do and can influence these fateful American public policies -- and how are American Jews organized to exercise that influence?

There are three broad ways in which public policies are influenced: 1) by an *electoral* presence in the political process; 2) by an intellectual presence, to use that word to describe the conceptual and informational aspects of the political process, and 3) by a social presence.

All three of those "ways" are political ways by definition. All activity is political activity whose impact is to shape governmental public policy. But some people think of electoral activity as "direct political activity" because it is to do with the sheer power to affect the election of policy-makers.

## The Electoral Presence

Being elected is the name of the game. For those who just want to get elected for personal reasons, it is the name of the game. And for those who want to make policy for idealistic reasons, getting elected is the name of the game. Thus, to the extent that a citizens' force can help to gain or impede an election, that force has a certain understandable influence on public officials or candidates.

This electoral presence has two somewhat different dimensions: 1) citizens as voters, and 2) citizens as activists in the electoral process.

In the voting process, Jewish numbers initially seem to leave something to be desired. There is one state in which Jews are about 10 per cent of the population, and one state in which Jews are about 6 per cent. There are 9 states in which Jews constitute anywhere from 2 to 4 per cent of the population. In most of the other 39 states, Jews are less than one per cent of the population, barely reaching one per cent in about a half dozen states.

There are, however, a couple of multiplier factors. Jews traditionally vote in higher proportion than the general population. Normally about 9 out of 10 eligible Jewish voters actually vote, as compared with little more than half of all eligible voters. The general rule of thumb is that the Jewish voting-age population multiplied by two gives their true weight in a general election -- and Jews have a disproportionately high voting-age population to begin with. More than that, Jews vote in even greater disproportion in primaries. (And in Presidential elections, there is the added fact that 9 out of 10 Jews live in 12 electoral college states worth a total of 277 electoral votes, enough to elect a president.)

Political candidates, by instinct, are normally quite concerned with a potential swing of 4 per cent of the votes, or even less. But there is a certain kind of political algebra involved. A political candidate is obviously not going to look favorably on taking a position which will gain 4 per cent of the vote but lose 10

The point is that, while most American voters are generally favorable towards Israel, they don't feel strongly about it one way or another. In most cases, a candidate is not going to lose votes by generally supporting Israel. On the other hand, while American Jews are split on most issues, and have many other public affairs concerns, a candidate's position on Israel is a strong consideration in the voting of almost all American Jews.

In other words, a public official or candidate will generally try to take positions on Israel which will curry favor with the Jewish voters, even for their marginal vote -- if the political algebra is right; if all other things are equal; if there is more to be gained than to be lost. And, in the matter of Israel, that usually seems to be the case.

Even more influential than the margin of Jewish voting, is the activism of American Jews in the electoral process -- that is, their involvement in the active promotion, support and financing of political candidates and parties. If Jews are disproportionately present in the voting booth by a ratio of two to one and more, they are often disproportionately in the ranks of the political activists by a ratio of ten to one, and more. The potential influence of Jewish electoral activists, all other things being equal, is very high indeed.

That phrase, "all other things being equal," keeps popping up uneasily, like a spectre at the feast. It means that the potential influence of American Jews in the electoral process cannot prevail against major countervailing factors. It is obvious that if 20 per cent of the voters were organized around an anti-Israel passion, the cause of Israel would be in trouble in spite of the Jewish population. But that is not the case, nor is it likely to be in the foreseeable future -- and there is a more sweeping factor involved, which might be stated this way: American public policy makers will, by and large, make policy on the Middle East within the framework of their perception of American national interest.

Now, "American national interest" is not an abstract geo-political term. It encompasses not just American security or American freedom, but concerns about jobs, energy and the American economy as they are affected by foreign policy.

Those are the daily-life concerns of any policy-maker's overall constituency. But American national interest in foreign affairs is also a matter of America's security and freedom. American policy-makers, by and large, have some sense of trust about maintaining America's freedom and values within the framework of foreign policy.

Nor, in that endeavor, are they out of step with their constituencies. All measurement of current American attitudes reveals a strong prevailing sense of appreciation for the quality of political freedom, for the U.S. as a free society, and for the politically free sector of the world. This is combined with an apprehension about the forces which threaten that free world. Of course, this strong consensus is crossed, as always, with an expectable antagonism to American military involvement anywhere. The concept of American national interest includes the domestic impact of foreign policy, the preservation of American security and world freedom, *and* peace.

