



# PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations • 838 Fifth Avenue • New York, New York 10021

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January, 1981

## HOW SECURE ARE WE?

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UAHC Board of Trustees, November 22, 1980

The question is: "How secure are we?" There is good reason for us to be worried about our security as Jews these days. But we sometimes worry about the wrong things. That, in effect, leaves some things inadequately worried about - which further reduces our objective security. Worrying, after all, is a Jewish art. We should do it expertly.

We hear around us, at Jewish meetings and in Jewish parlors, these kinds of concerns: "Israel is losing the public opinion war in America. . .we'd better mount a bigger public relations campaign to defend Israel properly." Or. . ."The American Nazi groups are holding open meetings, and joining with the Ku Klux Klan. . . We'd better be more aggressive in combating this growing edge of American anti-Semitism." Or. . ."The Moral Majority, the Evangelicals and the right-wing are sweeping the country, as witness the recent elections. . .We'd better attack this major threat to Jewish security."

First, it is appropriate for us to worry about changes in American attitudes on Israel. However, it would be instructive for us to do so within the framework of the following fact: American public opinion has become immeasurably more favorable towards support of Israel.

That is to say, all the recent surveys support the in-depth survey just completed for Edgar Bronfman which showed that, while Americans in 1976 favored sending military support to Israel by about a 2½ to 1 ratio - in 1980, they favor sending military support to Israel by a 5 to 1 ratio. AIPAC found the same increase in support-opinion among the Congressional candidates they surveyed.

So what's there to worry about? Well, recent developments suggest that (leaving American Jews aside) Israel has become less of an emotional factor in American life. Israel remains just a mathematical factor in a practical formula for what's good for America. It was always more of a cold mathematical factor than we ever wanted to believe - but accompanying it in the long post World War II stretch was an important emotional edge. The fulcrum of our post World War II consciousness about world affairs was, after all, the apocalyptic war against the Nazis. Many Americans, and a

number of critical American politicians (Hubert Humphrey was a prototype) saw Israel as a symbol of our victory over the Nazis; as a symbol of our moral failure to fight Nazism earlier; and as a refuge for the victims of our failures. The resultant pro-Israel emotional edge was an important and comforting one.

But some Congressmen began to warn us a dozen years ago that the scene was changing for their new colleagues. The fulcrum of American foreign policy consciousness was no longer the war against the Nazis, which was slipping from active American historical consciousness - but was now the Vietnamese experience. Israel did not figure in the new experience, unless it was negatively. The recent loss of old established "friends of Israel" in the U.S. Senate dramatized this kind of changing of the guard and slipping away of that emotional edge.

Another piece of evidence: The Bronfman survey, and the others, indicate that the American public does not have an automatic warm glow about Israel. Half of the American public believes that Israel mistreats the Palestinians and almost half of the public seems resentful of the fact that Israel expects the U.S. to back it no matter what it does. However, at the same time that the Americans are becoming more unhappy with some aspects of Israel, they are becoming more favorable towards supporting Israel. An apparent contradiction which is a clue to the nature within limits, of course - about whether the Palestinian Arabs are well-treated or ill-treated by the Israelis; they don't care much about the issue of an independent Palestinian state, in itself. They mainly care about whether support of Israel is in the American national interest - which includes questions of oil access, our economy and our status in the world, especially vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.

(The same phenomenon took place in the U.S. Congress in the last debate about American aid to Israel. Some Congressmen rose to criticize Israeli policy in the West Bank - but even those who were critical voted for a huge grant to Israel, on grounds that even their own criticism was irrelevant to the question of American support.)

The recent rise in American support of Israel came not because of anything Israel did or didn't do - but in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Khoumeini phenomenon, and the Iran/Iraq war. Indeed that part of the widely noted "conservative trend" which has to do with foreign affairs has a bearing here.

The immediate post-Vietnam impetus was somewhat isolationist or non-interventionist in nature; rather submissive to anti-American feeling in the world, indeed quite self-deprecatory. We may be seeing, and the last election is evidence of a kind of backlash or swing of the pendulum in what some call a conservative approach to foreign policy: a sense of wanting America to be more self-assertive in world affairs.

We lost some old emotionally attached friends of Israel partly because of that political mood. But, from the point of view of Israel, let's look at some of the replacements.

