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## American Zionism and the Evolution of 'Pro-Israel' in U.S. Politics

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## **Introduction**

**“For several decades, the Jewish establishment has asked American Jews to check their liberalism at Zionism’s door, and now, to their horror, they are finding that many young Jews have checked their Zionism instead.”<sup>1</sup>**

-Peter Beinart

After more than 60 years of existence and significant political transformations within both the Jewish State and the region in which it sits, the task of arriving at a conclusive definition for the label ‘Pro-Israel’, in the American context, is an increasingly difficult one. There is no doubt, however, that the definition is indeed changing—and not just among peace activists or scholars but in mainstream politics, political lobbying organizations, and on-campus student organizations. This thesis will examine both what this ‘new’ Pro-Israel definition looks like and how it is distinct from the ‘old’ definition. Most importantly, this thesis will examine the legacy of the ‘old’ definition, its implications on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, and what types of policies may be expected as we are ushered into an era potentially dominated by this ‘new’ definition.

At the risk of over-simplifying the two definitions, I hope to outline the basic parameters of both in order to establish the distinction and examine the degree to which each definition is a result of political, social, and religious changes in the ‘pro-Israel’ community of the United States.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Beinart, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment,” *The New York Review of Books*, June 10, 2010, pp. 1

<sup>2</sup> Because discussion of Israel has proven to be highly controversial in political and academic circles in the United States, it should be noted that this thesis is in no way meant to serve as a commentary on the policies of the Israeli Government or the Palestinian Authority. Nor will

‘old’ Pro-Israel camp (1) focused primarily on the security concerns of the Israeli state, (2) often ignored, dodged, or outright rejected the notion of a sovereign Palestinian state (3) emphasized, above all else, the ‘Jewish’ nature of the state. The ‘new’ Pro-Israel camp tends to (1) focus primarily on achieving ‘peace’ in Israel-Palestine (2) accept a Palestinian state as *requisite* in achieving this ‘peace’ (3) emphasize, above all else, the ‘liberal’ and ‘democratic’ nature of the Israeli state.

This thesis involves chronicling the ‘evolution’ of a term in U.S. political discourse and must, therefore, be examined in distinct periods of time. The first section will cover the period between the foundations of the earliest puritan colonies in the present-day United States up until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, during which ‘Zionism’ appears in various forms, corresponding to events and trends in the global Jewish community. The second section covers the period between 1948 and the 1993 Oslo Accords—a landmark agreement that established, for the first time, the basis for a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The final section will examine the period between 1993 and the present day, which witnessed a breakdown of peace negotiations and radical political changes in the Middle East. As we will see, developments in the U.S.-Israeli

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this paper challenge the allegiances of Jewish or Christian Americans to the state of Israel and will avoid any value judgments on personal or collective political opinions. It will, however, involve extensive analysis of the mainstream political and academic commentary on the above issues—which involves charges of racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and other deplorable labels that arise when discussing the various voices in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

relationship and the definition of 'Pro-Israel' in the United States generally correspond to military conflicts, annexation/relinquishment of territory, peace treaties, and shifts in regional political systems.

### **American Zionism before 1948**

Despite its connections to a religious nation that emerged in antiquity, political Zionism as we have come to encounter it is a modern phenomenon that has its origins not as much in Biblical scripture as it does in the prevalence of anti-Semitism throughout Europe (particularly in the East) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, long before political Zionism gained traction within mainstream Jewish-American political discourse, America offered it's own distinct refuge for Jews (as well as other religious minorities) seeking asylum from discrimination that powerful religious institutions and emerging nation-states in Europe had perpetuated.

For the former *Commentary* magazine editor Norman Podhoretz, the freedom available to European Jewry in America was unprecedented:

“In America there was no trace, or any remotely functional equivalent, of the kind of autocratic power that had been one of the two great enemies of the Jews of Europe from time immemorial. . . government acted as a bulwark against, and not an enforcer of, any form of legal discrimination against its Jewish citizens.”<sup>3</sup>

But this 'Golden Land', as Podhoretz calls it, was not viewed as such solely based on the unrivaled freedom it offered to the Jewish people—it was, in effect, the 18<sup>th</sup> century reincarnation of the 'lost' nation of Israel. The emphasis on and even obsession with the texts of the Old Testament is

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Podhoretz, *Why Are Jews Liberals?* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), pp. 73

unmistakable when examining the legal documents, charters, and writings of the early Puritan pilgrims to America who, despite maintaining a Protestant Christian identity, saw themselves as the new 'Children of Israel'. Over half of the statutes within the 1655 legal code of the New Haven colony include references or citations from the Old Testament, while only three percent came from the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> The first Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor, John Winthrop, frequently alluded to the covenant between God and Abraham in Genesis, declaring in 1679: "the ways of God towards this His people are in many respects like unto His dealings with Israel of old."<sup>5</sup> New England served not merely as a 'metaphor' for Israel, but as "the very metaphysical translation...of that 'typical,' 'figurative' or 'ceremonial' land and nation" that existed in Palestine at the time.<sup>6</sup> Early on, the Puritan Christian affinity with the narratives of the Old Testament fostered its own brand of 'Zionism' which not only worked to create a favorable religious environment for asylum-seeking European Jews, but paralleled the ancient story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt into the 'Promised Land'. Just as the Children of Israel had escaped the Pharaoh's wrath and crossed the Red

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<sup>4</sup> Max Baker and Paul Masserman, *The Jews Come to America* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1932)

<sup>5</sup> Abraham Katsh, *The Biblical Heritage of American Democracy* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1977), pp. 32

<sup>6</sup> Samuel H Levine, "Palestine in the Literature of the United States to 1867" *Early History of Zionism In America*, Ed. Isidore S. Meyer. (New York: American Jewish Historical Society and Theodor Herzl Foundation, 1958): 25

Sea to enter the land of Canaan, the Puritans had fled from the rule of the English king and crossed the Atlantic Ocean to settle in America.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the allusions to a 'New Promised Land' in America among early Christian colonists, the residual anti-Semitism within the European gentile communities of early America prohibited Jews from embracing similar notions of a 'New Israel'. The main difference from the Jews' experience in Europe, however, was that in America, "Jews did not occupy that subordinate position alone."<sup>8</sup> The Protestant establishment in the American colonies placed as many (if not more) restrictions on Catholics as it did Jews. The Church of England viewed Catholics as "the embodiment of evil" and worked "first and foremost to ward off Catholic influence in public life."<sup>9</sup> Even though they shared an 'inferior' position similar to that of other religious minorities, early Jews in America had achieved a status that constituted "one of the highest that Jews anywhere in the world would claim."<sup>9</sup> This status would be upheld and reinforced throughout the revolutionary period, during which the primary leaders and thinkers in the

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<sup>7</sup> To this day, Israeli politicians continue to invoke this parallel when describing the U.S.-Israeli relationship. In a May/June 2011 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the United States, draws upon the narrative of Plymouth rock settlers committing themselves to "studying Hebrew and bridging the Old and New Canaans—the Holy Land and America." In addition to citing the Zionist sympathies of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman, among others, Oren asserts that many Americans are similarly drawn to the Zionist narrative of pioneering, in which they hear "echoes of their own national narrative."

<sup>8</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 23

<sup>9</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 24

new American democracy sought to secure equal rights for all men—most notably through the “divorce between the religious matters and public life.”<sup>10</sup>

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, some American Jews had begun to construct utopian visions of a new, emancipated Jewish nation in America. In 1825, Mordecai Noah, high sheriff of New York, issued a proclamation to world Jewry in which he offered them “an asylum in a free and powerful country, where ample protection is secured to their persons, their property, and religious rights”—a ‘land of milk and honey’ where “Israel may repose in peace.”<sup>11</sup> Noah proposed a twelve-by-seven mile stretch of land in Grand Island, New York to serve as a ‘City of Refuge’ upon which a proper Jewish state would be built. Although Noah’s proclamation and subsequent attempt to finance the construction of a ‘Jewish state’ in northern New York was followed by international media and Jews worldwide, it was rejected almost from the very beginning as an ‘unrealistic venture’. While Jews had finally secured a geographic area that they could identify as a safe haven for uninhibited religious observance, America could not, by any means, be revered as a ‘New Israel’ for world Jewry. It would take radical social and political changes in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe to foster the movement we understand today as ‘Zionism’.