It is in terms of this American national interest that American support for Israel mainly stands or falls. The substance of the congruence between that American national interest and a strong secure Israel has been dealt with at length elsewhere -- not least of all by Tom Dine and AIPAC. For our purposes, here today, it suffices that the perception of that congruence between American national interest and Israel prevails today among our policy-makers, and is the fundament of their support of Israel.

It is within the *bounds* of this perception of American national interest that the American Jewish electoral presence has its impact. The sheer electoral strength of the Jewish population can have a decisive effect on the many tactical issues

which are marginal, or about which a number of policy makers are ambivalent. In the long run, however, that is not enough. If the perception of Israel's importance to America should shift radically, Jewish electoral influence on that subject, however strongly exercised, would dwindle.

That point is buttressed if we understand the strong mutual relationship between American public policy on the Middle East and American public opinion on the Middle East. There are other factors, but the chief factor affecting favorable American public opinion towards Israel has been favorable American public policy towards Israel.

That cause and effect relationship has been startling. There has been a popular myth that Americans were naturally favorable towards Israel from the beginning for sentimental reasons -- that is, because Israel was a refuge for Jews who had survived the Nazism against which the U.S. had fought a bloody and popular war. According to that myth, as generations grew up who knew not the war against Nazism, their natural attachment to Israel waned. The opposite has been true. All the measures of favorable American public opinion towards Israel have *risen* since the creation of the state. About 1949, the major national surveys began to ask a question, exactly repeated at least once a year thereafter, the essence of which was: which do you have more sympathy for, the Israeli cause or the Arab cause? In 1949, the favorable ratio for Israel was a bit over two to one. In June of 1982, during the Lebanese war, that favorable ratio was a bit over five to one. In between, it fluctuated somewhat according to events, but the general direction was upwards.

In brief, American public support of Israel has not been primarily based on sentiment, but on a perception of Israel's importance to American national interest -- *as translated to the public by American policy-makers*. Typical of that phenomenon was the fact that when the U.S. approved the 1947 plan for partition, 65 per cent

of the American people said they approved. When the U.S. suddenly developed and stated objections to the plan, American public opinion dropped to a 24 per cent approval of that same plan.

The clarity of Israel's importance to America grew with developments such as: the repeated failure of American policy makers to find Arab partners for a Middle East defense; the cumulative demonstrations of the instability of the Arab governments in general; the demonstration by Israel in 1967 of its military viability as well as its political stability; the evidence of Soviet adventurism in the area ...

The *political* point is this: the objective conditions have increasingly made the case for American support of Israel. Increasingly, American policy makers have seen those objective conditions, and despite interim disputes, have acted accordingly. Public opinion has followed their lead.

Policy-makers have often acted with more alacrity -- and on some specific tactical matters, have ended up on one side rather than another, because of the strong electoral presence of the American Jews -- but they have done so *within* a perception of objective conditions which were favorable to that support of Israel.

A parenthetical note: the policy-makers, like the American public (and like American Jewry) have, by and large, been able to make a distinction between criticism of Israel and alienation from support of Israel. Even while policy-makers were, on occasion, sharply criticizing some Israeli action, they generally refrained from seriously withdrawing support from Israel. And even while surveys showed sharp American public criticism of some Israeli action, they showed that the American public's basic support of Israel remained stable, because of the perception of American national interest. As the Gallup poll put it, in a release of July 7, 1982:

"Although as many Americans disapprove as approve of Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the action appears not to have altered Americans' basic loyalties in the

Middle East ... In an analagous situation last summer, a Newsweek poll conducted by the Gallup organization found that America's reaction to Israel's bombing of PLO positions in Beirut was more critical. Fifty per cent said the bombing was not justified and 31 per cent said that it was. But that survey, too, found no change in Americans' basic sympathies."

In sum, side by side with the influence of the Jewish electoral presence, is the perception of American national interest which both pervades that influence and limits it. But, more than that, the Jewish electoral presence provides an indispensable *access* to the policy-makers who need to understand that perception of American national interest clearly. The organized Jewish community has such acces to the policy-makers to the extent that there is a strong Jewish electoral presence in general. And the Jewish political activists, in particular, have such access. But the access is useless without a strong intellectual presence.

#### The "Intellectual Presence"

"Intellectual," in this case, merely distinguishes the conceptual and informational aspects of Jewish influence from that of sheer electoral presence. It has mainly to do with the key perception of American national interest in the Middle East.