John Culver in Iowa was replaced by Charles Grassley, a conservative, who generally opposed foreign aid, but supports aid for Israel. As a Congressman, he said, "Israel is strategically located and its importance as an integral component of our defensive line cannot be downplayed." He opposes the PLO vigorously.

Slade Gorton, who replaced Warren Magnuson, supports aid to Israel, and opposes the PLO vigorously. Even James Abdnor, of Lebanese background, who replaced McGovern in

South Dakota, has voted against cuts in aid to Israel, and vigorously opposes the PLO. Dan Quayle, conservative senator from Indiana, opposes foreign aid generally, but supports aid to Israel, criticized the pro-Arab UN resolutions, opposed arms to Saudi Arabia. Conservative Warren Rudman, who replaced John Durkin in New Hampshire, supports military and economic aid to Israel, and vigorously opposes the PLO.

Republican Paula Hawkins, in place of Richard Stone, supports economic and military aid to Israel, calling Israel "central to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East," and "a significant deterrent to further Soviet aggression."

So, at the present moment, it seems that Israel is doing well in the formula for American national interest, even if it is decreasingly buttressed by an emotional edge. However, in this volatile period, that particular formula may be precarious. For example, the Americanist formula could turn isolationist, as it has before - in which case, without an emotional edge, the favorable trend toward aiding Israel would be reversed.

Given oil, however, it is much more likely that if an Americanist formula turns sour for Israel, it will be by way of the Connelly formula - the belief, roughly that the best way for America to assertively gain sway in the Middle East is by appeasing the Arab demands unilaterally. That would reverse the trend also, and that is something to worry about.

This has much to do with which concept of "Americanism" prevails in this resurgent Americanism and Americanist formulas. We should not abandon the theme of Americanism to the extreme right wing. We are the first nation built on an idea rather than an ethnicity. Americanism should not carry any ethnic connotation. It should not connote blind patriotism or nationalism, but rather a commitment to the idea of America - an open pluralistic democracy with the Madisonian concept that groups with different interests and different points of view should negotiate with each other in the marketplace of ideas and politics, under the rules of the game. It is also true that if America is the corpus of such an idea, we should not be bashful about being assertive about our idea, or about our security or integrity as a nation.

Moreover, if that is a dominant dimension of our Americanism, then Israel's status as a living symbol and critical extension of the free political world becomes as strategically important to America as Israel's geographical or military position. Israel's mathematical position in such a formula for American national interest is not so vulnerable to a Connally-like proposal of Arab appeasement.

However, if that formula for America is to prevail, that idea of America has to be strengthened internally as well - and not just for that reason. . .which brings us to the domestic scene.

It is, of course, one of the better documented truths of our time that political anti-Semitism is more often a product of political extremism than a cause of it. There will be no serious anti-Semitism unless political extremism prevails - and it is the state of the nation which will determine whether political extremism prevails. There is first the question of massive dissatisfactions - drastic economic dislocation in general, unemployment and inflation. And second, there is the question of whether a society has enough built-in democratic traditions and restraints to withstand the blandishments of extremism, the disruption of democratic procedures,

in the face of such dislocations. That is where the idea of America comes in. After all, the frozen, non-negotiable polarization of political opinion is, in a practical sense, the antithesis of the American idea and the vehicle for everything we fear.

There is something here reminiscent of the apparent contradiction in attitude toward Israel. The surveys convincingly indicate that American anti-Semitism - negative feeling about Jews - is at a somewhat lower level than it has been since such attitudes were first measured some fifty years ago. But if it is the state of the society which mainly protects us, and if growing polarization is a major threat to that society, then, despite those attitudes, we are in a more precarious position than we have been since World War II.

The KKK becomes increasingly visible. The symbiotic relationship between the extreme left and the extreme right grows, and they attack each other - in one case tragically - and bring the polarization pitch a notch higher - protest votes cluster around KKK-identified candidates for public office. The Southern Senator slated to head the Senate Judiciary Committee calls for a retraction of the voting rights law, at the same time that an anti-busing amendment is passed by the Senate - spurring a symbolic war between left and right. The economy is stuttering but prices are not, and the economic progress made by disadvantaged minorities for over a decade has come to a virtual halt. In this economy, America is receiving two-thirds of the refugees and immigrants of the world. For every two babies born in this country, there is a new immigrant swelling our population - the highest immigrant ratio in population growth since the beginning of the century. That was exactly the situation which spawned the rise of the second KKK, the rise of a bigoted anti-immigrant political movement of some success at the beginning of this century.