The emergence of political Zionism is most often associated with Theodor Herzl’s 1896 publication of *Der Judenstaat* (“The Jewish State”),

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<sup>10</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 42

<sup>11</sup> Michael Brenner, *Zionism: A Brief History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003), pp. 6

which cast aside any illusions that European Jewry could seek refuge from growing anti-Semitism through assimilation. After witnessing the demonization of the assimilated Jewish French military officer Alfred Dreyfus (and, by extension, all French Jews), Herzl concluded that the only solution to the 'Jewish question' in Europe was to establish a sovereign state so that the Jews would cease to operate as a 'nation within a nation', as they had in Europe up to that point. In Herzl's view, the goal of Zionism was to gain immediate (rather than *eventual*) sovereignty in the form of a state so that "a Jewish society and culture organically tied to a territory" would form and give rise to a Jewish nationalist movement.<sup>12</sup> Far from being classified as religious fundamentalists, the secular European founders of Zionism developed the ideology based on "symbols and codes borrowed from the nineteenth-century European version of Jewish religion and ethnicity," drawing upon the "religiously preserved collective memory" of *Zion* as the territorial base for building the new Jewish state.<sup>13</sup>

Zionism in Eastern Europe emerged separately and earlier than the intellectual movements in Western Europe. After the outbreak of pogroms in 1881, Russian Jews faced with violence began to embrace Zionism as a solution to the discrimination and hostility they experienced. In 1882, the Russian Zionist pioneer Leon Pinsker published *Autoemancipation*, calling for a return to Zion and positing that "until the Jews had a homeland of their own

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 165

<sup>13</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 4

they would function as a pariah people subject to whatever hostility and ill will others chose to inflict on them.”<sup>14</sup> The idea of ‘Diaspora nationalism’ that developed in Eastern Europe called for Jewish political and civil rights and cultural autonomy within already existing European states—a doctrine that the World Zionist Organization adopted alongside the plan to ‘return to Palestine’ at its inaugural convention.

As the First Zionist Congress convened in Basel, Switzerland in 1897, Zionism was being hotly debated in the United States. While the Zionist movement had already gained significant support among the diaspora communities in Eastern Europe and the assimilated, intellectual communities in Western Europe, Zionism in America remained relatively weak and fractured before World War I. Building a mass support for Zionism in the United States could not rely on notions of nationalism as it did in Europe, for the “underlying idea that Jews are a separate nationality” was untenable within the American context, where “nation and state were synonymous concepts.”<sup>15</sup> At its first meeting in 1898, the Federation of American Zionists made it clear that any type of ‘nationalism’ embraced in the American setting would not conflict with Jewish-American identity: “The restoration of Zion as the legitimate aspiration of scattered Israel, in no way conflicts with our loyalty to the land in which we dwell or may dwell at any time.”<sup>16</sup> American Zionism in its early stages served primarily as a symbol of solidarity with

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<sup>14</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 90

<sup>15</sup> Yonathan Shapiro, *Leadership of the American Zionist Organization 1897-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 23

<sup>16</sup> *Leadership of the American Zionist Organization*, pp. 26

European Jewry who, unlike Jewish-Americans, experienced a *need* to return to the 'homeland' in Palestine due to the increasingly oppressive legal and social restrictions placed on them.

While the outbreak of World War I slowed the development of the World Zionist Organization in Europe, vast social changes within the Jewish community of the United States during and after the war brought about a new revitalization of American Zionism. Due to a restriction on Eastern European immigration during the war, the number of U.S.-born Jews outnumbered those who were foreign-born for the first time in 1920. A new generation of American-born, English speaking, educated, and suburban Jews found themselves facing the same discrimination and anti-Semitic sentiments as their forefathers and relatives in Europe, despite having improved their socio-economic status within American society. Because of this continued marginalization, the second generation embraced Zionism as a way to "justify the separate existence of the Jewish community in the United States" and provide "a self-respect denied to the group by the dominant society and its culture."<sup>17</sup> This allowed them to retain a 'Jewish-American' identity while simultaneously embracing the principle of 'Palestinianism' within Zionism—that is, the principle that calls for world Jewry to "help build up Palestine as a Jewish national home."<sup>17</sup>

This sentiment manifested itself through the leadership of Louis Brandeis, who assumed leadership of the Federation of American Zionists in

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<sup>17</sup> *Leadership of the American Zionist Organization*, pp. 251

1915 and proclaimed, "Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will be a better man and a better American for doing so."<sup>18</sup> From the beginning, American Zionism was distinct from its European counterpart in that it endorsed Palestinianism over 'Diaspora nationalism' as a solution to worldwide Jewish suffering, for a 'return' to Palestine did not conflict with the community's allegiance to the United States, where they had experienced unprecedented prosperity. After witnessing Woodrow Wilson's strong support of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the American Jewish community essentially abandoned any lingering anti-Zionist sentiments that had resulted from the debate with European Zionists at the turn of the century.

American Jewish labor leaders, philanthropists, and even leaders within the Reform synagogue<sup>19</sup> began to embrace Zionism in greater numbers and to a greater degree during the interwar period. With the establishment of the Zionist Organization of America in 1918, the support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine became institutionalized as a "basic value of American Jewish marginal culture."<sup>20</sup> The generation that had faced an identity 'crisis' in light of persisting anti-Semitism in America had found a

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<sup>18</sup> Louis Brandeis, "The Jewish Problem: How To Solve It," Speech to the Conference of Eastern Council of Reform Rabbis, 25 April, 1915.

<sup>19</sup> At this time, the American Orthodox community had already declared its support for Zionism and had determined that Zionism was "not incompatible with American patriotism," and urged members of the Orthodox Jewish Congregational Union of America to support the movement during the first convention in 1898 (*Leadership of the American Zionist Organization*, pp. 26).

<sup>20</sup> *Leadership of the American Zionist Organization*, pp. 256

form of nationalism to which they could subscribe—a nationalism that evolved from a “new self-consciousness” that was developed to “mirror the newly realized situation.”<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that this sense of nationalism in the American Jewish community developed independent of European Zionism and grew primarily out of a revitalized ethnic identity after World War I. A Palestinian mandate under British control fostered a greater optimism among American Jews who sought to realize the goal of establishing a Jewish homeland, not necessarily for themselves but at the very least for their coreligionists in Europe.

As we can see, American support for establishing the State of Israel existed long before anti-Semitism in Europe reached its apex in the form of the Holocaust. It is necessary to nullify, therefore, the idea that the creation of Israel was predicated *solely* on the events of the Holocaust, for the support for such a state had gained substantial strength in the United States and elsewhere prior to and completely independent of the extermination of two-thirds of Europe’s Jewish population.<sup>22</sup> The effect of the Holocaust on American Zionism, however, would be a significant factor in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Perhaps most profoundly, the Holocaust altered the support base for Zionism to the point that “differences over ideology, assimilation or religion

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<sup>21</sup> Everett V. Stonequist, “The Problem of the Marginal Man” *The American Journal of Sociology* 41.1 (1935): 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> For over two thousand years, the Judaic principle calling for the “love of Zion” persisted throughout the diaspora. This principal tenant predates the Holocaust and institutionalized European anti-Semitism, tracing its roots back to the beginning of the exodus of the Jewish community from the original *Eretz Israel* during the Babylonian occupation during the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

that had previously animated heated debates over Jewish statehood” became irrelevant.<sup>23</sup> As they watched the fate of their coreligionists across the Atlantic, the American Jewish community was effectively ‘stifled’ in voicing opposition to the immigration restrictions that the United States had placed on European refugees. Out of fear that petitioning the government for a change in policy would foster more anti-Semitism in the United States, American Jews turned to Zionism as a means of supporting Jewish refugees escaping from execution in Europe. In 1942, the American Palestine Committee reaffirmed their support for an American policy that called for a Jewish national home in Palestine, and by 1944 a pro-Zionist policy was officially endorsed by the majority of the U.S. congress and more than 3,000 non-Jewish organizations.<sup>24</sup>

By the mid-1940s, as the results of Hitler’s campaign of European Jewish genocide became readily available for the world to see, American support for a sovereign Israeli state may have seemed to be a foregone conclusion. Within president Harry Truman’s administration, however, there was a great deal of vacillation between two policies regarding the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. While members of Truman’s cabinet (most notably Clark Clifford) advocated for a strong pro-Zionist stance, the Departments of Defense and State (along with the Military) urged against adopting such a policy out of concern that it may alienate Arab states.<sup>24</sup> Truman’s Secretary of State, George Marshall, believed that ‘for

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<sup>23</sup> Alan Dowty, *Israel/Palestine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), pp. 81