The perception of an over-arching American/Israeli common interest is not irreversible. To begin with, strategic and tactical disputes between the U.S. and Israel, if they were durable enough and embittered enough, could conceivably escalate and obscure the basic common interest between the two nations. That possibility exists because the Americans' persistent favorable attitude towards Israel is not bone-deep. The question of what Americans would be willing to do, or to sacrifice finally in order to implement their favorable attitude towards Israel is problematic. Therefore, the perception of Israel's importance to the U.S. has to be ever stronger, clearer, more basic in order to survive future adversity.

Of course, the perception of American national interest in relation to Israel will not be decided in the course of some grand philosophical discussion of that large issue. It will be decided or altered around actions or exchanges on specific issues such as the nature of American aid to Israel; the nature of arms sales to Arab countries; the question of specific strategic agreements between the U.S. and Israel; proposals for handling the Palestinian Arab problem.

There is some reason to believe that American Jewry's intellectual energies, on this subject, are too often diverted by over-preoccupations with legalistic and defensive issues relative to Israel about which neither the American public nor policy-makers care too much as distinct from the matter of American national interest. And there may be reason to believe that American Jewry has not enough concentrated its energies on this front, and not enough extended its horizons. The perception of American national interest in Israel depends finally upon a base perception of the nature of America, the political nature of the world and the nature of America's role in that world. If American support for Israel is to lag, it may happen not so much as a result of declining American-Israeli relations, but as a result of America's incapability of helping Israel, or even the result of a general decline of American will. These matters, as crucial as they are, are not now a coherent enough part of the American Jewish public affairs agenda or intellectual discourse, although there is, as we shall see, a strong apparatus for transmitting concepts and information about American/Israeli relations narrowly.

#### Social Presence

The factor of Jewish social presence cannot be overlooked in assessing American Jewish influence on American public policy. The ninth generation member of West Virginia's most politically prominent family was recently engaged in a

dinner conversation about current American politics. His dinner companion suggested that New York's Cuomo might become an attractive presidential aspirant someday. "Cuomo," objected the West Virginian, "that's still too foreign a name for most parts." His dinner companion suggested that times were changing, as witness the election of Cohen in Maine. The West Virginian looked puzzled. "Cohen," he said, "that's not a foreign-sounding name."

The integrated social presence of Jews in major parts of America, and in its media, has an effect on Jewish influence. At least one study indicated that those who knew Jews best tended to be among the most favorable towards Israel.

A distinguished scholar of American public opinion, Hadley Cantril, once wrote: "When an opinion is not solidly structured, an accomplished fact tends to shift opinion in the direction of that accomplished fact" -- which may help to explain why American public policy is so instrumental in shaping American public opinion. By the same token, one could say that, when an opinion is not solidly structured, the inclinations of friends and associates tend to shift opinion in the direction of those inclinations.

(Of course, if one had the vision of an America riddled by prevalent anti-semitism, the direction would be otherwise. The fact is that anti-semitism is largely dormant in this country at this time -- and more than that, a good case can be made that, under current conditions, virulent anti-semitism would be revived in this country only within the context of prevalent anti-Israel feeling, coupled with the pro-Israel activity of American Jews. But at this time the American public is prevalently favorable towards Israel.)

More significantly, the perception of American national interest notably includes the importance of Israel as part of the association of free societies which America leads and on which it depends. The image of Israel as a free

society in the western style, *as a culturally similar society*, depends primarily on Israel's real character, but is significantly buttressed by the integrated and familiar Jewish presence in the American society.

Of course, the ability of American Jews to project that image depends on the extent of their integration into the American scene, as individuals and as a community. Excessive separatism works against that image. The indication that American Jews are interested *only* in Israel, and have only that item on their public affairs agenda, would work against that image. It is an important part of the familiar Jewish impact on the social scene that they are visibly engaged in general community affairs and issues.

A further significant dividend of social integration is the increased *access* it affords to public officials, and to forces which affect public officials. The concept of "coalition" still has validity in these terms.

There is some sense that in recent years the organized Jewish community, as such, has withdrawn somewhat from the integrated public arena -- and to that extent has crippled itself with respect to influencing American public policy.

#### Jewish Organizational Approaches

So these are the three presences -- electoral, intellectual and social -- which form the substance of American Jewish influence on American political and public affairs life -- intertwined with each other, none of them sufficient but all necessary. How then is the Jewish community organized to effect and enlarge these political presences? There are three categories of such organization: conventional, lobbying and partisan.