It is noteworthy that the KKK always had public morality at the top of its agenda, along with attacks on Italian, Irish and Jewish immigrants. Prostitution and the deterioration of morals was as often to be found in their leaflets and speeches. And now we have the Moral Majority. The critical ingredient in a dangerous polarization is always the injection of political moralism - that is, one's opponent is not just wrong in the open marketplace of ideas - he is evil. As the Christian Voice, the companion group to the Moral Majority has written, "We believe that America, the stronghold of faith on this planet, has come under increasing attack from Satanist forces in recent years. . .launched by the rulers of darkness of this world, and insidiously sustained under the ever more liberal ethic."

If your political opponent is not just wrong, but evil, then the way is open for the model components of political extremism - the conspiracy theory and the understanding that one must suspend democratic procedure in order to deal with conspiratorial evil - and the development of target groups to carry the conspiracy, notably ethnic groups, and most notably the Jews.

That is the danger of the Moral Majority - that it will help spawn a climate which will not only further the polarization, but will freeze the polarization beyond political redemption.

So, while the anti-Semitic attitudes of the populace is at a new low, anti-Semitism is never at an irreversible or unrenovable point - and there are developments in our society - notably, relating to polarization - which should make us nervous about our security. Just as pro-Israel sentiments in the populace are at a new high, there are

developments in our society - notably, relating to the diminution of an emotional attachment to Israel - which should make us nervous about Israel's security.

The question, now, is what do we do about these conditions, these developments which threaten our security? How do we best marshal our forces and energies to address these conditions, rather than milling hysterically around their symptoms.

First, it seems critically important to understand that if the "new right" as it is called, or the Moral Majority were victorious in the last elections, it was not because they were sinister forces, which won in some underhanded way. To hold that would be to hold a piece of Moral Majority philosophy. They may have thrown a lot of money into targetted campaigns, but they did not win just because of that. In Senatorial races that were not targetted at all by these groups, there was a Republican swing of almost 20 percent. So the swing that took place was a result of something more basic than the activities of the NCPAC or Moral Majority. In other words, the enemy was not just the Moral Majority - any more than it will be just the KKK if it grows - the enemy is also us - our stale delinquencies. With that understanding, our job is not just to fight something, but to build something - to fill a vacuum which we left and to fill it in a way that is compatible with our values.

Briefly. . . For example, there is the need for us to promote the idea of America, for us to promote Americanism, if you will. It would be a mistake to allow this vacuum to be filled by the hard right - or to allow the idea of America to be further eroded by the hard left. The resurgent feeling of Americans is that America is worthwhile, and should be strong and more assertive - a feeling which should be supported in the center - the depolarizing center.

Nor, for another example, should we leave public morality in the vacuum. Is the Moral Majority the only religious group concerned about family life, its strengths and its subversions? This also has been a delinquency of the center.

Nor can we allow the hard right to preempt the issue of inflation, or the problem of runaway government programs. These are legitimate concerns of the American people. When extremists preempt that issue, they tend to do so without social compassion.

Aside from engaging the issues, however, the center has to be more concerned with those democratic and political procedures which themselves buttress the center by structurally resisting polarization. This means that we have to actively oppose the deterioration of coalition party politics, oppose the mechanisms of factional politics. The proliferation of the direct primary is an example of such a mechanism.

Nor is building the center - as distinct from just fighting the right or the left - unrelated to the new conditions relating to Israel. Attempts to defend Israel against every accusation - or to get everyone to love Israel as much as we do, is an increasingly futile task. Israelophilia, which was always partly an illusion, might serve some therapeutic purpose for us, or some institutional purposes - but efforts to revive it will not extirpate the cause of our insecurity on that score. We have to concentrate, more than before, on Israel's importance to American national interest. But that too is precarious unless we do it within the framework of an assertive Americanism - and one that stresses the idea of America. That leads us back

in full circle to the understanding that our most basic task with respect to American support of Israel is the support of the political center of America.

All this holds clear signals for replacing some of the old cliches with a new Jewish public affairs agenda. More than ever, our defensible borders are not around the body of Jews, not a Fortress Judaica. Our defensible borders - those of American Jews, Israel, the world's Jews - are the borders of the United States. How secure are we? We are as secure as a strong and democratic America is secure. On those grounds, we have some reason to be uneasy, but there is no reason to be blind about what has to be done.