<sup>24</sup> “Zionism and American Jews” *MERIP Reports*, No. 29 (June 1974), pp. 8

strategic reasons' the United States should be "more even-handed in its view of the future of Palestine."<sup>25</sup> Truman's administration changed course radically two months ahead of Israel's Declaration (and War) of Independence, indicating its support for a United Nations trusteeship over Palestine, rather than the establishment of an independent Jewish state. By the 1948 election, however, the need to secure the Jewish vote (which had historically been aligned with the Democratic party but was by *no* means 'guaranteed') far outweighed the concerns posited by his foreign policy advisors. After fully recognizing Israel's independence on May 14, 1948, Truman embarked on a massive campaign up until the November election in which he promised "extensive American support for Israel" to an American Jewish population that overwhelmingly identified itself as 'Zionist', if even only at the philanthropic level.<sup>26</sup>

By 1948, Zionism had become ingrained in the psyche of the American Jewish community and served as a unifying cultural focus by which American policy toward Israel came to be defined. At this point, Arab rejection of the 1947 partition and refugees from the War of Independence (or, from the Arab perspective, the 'Catastrophe') were issues of little concern to American Jewry, apart, perhaps, from academic circles. In 1945, acclaimed political theorist Hannah Arendt warned that if political Zionism failed to "normalize the situation of the Jews in America," then support of Zionism may effectively

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<sup>25</sup> Michael C. Desch, "The Myth of Abandonment: The Use and Abuse of the Holocaust Analogy," *Security Studies* Vol. 15, No. 1 (January-March 2006): 112

<sup>26</sup> "Zionism and American Jews," pp. 9

be thrown into ‘reverse’—that is, anti-Semitism would resurge if the loyalty or allegiance of American Jews came into question.<sup>26</sup> While such a ‘reversal’ may have never manifested itself in any real terms, the issue of anti-Semitism did not, by any means, disappear. The distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism continues to animate the debate over American support of Israel to the present day.

### **American Zionism after Israel: from Independence to Oslo 1948-1993**

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 imbued the American Jewish community with unprecedented Zionist fervor. Although support for Israel within the American Jewish community consisted primarily of monetary donations and various forms of political activism, thousands of American Jews were beginning to show their support by relocating to the new Jewish state. Within the lifespan of the British Mandate of Palestine (1919-1947), an estimated 11,000 American Jews immigrated to Israel, most of whom were motivated by Zionism rather than religious ideologies. After 1948, however, the rate at which American Jews began relocating to Israel nearly doubled; over 3,600 Americans moved to Israel between 1950 and 1959, averaging out to 360 per year—50 percent higher than the yearly rate during the entire mandatory period.<sup>27</sup>

In one of the few empirical studies of American *olim* (immigrants) throughout the 1950s and 60s, Gerald Engel found a distinct lack of criticism of American society among respondents, indicating that ‘pull’ factors, rather

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<sup>27</sup> Chaim I. Waxman, *American Aliya: Portrait of an Innovative Migration Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), pp. 78

than ‘push’ factors, served as the predominant motivators for Aliyah. More than 80 percent were attracted by the idea of a Jewish homeland, 75 percent were motivated by the concept of Israel as the land of the Bible, and 71 percent were attracted by Jewish education; almost twice as many indicated feeling ‘much’ attraction to all aspects of Jewish life in Israel than those who indicated they only felt ‘some’ attraction.<sup>28</sup> Most importantly, however, Engel found that the post-1948 American *olim* were coming increasingly from non-Zionist homes and, on the whole, had less formal affiliation with Zionist youth organizations. The declining influence of this brand of ‘formal Zionism’ is evidence for the first major shift in Zionism’s reach and influence within the American Jewish community.

In post-war America, Zionism became less a fundamentalist religious ideology than a new centralized and revitalized expression of Jewish cultural identity. By 1948, Mordecai Kaplan’s prophetic classification of the Jewish state in Palestine as the ‘first zone’ of worldwide Jewish life had come to fruition. Kaplan, an influential American reconstructionist Rabbi and thinker, declared in his 1934 book *Judaism As A Civilization*: “In Palestine only will it be possible for the Jew, if he so chooses, to live entirely within his people’s civilization.”<sup>29</sup> America, for Kaplan, allowed Judaism to survive “only as a subordinate civilization”—one subject to the dominant interests of American life and identity. While conceding that Jewish life outside of Palestine was

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<sup>28</sup> *American Aliya*, pp. 86

<sup>29</sup> Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism As A Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1934), pp. 215

achievable, Kaplan stressed the need for the Jew to immigrate to Palestine if “he wants to live as a Jew only, and to be free of the need of reckoning with the civilization of any other people.”<sup>30</sup> Yet, despite the lofty promises of unprecedented individual and collective sovereignty, immigrants to the new Jewish state were faced with an inevitable ‘reckoning’, of sorts, with the American civilization.

Jewish immigration to Israel during this period, despite its ideological significance, was far too scant to be considered a primary factor in the U.S. Government’s interest in fostering a ‘special relationship’ with the state. In the two decades directly following Israeli independence, the relationship bore little resemblance to the ‘unbreakable’ bond affirmed by both U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in contemporary diplomatic discourse.

Early attempts at establishing an effective ‘Israel lobby’ in Washington were mired in controversy from the start. Rumors that President Eisenhower had launched an investigation into the American Zionist Council for its alleged use of tax-exempt funds for lobbying purposes tarnished the organization’s reputation to the point that it was re-organized and re-packaged into the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs (AZPAC) in 1954.<sup>31</sup> While such investigations never actually took place, the rift between

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<sup>30</sup> *Judaism As A Civilization*, pp. 217

<sup>31</sup> David Verbeeten, “How Important Is the Israel Lobby?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 2006): 37

the Eisenhower administration and mainstream American Zionist organizations had nonetheless become palpable by the mid 1950s.

Rather than pursuing the traditional ‘sticks-and-carrots’ diplomacy to develop U.S. relationships with emerging anti-Soviet allies in the Middle East, the Eisenhower administration did not offer any promises of arms delivery or unilateral security guarantees to Israel in exchange for its compliance with various American demands—including territorial concessions in the Negev, a cessation of raids against Egypt and Jordan, and acceptance of an unspecified number of Palestinian refugees.<sup>32</sup> Such a posturing was justified within the framework of long-term U.S. ambitions to form alliances with Arab states (at that point unanimously and unequivocally opposed to Israel’s existence) to curb Soviet power and influence in the Middle East. In a top-secret memo by the National Security Council on July 23, 1954, the Executive Secretary explicitly outlines U.S. ambitions to “progressively reduce the amount of economic aid furnished to Israel, so as to bring it into impartial relationship to aid to others in the area.”<sup>33</sup> In both public and private diplomatic iterations of U.S. policy, it is clear that the U.S. was not interested in aligning itself with Israel out of fear of alienating other Middle Eastern nations over which it competed for influence.

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<sup>32</sup> Abraham Ben-Zvi, *Decade of Transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Origins of the American-Israeli Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 19

<sup>33</sup> National Security Council, NSC-5428, President’s copy, 23 July 1954, Top Secret. “U.S. objectives and policies with respect to the Near East” *American Zionism: A Documentary History* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 157

While the Eisenhower's markedly mistrusting, even hostile, attitude toward Israel can account for much of the lobby's ineffectiveness in the 1950s, the effect of ideological discrepancies between AZPAC (which became AIPAC in 1959) and the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) should be recognized as a barrier to the early development of a unified 'Israel lobby' in the United States. Early on, the ZOA (an umbrella group of the World Zionist Organization, discussed in the previous section) expressed concerns that AIPAC's dominance would risk "surrendering control to Jews who were willing to help fund Jewish charities, schools, and kibbutzim but were less dedicated to the traditional Zionist idea of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state."<sup>31</sup> Although the rift between the principal actors in the fledging pro-Israel lobby was not fully reconciled until the 1967 war, significant developments in the political landscape of the Middle East and (consequently) American policy toward Israel in the early 1960s began to form the foundations for the current U.S. alliance with the Jewish state.