#### Conventional and Communal Organizations

American Jewry is probably the most highly organized single population in the free world. Over half of American Jewish heads of households belong to some

Jewish organization other than the synagogue itself. These are all voluntary and autonomous members of voluntary and autonomous organizations.

The '75 national organizations to which these Jews belong are essentially educational in nature. Even those which are primarily social or welfare-oriented in origin, have a heavy educational mission. They customarily attempt to educate their membership about some aspect of Jewish public affairs. Many of them also have taken on the natural function of informing and educating the general community, including the policy-makers, about the sentiments of their constituencies on certain public affairs.

These are conventional organizations, not only in the sense that they variously engage in customary kinds of educational/welfare pursuits -- but also, in the original sense of the word "convention," they convene or bring together large groups of Jews for common endeavor, common discussion and common assessment of events that affect them.

In the 1930s, the organized American Jewish community discovered a tragic flaw in its convening functions. At one point, for example, when the American government was holding an important conference about public policy on allowing refugees into this country, a number of different Jewish organizations came with different proposals on the subject. American Jewry had failed to create community; it had failed to create an informed consensus; most significantly, as a result, it had failed to educate the general community, including the policy-makers, about the consensual opinions of the Jewish constituency. In public affairs, that is a high crime. After World War II, the Jews organized to avoid that crime. They formed mechanisms by which the various streams of conventionally organized life could come together to create a consensus, where possible; and to transmit that consensus as a community.

That is the meaning, on the local scenes, of the Jewish Community Relations Council, which is the place where all of the organized elements of the community

come together to discuss and to try to find consensus on public issues; and to relay that common consciousness, as a community, to the general public, including the policy-makers.

There are about a hundred Jewish Community Relations Council or Committees, in some form, in over a hundred Jewish communities in the country. They are associated in a communications network through the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council. Most of the largest national Jewish organizations are also part of that NJCRAC communications network (see Chart A).

In the context of this discussion, the chief functions of these conventional organizations, as they come to climax through conventional communal mechanisms, are (see Chart B):

- . To form and discover that consensus about public issues which affect Jews. This does not mean, it should be noted, that *differences* among Jews about these public issues should be ignored, or tossed under the rug. A healthy community cannot be formed without a discussion of those differences ... without the creation of a common consciousness which includes those differences.
- . To transmit a communal presence, and the substance of the common consciousness to the general community, including the policy-makers. It is the unique nature of the conventional communal mechanism that it addresses not just the subject of Israel, but the range of all public issues which affect the Jews, such as the strength of the democratic process, the elimination of conditions which might lead to political extremism, the protection of the First Amendment and so forth.
- . To promote the integration of Jews in American life -- not only by supporting public policy towards that end, but by themselves engaging integratively on the general community scene.

The conventional organizations share certain educational and conceptual func-

### Lobbying Organizations

Lobbying has a specific meaning: to directly influence the voting of legislators, or the equivalent action of administrators, on specific issues. In pursuit of this mission, the chief functions of such a lobbying organization would be (Chart B):

- . To organize specific issue campaigns among policy-makers. This is not just a matter of urging policy-makers to take specific positions, but assessing strategy and trying to coalesce groups of legislators around specific issues, under often changing conditions. This is a job which must be done on the spot, based on prior education and commitments of the policy-makers -- but without which all prior education and commitments could come to naught.

This key function might be considered the organizational aspect of the intellectual presence, since it has to do with pressing issues. But it is also a part of the electoral factor. In the processing of legislative concerns, lobbying organizations normally monitor the voting records and attitudes of policy-makers and prospective policy-makers.

- . To provide the policy-makers with the kind of information and interpretation which is necessary for each current or expected issue (and which resources inevitably become part of the Jewish community discourse).

Since 1951, AIPAC has of course been the sole and notable pro-Israel lobbying agency on the American scene. It is largely but not exclusively supported by Jews, and is seen as part of the Jewish organizational landscape.

However, two other agencies on the landscape should be noted: the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations and the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California. They are both hybrids in our organizational scheme. The Presidents Conference is a less systematic amalgam of conventional Jewish organizations than

the NJCRAC. Unlike the NJCRAC, the Presidents Conference is concerned almost exclusively with Israel, and, unlike AIPAC, mainly confines its "lobbying" activity to the Administration.