John F. Kennedy began his presidency with a distinct lack of 'external constraints' (compared to those of Eisenhower) in pursuing a policy of Soviet containment in the Middle East. Despite establishing successful relationships with regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, the Soviet Union was faced with intra-Arab rivalries that threatened to break its base of influence.<sup>34</sup> For Kennedy, this meant increased flexibility in using Israel as a political issue in the 1960 Presidential election in opposition to then-Vice President Richard Nixon, who

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<sup>34</sup> Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 95

shared Eisenhower's lingering fear that a close U.S. relationship with Israel would further alienate key Arab states. Of course, with this increased flexibility also came an increased dependence on support from the American Jewish community—an electorate that Kennedy relied on more than any U.S. president up to that point. Kennedy took advantage of an invitation from the Zionist Organization of America to speak at its national convention in the August before the 1960 elections (an invitation which Nixon declined) and used the platform to express his commitment to Zionism:

“Israel has not been merely a Jewish cause—any more than Irish independence was the cause merely of those of Irish descent. Because wherever freedom exists, there we are all committed—and wherever it is in danger, there we are all in danger. The ideals of Zionism have in the last half-century been endorsed by both parties and Americans of all ranks in all sections. Friendship for Israel is not a partisan matter, it is a national commitment.”<sup>35</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Kennedy earned more than 80 percent of the Jewish vote in 1960—more so, as Norman Podhoretz posits, out of anti-Nixon and anti-Republican sentiments than pro-Kennedy enthusiasm.<sup>36</sup> However, Kennedy's 'pro-Israel' political posturing before the election was largely inconsistent with his decisions throughout his short presidency; he opposed the Israeli government on policy toward Egypt, the status of Jerusalem and refugees, as well as a key UN Security Council vote which condemned Israel for its 1962 raid into Syria. Nevertheless, Kennedy's rhetorical commitment to the state of Israel and Zionism secured broad support for himself, his successor, and the Democratic Party up until 1967, when the dynamics of the

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<sup>35</sup> *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 96

<sup>36</sup> *Why Are Jews Liberals?*, pp. 139

Arab-Israeli conflict changed radically and so too did the United States' relationship with Israel.

The effect of the Six-Day War on American Jewish affinity with the state of Israel cannot be overstated. As Journalist Thomas Friedman boldly declared in his acclaimed 1989 book *From Beirut to Jerusalem*: "American Jews could not embrace Israel enough...The impact of Israel on American Jews was so powerful that for many of them Israel actually replaced Torah, synagogue, and prayer as the carrier of their Jewish identity."<sup>37</sup> The Israeli victory in June 1967 left the state in control of the Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and (most importantly) all of Jerusalem. In the American press, allusions to the tale of David and Goliath were in no short supply, narrating the miraculous story of a "tiny David slaying a huge, if rather awkward, Goliath."<sup>38</sup> The covers of *Life*, *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines ran full-page portraits of the triumphant General Yitzhak Rabin at the Western Wall in military clothing, while the *New York Times* dubbed him "Hero of Sinai."<sup>39</sup> Through the American media lens, the Israeli Defense Forces (military might and sophistication notwithstanding) were lauded for their virtues as the persistent narrative of 'David' resonated in a U.S. population "accustomed to watching decades of westerns in movie theaters and on television with their lone heroes who fight successfully against

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), pp. 455-456

<sup>38</sup> Vermont Royster, "David and Goliath," *Wall Street Journal* 9 June 1967. pp. 10

<sup>39</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, "From David to Goliath: American Representations of Jews Around the Six-Day War," Ed. Bernard D. Cooperman, *Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000), pp. 72

incredible odds.”<sup>40</sup> The outcome of the Six-Day War created an environment in which “Israel moved from the periphery to the center in the structure and culture of the American Jewish community.”<sup>41</sup> Among college students, who were largely opposed to the war in Vietnam, there was unprecedented animation over the issue of U.S. support for Israel. Hundreds of Jewish students began to hold mass meetings on campuses across the country, volunteering to go to Israel to help the war effort and spreading awareness for the “need to wage what the students saw as a very different and just war,” in comparison to Vietnam.<sup>42</sup> Yet, this newfound sense of pride among much of the American Jewish community during and after the war would translate into more than just a revitalized collective identity.

In the period between 1967 and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, AIPAC was still fighting an uphill battle to secure increased aid for Israel from the U.S. government. Indeed, Israel had proven itself to be a “viable, independent nation, and not a ‘puppet nation’ propped up and manipulated by U.S. power”<sup>43</sup> and therefore *more* of a strategic ally in securing a base of U.S. influence in the Middle East. However, President Nixon’s lingering concerns of alienating other Arab states prohibited AIPAC from successfully lobbying to increase the U.S. foreign aid package to Israel from \$25 million to

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<sup>40</sup> “From David to Goliath,” pp. 70

<sup>41</sup> Chaim I. Waxman, “The Limited Impact of the Six-Day War on America’s Jews,” Ed. Bernard D. Cooperman, *Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000), pp. 99

<sup>42</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 323

<sup>43</sup> “From David to Goliath,” pp. 69

\$50 million.<sup>44</sup> The ‘\$36 Billion Bargain’ achieved during Nixon’s tenure in office had little, if anything, to do with the influence of AIPAC, which was in debt before 1967. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger notes in his memoirs that president Nixon “delighted in telling associates and visitors that the ‘Jewish lobby’ had no effect on him.”<sup>45</sup> After 1973, however, contributions remained at or above \$2 billion annually, spiking the very next year at \$4.5 billion.<sup>46</sup> As Israel faced increased hostility, including surprise attacks from Syria on Yom Kippur or international terrorism against Israeli citizens in 1970 and 1972, the overwhelming need to secure foreign aid to Israel could no longer be ignored.

After 1973, AIPAC took center stage as the voice of the ‘pro-Israel’ community in the United States. The organization grew from a staff of 12 lobbyists and a \$300,000 annual budget in 1973 to a staff of 80 and an annual budget of more than \$5 million in 1985.<sup>44</sup> At this time, the organization became very powerful, as any ‘threat’ to cut military aid or the size of the U.S. annual aid package to Israel “came to be defined as a threat to Israel’s survival.”<sup>47</sup> In addition, politicians quickly recognized the political expediency of being a ‘friend’ of Israel on Capitol Hill when any bill involving aid to Israel came to a vote. As one senator expressed in 1976: “There’s no political advantage in not signing. If you do sign, you don’t offend anyone. If

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<sup>44</sup> Wolf Blitzer, *Between Washington and Jerusalem: A Reporter’s Notebook* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 120

<sup>45</sup> “How Important Is the Israel Lobby?” pp. 40

<sup>46</sup> Abramo F.K. Organski, *The \$36 Billion Dollar Bargain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 142

<sup>47</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 326

you don't, you might offend some Jews in your state."<sup>48</sup> While Jews make up approximately two percent of the overall American electorate, the importance of the 'Jewish vote' is largely related to their campaign contributions.<sup>49</sup> One senator from a sparsely populated Western state said although there are only one or two thousand Jewish citizens in his state, "they all contribute to my campaign."<sup>48</sup> This unified conception of 'pro-Israel' (i.e.—voting for any bill that increased aid to Israel) in congress would, however, increasingly complicate the issue of U.S. support for the Jewish state.

As the American historian Hasia Diner points out, the ability of the 'Israel' issue to "shape American Jewish consciousness" resulted in a stifling of dissent among American Jews:

"For a community that historically had been open to debate and to differing approaches to common problems, the taboo on criticizing specific Israeli policies compromised communal democracy and shattered even the semblance of unity."<sup>50</sup>

To counter the threat of censorship, a group of politically active American Jews founded the *Breira* or "alternative" organization to foster discussion about sensitive subjects that had become taboo within the American 'pro-Israel' camp that developed in the early 1970s—namely, Israel's relationship with the Palestinians, refugees, and the growing number of settlements in the West Bank. By 1977, the organization had a membership of more than

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<sup>48</sup> Mary A. Barberis, "The Arab-Israeli Battle on Capitol Hill," *Virginia Quarterly Review* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 1976): 209

<sup>49</sup> This is especially true in 'swing states,' where a few votes can mean the difference between winning and losing a congressional seat.

<sup>50</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 327

12,000, including Rabbis and other Jewish community leaders. However, their presence and expressed ambitions to enter the mainstream American dialogue on Israel was met with rebuke and hostility from prominent Jewish leaders. One Rabbi accused *Breira* of giving “aid and comfort to those who would cut aid to Israel and leave it defenseless before murderers and terrorists,” while the prominent Rabbi and scholar Arthur Hertzberg refused to speak at a conference of the American Jewish Congress because a member of the *Breira* organization had been invited.<sup>51</sup> After considerable demonization in the mainstream Jewish press and accusations of ‘self-hatred’, *Breira* members were effectively blacklisted from speaking at national Jewish events and eventually re-emerged as the New Jewish Agenda in 1980, by which time other organizations such as American Friends of Peace Now had begun to advance the issue of Palestinian rights within the American Jewish dialogue on Israel, albeit with similar criticism and resistance. Yet while nascent ‘pro-Israel’ groups willing to criticize the policies of the Israeli government (particularly after the right-wing Likud party gained control of the Knesset in 1977) were struggling to make their voices heard in the American mainstream, another religious group was beginning to gain considerable influence over U.S. policy toward Israel.

### **Christian Zionism: Origins and Ascent**

Christian Zionism has its roots in early 19<sup>th</sup> century England, when evangelical Christian thinkers began to embrace the idea that the “Second

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<sup>51</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 328

Advent” or “Second Coming” of Christ would occur *before* the new millennium. The role of the Jews in Biblical prophecy became central to the ‘premillennialists’—with whom the Calvinist doctrine of the divine “election” of the Jews resonated greatly.<sup>52</sup> The persistence of this newfound philosemitism eventually laid the ideological foundations for a *religious* justification for Christian Zionism that, at the very least, motivated the prominent British politician Lord Shaftesbury to show public support for Jewish ambitions to establish a national homeland in Palestine. Although Shaftesbury died in 1885 (just four years after the assassination of Czar Alexander II and the outbreak of anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia), his contribution to Christian Zionism left a monumental impact on the British evangelicals—so much so that at the Fourth Zionist Congress in 1900, Theodor Herzl proudly proclaimed: “England, mighty England, free England, with its world embracing outlook will understand us and our aspirations.”<sup>53</sup> Of the ten members of the British War Cabinet that issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, six (including Arthur Balfour himself) came from evangelical Calvinist backgrounds and were undoubtedly influenced by 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of what would come to be known as Christian Zionism.<sup>54</sup>

Just as the Six-Day War had revitalized American Jewish identity, so too did the aftermath of the June 1967 war revive evangelical Christian interest in Biblical prophecy. Nelson Bell, editor of the evangelical journal

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<sup>52</sup> Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 68

<sup>53</sup> *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, pp. 322

<sup>54</sup> *The Origins of Christian Zionism*, pp. 332-333

*Christianity Today*, wrote shortly after the war: “That for the first time in the more than two thousand years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible.”<sup>55</sup> The doctrine of dispensationalism—that is, belief in a distinct period constituting the ‘end of times’—became a prominent theme in the writings and speeches of American evangelicals, most notably Hal Lindsey, who called the State of Israel ‘the fuse of Armageddon.’ Despite his wariness toward the eschatological implications of evangelical Christian doctrine, retired Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion hosted a conference in 1971 for American evangelical clergy in Jerusalem—a meeting inspired by Lindsey’s book *The Late Great Planet Earth* published the previous year.

Yet, aside from renewed interest in strict textual interpretation, the 1970s and 80s were largely characterized by a resurgence of the ‘Christian Right’ in the United States. In 1979, Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority, an evangelical lobbying group whose purpose was to promote the pursuit of conservative, Christian, and ‘family-oriented’ legislation in the U.S. congress. The issue of greatest importance to Falwell (a self-proclaimed ‘convert’ to Zionism after 1967), however, was the ‘destiny’ of the State of Israel, stating in 1984 that “the people of Israel have not only a theological but also a historical and legal right to the land.”<sup>56</sup> Falwell advocated

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<sup>55</sup> Shalom Goldman, *Zeal For Zion: Christians, Jews, & the Idea of The Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 292

<sup>56</sup> *Zeal for Zion*, pp. 294

restoration of Jewish control of ‘the land’ promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18—which includes the area between the Nile and the Euphrates. Such a conception was welcomed warmly by the right-wing Likud government under Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who developed a close personal and political friendship with Falwell. In forming this relationship, Begin and fellow Likud member Ariel Sharon were able to gain support for an ambitious settlement policy—one that would establish ‘facts on the ground’ in the occupied territories and thus secure expanded final boundaries for the State of Israel. At a time when the Likud party’s settlement policy faced considerable resistance from U.S. President Jimmy Carter (and, to a lesser degree, from Ronald Reagan), Begin could consistently rely on ideological support from Falwell and his evangelical Moral Majority.

Of course, Falwell’s unrelenting support for Israel was not met without criticism from dissenting voices within the American Jewish community. After Begin awarded Falwell with the Jabotinsky Prize in 1980 (the first awarded to a non-Jew), Reform leader Rabbi Alexander Schindler criticized the emerging alliance between the Israeli Right and the American Christian Right: “Can someone really be good for Israel when everything else he says and does is destructive of America and undermines the Jewish community?”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the fledging acceptance of a two-state solution among liberal American Jews in the late 1980s meant Falwell had created a nearly intractable chasm between his evangelical followers and the very

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<sup>57</sup> *Zeal for Zion*, pp. 295

community to which he pledged full 'support'. In both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, Falwell published a full-page declaration that called for evangelical Christians to recognize Israel's 'divine right to the land,' and viewed with 'grave concern' any "effort to carve out of the Jewish homeland another nation or political entity"—thus rendering a Palestinian state theoretically impossible.<sup>58</sup> The Christian Right's alliance with religious fundamentalist settlers and Israel's Likud politicians further complicated support for Israel among secular, liberal American Jews who, despite finding a newfound affinity with the Jewish state after 1967, were hardly interested in the eschatological Christian conception of Israel's destiny and perhaps even *less* interested in the Christian Right's positions regarding domestic social and economic policies in the United States.

The rise of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, and the tumultuous six years that followed left Israel in a radically different position in relation to the 'Palestinian issue'. As Palestinian Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat rushed to accept UN Resolutions 181 and 242 (thus acknowledging Israel's right to exist "in peace and security") it seemed opposition to the existence of a Palestinian state was no longer a tenable position, even among those who considered themselves to be in the 'pro-Israel' camp. At this time, a shift in diplomatic relations between Israel and the PLO finally allowed American rabbis, community activists, and members of prominent Jewish organizations to

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<sup>58</sup> Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 190

“discuss the needs of the Palestinians and the problems posed by West Bank settlements.”<sup>59</sup> Support for an independent Palestinian state among Israelis rose to an unprecedented 30 percent by 1990, with an increased 10-15 percent supporting withdrawal from all or part of the West Bank and Gaza as part of a final peace agreement.<sup>60</sup> In a sense, the normalization of political relations between Israel and the PLO and the growth of the domestic peace movement in Israel corresponded directly with the ‘un-censoring’ of dissenting opinions in the American Jewish community. While such a shift may have effectively restored the ‘communal democracy’ within American Jewry, it also allowed for increased polarization of political opinions regarding Israel—opinions that would continue to diverge even after the monumental handshake between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on the White House lawn in September 1993.

### **American Zionism at the Turn of the Century: from Oslo to Present**

#### **1993-2012**

Although the ‘peace’ agreement reached in the 1993 Oslo Accords has yet to be fulfilled, it had a defining impact on the trajectory of U.S.-Israeli relations throughout the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and into the 21<sup>st</sup>. While the prospect of continued and direct negotiations with a legitimate Palestinian Authority opened up previously unavailable paths of dissent over Israeli policies within the American Jewish community, for many a ‘particular stance’ toward Israel became a “communal litmus test of trustworthiness.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 329

<sup>60</sup> *Israel/Palestine*, pp. 138-139

To be sure, in an April 1993 *Commentary* article entitled “A Statement on the Peace Process,” editor Norman Podhoretz, by that time a leading neoconservative, noted that Jewish criticism of Israel in the 1980s following the invasion of Lebanon had ‘dangerous political consequences’ within the context of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in the early 1990s:

“For one thing, they provided cover for ideological enemies of Israel and even outright anti-Semites, who were overjoyed at being able to quote Jews instead of having to rely exclusively on their own easily discounted forms of vilification. For another thing, the politicians in Washington...were led to believe that Israel could now be pressured or even turned on without incurring too high a price in Jewish political support.”<sup>61</sup>

This rather cynical view on the effect of Jewish criticism on U.S.-Israeli relations highlights the dominant right-wing ‘pro-Israel’ anxiety that such criticism would result in an ‘unbalanced’ peace deal in which Israel would be forced to relinquish more than it should as part of the Oslo agreements. Furthermore, Podhoretz offers little direct recognition of the legitimacy of a Palestinian state, only commenting that “Jews in the Diaspora whose lives are not on the line lack the moral standing to participate in the debate among Israelis over their physical security.”<sup>62</sup> By rejecting the voices of diaspora Jews in such a debate (which, ironically, would include his own), Podhoretz effectively dodges committing to a negative or affirmative position on Palestinian statehood, replacing it with the vague conclusion that ‘it is not our decision to make.’