Because of the number of public policies on the state level affecting the life and institutions of the Jews, California 12 years ago pioneered a state-level agency, called the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California (JPAC). It is partly a communalizing on the state level of the concerns of the conventional organizations; and it is partly a technical operation like AIPAC on the state scene. It is also part and parcel of the Jewish social presence, and deepens access to the general political scene.

#### Partisan Organizations

Partisan organizations are defined as those which support specific candidates for office, most notably by financing. Electoral activism consists of more than financing -- but even in that activity, until recently, American Jews did not need organizational mechanisms in order to be activist. For example, in the eight years before the Federal Election Reform Acts of the 1970s, literally half of those who contributed \$10,000 or more to the Democratic Party were Jews. And, for another example, about two-thirds of those who gave \$100,000 or more to the Humphrey campaign in 1968 were Jews. Jews have, in modern times, always been hyperactivist and hyper-contributors in electoral campaigns.

But since the Federal Electoral Reform Acts, which limited individual contributions and expanded the legitimate role of PACs, over thirty PACs have been created whose primary function is to financially support pro-Israel political candidates. These are also considered part of the Jewish organizational landscape.

Summary

It is important not to over-simplify the nature of American Jewish influence on political decisions. No single factor is sufficient.

There has been a tendency for pro-Israel observers to become lyrical about the operation of the PACs. And well they might. PACs have been able to isolate certain races involving candidates with a strong understanding of Israel's importance to the U.S., and have presumably been instrumental in some of those races. They have also involved some new participants in this direct electoral activism. As one scholar in political finance cautioned:

"No neat correlation is found between campaign expenditures and campaign results. Even if superiority in expenditures and success at the polls always ran together, the flow of funds to a candidate might simply reflect his prior appeal rather than create it ... It is clear that under some conditions, the use of money can be decisive. And under others, no amount of money spent by the loser could alter the outcome."

It was pointed out in the 1980 Congressional campaign, for example, that, of the top ten Congressional spenders, half won and half lost in each house. Of the nine Democrats who lost, seven had a spending advantage.

Clearly, money does not automatically win elections. And the strength of the Jewish electorate does not automatically win elections. Neither would prevail on any Israel-related issue where the intellectual weight of that issue was running heavily against Israel. On the other hand, no conceptual or interpretive campaign will prevail against candidates whose mind sets are not open to the kinds of considerations which are important for support of Israel. But, of course, most situations in the short range are not that clear-cut. Whenever all other things are equal, or whenever there is uncertainty or ambivalence, then all three factors -- the electoral, the intellectual and the social -- can provide the crucial edge of difference in decision-making.

By the same token, none of the organizational types is sufficient. Looking at Graph B, one can see that there is a mixed contribution by all of the organizational types to all of the factors of political influence. The electoral presence of the Jews, for example, depends not only on the support of candidates or the monitoring of the candidates. It also depends on the existence of an organized, consensual and articulate Jewish community -- and an integrated Jewish community. That is the prime business of the conventional organizations, and of their JCRC. The JCRC uniquely represents the total organized Jewish community, and uniquely represents the total range of public affairs concerns of that Jewish community. And it is the conventional organizations and their JCRC which must basically establish a constituency relationship with the local policy-makers, and report to them the common consciousness of the Jewish community on consensual issues, including Israel.

But it is only AIPAC which can build on those community foundations to make them bear fruit on the national decision-making scene. Relaying the consensual opinions of the local Jewish community to policy-makers is a relatively simple matter, requiring a relatively small part of the energies of the conventional Jewish organizations. But the matter of national decision-making on American/Israeli relations requires the kind of technical proficiency and constant, intensive on-the-spot work in Washington which only AIPAC can handle. And there should be, as Northern California has pioneered, a local corporate presence of AIPAC members, not only to support the national agency, but to let the policy-makers from their region know that there is specific support of that national agency.

So we have several kinds of organizational life, which are not formally connected, and cannot be; whose main functions are not overlapping; but which have a kind of natural dependence on each other for the effective accomplishment of a goal which they all share.

This unique configuration of organizational life also points up the complexity of American Jewish influence in political life. It would be a serious error to over-simplify it; or to become over-addicted to any single part of it.

Indeed, the complexity can only deepen, as developments within Israel, within America, and in the world move into what promises to be an even less innocent, more troubled, period. The direction of this upcoming period will heavily turn around the shape of American public policy. The future not only of Israel, but of much more, may depend partly on how many of us become more involved, and more *thoughtfully* involved on all three levels of this organizational life.

Earl Raab

September, 1983