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<sup>61</sup> Norman Podhoretz, “A Statement on the Peace Process,” *Commentary* Vol. 95, No. 4 (April 1993): 19

<sup>62</sup> “A Statement on the Peace Process,” pp. 20

While such a position theoretically stifles any voice wishing to comment on the matter, Podhoretz's criticism of Jewish dissent creates an important dichotomy of the American Jewish community in the 1990s—particularly evident in their 'abandonment' of George H.W. Bush in the 1992 election. The *Commentary* editor cites Bush's misjudgment of the division among American Jews on Israel, describing a misguided 'new idea' that took root during the Republican's first and only administration:

"It was that the Jewish community was now more or less evenly split. On the one side was an old-fashioned establishment in the pocket of an intransigent and expansionist Israeli government. On the other side was an almost equally large group of courageous dissidents who would welcome an American policy aimed at forcing Israel to be more "flexible" in the pursuit of peace."<sup>61</sup>

Podhoretz admits that this division was *perceived* rather than *real*—resulting in Bush's support within the American Jewish community being cut in half (from 30 percent in 1988 to 15 percent in 1992). Yet, in the coming decades, the 'split' in the 'pro-Israel' camp would develop along similar lines.

The post-Oslo years were characterized by increased animation over what should and should not be considered 'anti-Israel' within American Jewish discourse. One apparent manifestation of this controversy occurred in 1997, when the Anti-Defamation League (led by Abraham Foxman) sought to honor *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, who had expressed support for the Oslo accords and called for Israel to recognize Palestinian claims, by inviting him to speak at its annual convention. Zionist Organization of America president Morton Klein launched a protest, resulting in a "barrage of hostile rhetoric" between himself and Foxman due to his

belief that Friedman was “an enemy of Israel, someone who should not be honored at a Jewish event.”<sup>63</sup> The American Jewish community had truly reached a new level of polarization in 1997 if Friedman, a prolific American Jewish journalist who had devoted the majority of his career to reporting and serving as an advocate on behalf of Israel, was being called an ‘enemy’ of the Jewish State.

Of course, the increased polarization of the 1990s must be understood within the context of the movement of Post-Zionism out of *exclusively* intellectual circles and into mainstream political discourse. ‘Post-Zionism,’ simply put, is “a set of critical positions that problematize Zionist discourse, and the historical narratives and social and cultural representations that it produced.”<sup>64</sup> Post-Zionism acknowledges the achievement of the original Zionist mission and emphasizes the need to move beyond the ideal of a ‘Jewish’ state (or, at the very least, least beyond an *expansionist* Jewish state) in favor of a more limited, pluralistic one. This conception of Post-Zionism does not, by any means, challenge the existence of Israel or the ideological bases of its foundation. Rather, ‘Positive’ Post-Zionism, as Danny Ben-Moshe describes it, can be understood as “a political cultural process that seeks to de-Judaize and de-Zionise Israel and is one that is manifest in materialistic American culture.”<sup>65</sup> In one sense, the discussions at Camp David in 2000 can

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<sup>63</sup> *The Jews of the United States*, pp. 329

<sup>64</sup> Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Post-Zionism Debates: knowledge and power in Israeli culture* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 2

<sup>65</sup> Danny Ben-Moshe, “The Oslo Peace Process and Two Views on Judaism and Zionism, 1992-1996,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (May 2005): 14

be viewed as the final abandonment of the Revisionist Zionist ideology<sup>66</sup> that had dominated Israeli politics after 1967. Despite Arafat's rejection of Prime Minister Ehud Barak's 'generous offer', the deal represented a significant turning point for it signaled a return to the "classic, mainstream Zionist position favoring territorial compromise with the Palestinian people, a recognition of the basic legitimacy of their claim to self-determination and acceptance of a partition of the Land of Israel/Palestine between Jews and Arabs."<sup>67</sup> While the deal does not represent a wholesale embrace of Post-Zionism, it did bring the ideology into the political mainstream, as it moved away from far-reaching Zionist ambitions and toward achieving 'peace' with a sovereign, independent Palestinian state. Yet, because Post-Zionism does not prioritize the 'Jewish' nature of Israel, its adherents on the political left have often been labeled 'anti-Semitic' in both Israel and the United States.

In September 2002, Harvard University president Lawrence Summers caused a stir among Post-Zionist intellectuals—most notably UC Berkeley's Judith Butler<sup>68</sup>—after publicly recognizing that "Profoundly anti-Israeli

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<sup>66</sup> Revisionist Zionism should be understood as the insistence of Jewish sovereignty in the entire biblical land of Israel. Such a state would necessarily include the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and part or all of the Kingdom of Jordan. It should be noted that the Revisionist Zionist conception of the State of Israel is similar, if not identical, to the conception among Christian Zionists, who rely on the parameters set out in Genesis 15:18 in which God promises to Abraham the land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."

<sup>67</sup> Elhanan Yakira, *Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust: Three Essays on Denial, Forgetting, and the Delegitimization of Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 305

<sup>68</sup> Judith Butler holds controversial views regarding the connection between Zionism and Judaism. More specifically—she has openly expressed the view that challenging the right of the State of Israel to exist does not equate to challenging the right of the Jewish people to exist. She identifies herself as an 'anti-Zionist Jew' and actively engages in Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns against not only the Israeli settler population (as

views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities” and claiming that “serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent.” Butler responded in 2004 with a book chapter entitled “The Charge of Antisemitism,” in which she criticizes Summers’ distinction between ‘effective’ and ‘intentional’ anti-Semitism—a distinction she claims is “controversial at best.”<sup>69</sup> In her view, because nearly all anti-Israel views can be interpreted and used for ‘effective’ anti-Semitism, Summers had “struck a blow against academic freedom” because his charge would presumptively extend to almost any “anti-Israel” viewpoint or action, including Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaigns (in which Butler herself was actively involved). It seemed, at that point, that views on Israel in the United States had reached the apex of polarization. In both mainstream and intellectual communities, critics of Israel were almost invariably met with charges of anti-Semitism, and *Jewish* critics of Israel were met with the deplorable tag of being “self-hating Jews.” There was little to no room for critics of the Israeli government to identify themselves as ‘Pro-Israel’ in mainstream U.S. politics—that is, until the end of George W. Bush’s second term in office.

In April 2008, former Clinton adviser Jeremy Ben-Ami founded J Street—a non-profit lobbying organization that brands itself as “Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace.” Its goal was “to give a voice in American politics to those who

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Peter Beinart encouraged in a 2012 *New York Times* Op-ed) but against the entire State of Israel.

<sup>69</sup> Judith Butler, “The Charge of Antisemitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique” *Postzionism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), pp. 369

believe that Israel's future depends on a two-state solution."<sup>70</sup> Ben-Ami draws upon his personal and familial connection to Israel as well as his experience in policymaking to push forward with a 'new voice' that breaks sharply from the traditional conception of what it means to be 'pro-Israel' in the United States. Citing Washington's experience with AIPAC and evangelical pastor John Hagee's Christians United for Israel (CUFI) organization, Ben-Ami points out: "It's no shock that a community so fundamentally liberal and overwhelmingly moderate in its views on the Middle East is perceived as monolithically hawkish and right-of-center when it comes to Israel."<sup>71</sup> Short of being a 'fringe' group of activists, J Street has established a Political Action Committee that lobbies on Capitol Hill, formally endorses candidates, and was able to boast a \$1.5 million budget in 2009—miniscule in comparison to AIPAC's \$67 million annual budget, but more flexible because it is able to donate directly to politicians' campaigns, whereas AIPAC can only hold 'information sessions' and donate money *through* other political action committees it recognizes as having 'pro-Israel' stances. In the 2010 election, J Street endorsed and supported 61 federal candidates, 45 of whom won their elections. By the end of 2011, J Street had convened the third largest gathering of American Jews on the entire continent at its Second National Conference in Washington, D.C.

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<sup>70</sup> Jeremy Ben-Ami, *A New Voice for Israel: Fighting for the Survival of the Jewish Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. xii

<sup>71</sup> *A New Voice for Israel*, pp. 95

Ben-Ami's J Street emerged and gained notoriety at a time when the newly-inaugurated president Obama was staking out a new 'vision' for U.S. involvement in the Middle East. In his June 2009 speech in Cairo entitled "A New Beginning," Obama linked the pursuit of a two-state solution with American and international interests:

"The only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two states, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security. That is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest, and the world's interest. And that is why I intend to personally pursue this outcome with all the patience and dedication that the task requires."<sup>72</sup>

Ben-Ami welcomed the position and expressed optimism that Obama would "garner Jewish support in such a push specifically because many in the Jewish community recognize that resolving the conflict is not only necessary to secure Israel's future, but also critical to regional stability and American strategic interests."<sup>73</sup> Naturally, Ben-Ami's vision of a 'New Voice for Israel' was met with considerable skepticism and intense criticism from the traditional 'pro-Israel' community in the United States, most notably from Harvard Law professor and acclaimed public defender of Israel Alan Dershowitz.

However, what Dershowitz took issue with was not Ben-Ami's endorsement of a two-state solution, but rather his endorsement of General David Petraeus' assertion that 'large-scale armed confrontations' in the Middle East were motivated mainly by anti-American sentiment brought on

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<sup>72</sup> Barack Obama, "A New Beginning" Remarks in Cairo, Egypt. 4 June 2009

<sup>73</sup> Jeremy Ben-Ami, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times* 21 April 2010

by “U.S. favoritism for Israel.”<sup>74</sup> Such a statement has led right-wing critics to conclude that the Obama administration is not really ‘pro-Israel,’ for the more ‘hawkish’ supporters of Israel interpret the phrase to mean “providing uncritical support for Israeli governments” and *not* “lecturing Israel on what’s best for it, or applying any kind of pressure on it—both of which President Obama has done.”<sup>75</sup> Ben-Ami’s support of Petraeus’ claim (echoed by Vice President Joe Biden) would earn him a scathing rebuke from

Dershowitz in the *Huffington Post*:

“As long as [J Street] was limiting its lobbying activities to ending the settlements, dividing Jerusalem and pressing for negotiations, it could plausibly claim the mantle of pro-Israel, despite the reality that many of its members, supporters, speakers and invited guests are virulently anti-Israel. But now that it has crossed the line into legitimating the most dangerous and false argument ever made against Israel’s security, it must stop calling itself pro-Israel.”<sup>76</sup>

Dershowitz’s criticism is important because it allows that pursuing a campaign to end settlements, divide Jerusalem, and press for negotiations could ‘plausibly’ be called ‘pro-Israel’. For Alan Dershowitz, who had long spoken out against the de-legitimization of Israel among U.S. intellectuals, such an admission signaled an ideological re-positioning of ‘pro-Israel’ sentiments within the United States.<sup>77</sup> Before 1993 (and even before 2000),

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<sup>74</sup> David H. Petraeus, Statement Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Posture of U.S. Central Command. 16 March 2010 <<http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2010/03%20March/Petraeus%2003-16-10.pdf>>.

<sup>75</sup> Dov Waxman, “The Real Problem in U.S.—Israeli Relations,” *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 35, No. 2 (Spring 2012): 72

<sup>76</sup> Alan Dershowitz, “J Street Can No Longer Claim to Be Pro Israel,” *The Huffington Post* 21 April 2010. < [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-dershowitz/j-street-can-no-longer-cl\\_b\\_546841.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-dershowitz/j-street-can-no-longer-cl_b_546841.html)>.

<sup>77</sup> This re-positioning is closer in line with the emerging ‘new consensus’ in Israeli Politics after 1993. A 2012 poll by the Jerusalem-based Truman Institute for the Advancement of

the idea that one could openly advocate for a two-state solution, advocate dismantling West Bank settlements and simultaneously call themselves ‘pro-Israel’ would have been embraced only on the far left of the political spectrum. However, two years into the Obama administration, this ‘new’ definition had gained considerable support, particularly among the younger generation that had grown up in the post-Oslo era and had come of age around the monumental U.S. election of 2008.

Ten days after Israeli Naval commandos boarded the Gaza-bound *Mavi Marmara* sea vessel and killed nine pro-Palestinian Turkish activists delivering humanitarian aid to the dilapidated party-state on the Mediterranean, American journalist Peter Beinart published an essay in the *New York Review of Books* that would spark controversy and debate throughout the American Jewish community and, indeed, among all those who had, at one point or another, considered themselves ‘pro-Israel’.

Beinart’s essay, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment,” is a lamentation of what he sees as the ‘death of liberal Zionism’ in the United States—a death that has all but silenced Jewish voices who speak out against the policies of an increasingly religious, right wing, and ‘anti-democratic’ Israeli government. Beinart cites several studies conducted in the early-mid

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Peace found that 70 percent of Israelis support a two-state solution (Yossi Klein Halevi, “Can the Center Hold? Understanding Israel’s Pragmatic Majority,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 91, No. 1 (January/February 2012):168)

2000s which showed that “non-Orthodox younger Jews<sup>78</sup>, on the whole, feel much less attached to Israel than their elders.”<sup>79</sup> The most telling survey, conducted by conservative pollster Frank Luntz, found that most interviewees, broadly defined, were ‘liberals’ who believed in “open debate, skepticism about military force, and a commitment to human rights. And in their innocence, they did not realize that they were supposed to shed those values when it came to Israel.”<sup>47</sup> Although this broad sketch of a ‘dovish’ American Jewish youth has notable exceptions, it does coincide with the rise in popularity of groups such as J Street, which boasted nearly 3,000 attendees at its third annual conference in March 2012—a quarter of which were college students from more than 125 U.S. campuses.

Recent poll data indicates that the American Jewish community, on the whole, has not moved en masse away from its historic ‘connection’ to the state of Israel. A 2010 Brandeis survey found that a majority (63 percent) of the American Jewish community indicated it still felt ‘very much’ or at least ‘somewhat’ attached to the state of Israel, with 37 percent feeling only ‘a little’ or ‘not at all’ attached to Israel.<sup>80</sup> However, under the age of 45, close to 50 percent indicate they have ‘a little’ or ‘no connection at all’ to Israel. 46 percent overall favor dismantling some or all of the settlements, although the

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<sup>78</sup> A 2006 American Jewish Committee survey found that only 16 percent of non-Orthodox Jews under the age of 40 feel “very close to Israel” while 60 percent of non-Orthodox under age 40 support the establishment of a Palestinian state.

<sup>79</sup> “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment,” pp. 1

<sup>80</sup> Theodore Sasson, Benjamin Phillips, Charles Kadushin, Leonard Saxe, “Still Connected: American Attitudes about Israel,” Brandeis University Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies August 2010, pp. 9

study does not indicate how these opinions are divided among various age groups. 37 percent disapprove of Obama's handling of the U.S.—Israeli relationship, with the same percentage (roughly—actually 38) 'unsure' about it, and 25 percent responding they approve of how he has handled it. About 49 percent from the 18-29 age group indicated that they agreed with the official Turkish statement following the flotilla raid in the summer of 2010—which claimed that Israel had made an 'unprovoked attack' on innocent civilians and had violated international law.

The American Jewish 'establishment' Beinart describes is one that had traditionally defined what it meant to be 'pro-Israel' in the United States—uncompromising on Israeli 'security needs' and generally rejectionist (or at the very most, skeptical) toward a Palestinian state. But the prevalence of 'liberal' values among the American Jews (78 percent of which voted for Barack Obama in 2008) has come to overshadow any lingering adherence to this 'old' conception of 'pro-Israel'. However, we must not confuse a wholesale re-defining of 'pro-Israel' with a general increase in apathy toward Israel within the context of U.S. politics. On April 3, 2012, the Public Religion Research Institute published a survey of over 1,000 American Jewish voters, among whom only 4 percent indicated that 'Israel' was the most important issue in the 2012 presidential election, while 20 percent identified 'support for Israel' as the most important quality to their Jewish Identity.<sup>81</sup> The largest portion, 46 percent, identified 'a commitment to social equality' as the

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<sup>81</sup> "Survey: Chosen for What? Jewish Values in 2012" Public Religion Research Institute 3 April 2012. <<http://publicreligion.org/research/2012/04/jewish-values-in-2012/>>.

most important quality to their Jewish identity—supporting Beinart’s claim that American Jews check their ‘Zionism’ at ‘liberalism’s door.’

### **Conclusions**

In examining the current state of American Zionism and American conceptions of ‘pro-Israel’, I have identified three main factors in the shift from the ‘old’ definition to the ‘new’ one. To review, the ‘old’ pro-Israel camp was (and, in a sense still is) security focused, ambivalent or rejectionist toward a Palestinian state, and embraces, above all else, the Jewish nature of the State of Israel. The ‘new’ pro-Israel camp is focused on achieving ‘peace’ in Israel/Palestine, advocates for a two-state solution, and emphasizes, above all else, the ‘liberal’ and ‘democratic’ nature of the Israeli State. Clearly, there is room for ‘bleeding over’ between the two, but if we are to understand the ‘new’ definition as an ‘ideal’ or ‘form’ toward which we are moving, it follows that in 2012 we are clearly still in a transitional period.

### **The Generational Divide: Post-1967, Post-Oslo**

As Beinart noted in *Failure*, the polarization between ‘liberals’ and ‘Zionists’ within the American Jewish community is the direct result of leading American Jewish institutions that have ‘actively opposed’ a brand of Zionism that “challenges Israel’s behavior in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and toward its own Arab citizens.”<sup>47</sup> The generation that came of age in the post-1967 euphoria had established a Zionism that rejected Palestinian statehood and placed Israel at or near the center of Jewish communal identity. Yet, after many American Jews found their dissenting opinions

stifled and faced threats of being labeled 'self-hating' or 'anti-Semitic', an emphasis on the liberal, democratic nature of the Jewish state broke into the mainstream, especially as the ever-nearing and elusive 'peace' with the Palestinians became more realistic after the 1993 Oslo accords. The 'communal democracy' that had characterized a politically active and pluralistic American Jewish community before 1967 was effectively restored by the late 2000s, offering a younger generation outlets for dissenting opinions over Israeli policies and military campaigns that had hitherto been considered taboo.

### **The Impact of Christian Zionism: Polarizing the 'Pro-Israel' Community**

The emergence of evangelical Protestant Christian support for Israel in the late 1970s and through the 1980s under the leadership of Jerry Falwell resulted in a polarization of the 'pro-Israel' community in the United States that would shape the subsequent polarization within the American Jewish community. The restoration of Jewish control over the ancient 'Land of Israel' God had promised to Abraham revitalized the emphasis on a 'premillennial' interpretation of the Second Coming of Christ. Christian evangelicals enjoyed (and still enjoy) a healthy and fruitful relationship with the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee and the right-wing Likud governments of Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir and Benjamin Netanyahu throughout their various tenures in that Christian Zionists provided ideological and monetary support for settlement expansion in the West Bank. As the prospect of a Palestinian state became imminent, however, the 'pro-

Israel' Jewish left and 'pro-Israel' Christian right found themselves on opposite ends of the political spectrum, with Christians continuing to embrace an ideology closer to Revisionist Zionism of right-wing Israelis and the Likud party. Thus, a strong relationship remains between the Israeli right and the American Christian right, fostering the growth of continued settlements in hopes of maintaining Jewish control over the entire *Eretz Israel*, and perhaps more.

### **Re-Shifting of the Middle East: Arab Spring, Israeli Winter?**

Barack Obama's foreign policy toward the Middle East has been largely characterized by a desire to re-define the U.S. relationship with Arab states and, by extension, with Israel. His 2009 Cairo speech ushered in a new era (it is no coincidence the speech was entitled "A New Beginning"—essentially, a 'clean slate') in which U.S. 'favoritism' toward Israel was acknowledged as a liability in reaching out to the greater Muslim world, a thesis offered in John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt's 2007 book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Yet, after the uprisings in the spring of 2011, Obama was presented with his very own 'clean slate' in several Middle Eastern nations—offering him a chance, once again, to define the U.S. relationship with Israel in terms that would not risk alienating nascent Arab democracies. Obama's call for a complete withdrawal of all Israeli troops and settlers from the occupied territories in his May 19, 2011 address on the Middle East represented the most direct challenge to the Israeli government that any U.S. president (save, perhaps, Jimmy Carter) has ever put forth.

American Jewish support for Obama's re-election (62 percent among the general Jewish population, 86 percent among those who voted for him in 2008, according to the PRRI poll<sup>81</sup>) indicates that Obama is serving their interests of the with regard to U.S. policy toward Israel—meaning either that Obama is sufficiently pro-Israel for the American Jewish community, or that earning the label of 'pro-Israel' is no longer a prerequisite for Jewish support in the United States.

### **The Future of 'Pro-Israel' in the United States**

The emerging 'new' definition of 'Pro-Israel' in the United States does not represent a radical change from the traditional definition of the term. While the younger, post-Oslo generation of American Jews may have a more overtly humanistic conscience in relation to Israel, they are nowhere near abandoning Zionism, as Beinart would suggest. Moreover, the willingness to criticize Israel's policies applies almost exclusively to the issue of West Bank settlements. On other issues—border security, a potential nuclear threat from Iran, combatting terrorism—there is a greater consensus among younger American Jews that errs on the side of unconditional support for Israel. The principal difference, however, is that the current U.S. administration is exerting unprecedented pressure on the Israeli government in pursuit of a return to the 'even-handed' approach toward the Jewish state that existed briefly between 1948 and 1967. While such an approach may have meant political 'suicide' as recently as five years ago, it is now possible (and perhaps, within the next decade, will be *favorable*) to gain majority

support from the 'Pro-Israel' community through appealing to the moral supremacy of achieving a two-state solution, rather than the supremacy of ensuring the perpetual security of the Jewish state.

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### **Summary**

This project examines what I consider to be the changing nature of American Jewish attitudes toward Israel. It was inspired by Peter Beinart's 2010 essay "The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment," which suggests that traditional outlets of expressing support for Israel in the United States were alienating a younger, more liberal-minded generation of American Jewish students due to a lack of room for dissent over Israeli policies—particularly the perpetuation of settlements in the West Bank which preclude the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside an independent Jewish state of Israel. The debate generated from Beinart's article launched the discussion of what it means to be 'pro-Israel' in the United States into mainstream media, political, and academic commentary. The very nature of the debate implies there are multiple definitions of the label 'pro-Israel'—for both voters and policy makers—in the United States, and certainly within the American Jewish community. In order to assess the differences between the 'old' and 'new' conceptions of 'pro-Israel', I began with a history of American Zionism—that is, American support for an independent Jewish state or homeland in Palestine.

The essay begins with early conceptions of Zionism in the United States (particularly, the colonial period) which elevated America to the status of a 'New Israel' for both English colonists and, to a lesser degree, European Jewish immigrants, due to the unprecedented religious freedom offered. Political Zionism—the goal of establishing a sovereign Jewish state that would serve as a refuge from the anti-Semitism that plagued Europe—emerged out of Austrian Journalist Theodor Herzl's work *Der Judenstaat* ("The Jewish State"), published in 1896. Herzl's experience covering the Dreyfus Affair (in which the Jewish French military officer Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused of treason) led him to conclude that European Jewry could not escape the specter of anti-Semitism through assimilation and that, therefore, the only option was to establish a political entity in the historic Jewish homeland—Palestine. Thousands of Russian and Eastern European Jews began to immigrate en masse to Palestine after the violent outbreak of pogroms (violent riots against Jews) in 1881, and when Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress in 1897, the prospect of establishing a Jewish state had become a tenable idea among world Jewry. In America, however, the concept of Zionism was adopted but with a condition—the support for a Jewish homeland was not to conflict in any way with Jewish Americans' allegiance to their home nation, the United States. Because of this condition (established by the Federation of American Zionists in 1898) the American Jewish community did not fully embrace Zionism until after World War I, when the British gained control of Palestine and anti-Semitism in the U.S. was on the

rise. In the wake of the Holocaust (but not *solely* because of it), American Jews widely supported the right of their coreligionists in Europe to pursue the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine, regardless of the native population that lived on the land.

While the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 bolstered American Zionist sentiments, it was not until 1967 that Israel became the carrier of Jewish identity all over the world, and especially in the United States. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) emerged in the early 1950s, and gained political traction in the 1960s as presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson began to openly support Zionism and the self-determination within the context of developing a close relationship with an anti-Soviet power in the Middle East. After the 1967 War, Israel gained control of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. This victory imbued the American Jewish community with a revitalized support for Israel and Zionism, so much so that the prolific American Journalist Thomas Friedman concluded that Israel had “replaced Torah, synagogue, and prayer as the carrier of their Jewish identity.” As AIPAC grew and gained considerable influence, it became the norm that any threat to cut U.S. aid to Israel (be it military or humanitarian) was viewed as a threat to the security of Israel. Criticism of the Jewish state became more taboo, and Jewish activist groups emerging in the 1970s that sought to discuss the status of Palestinian refugees and settlements in the occupied

territories were quickly marginalized and labeled as ‘anti-Israel’ and often times ‘anti-Semitic.’

The 1967 War also animated the evangelical Christian community in the United States—who viewed Jewish control over the ancient Land of Israel as a sign of the second coming of Christ. In the late 1970s, pastor Jerry Falwell (founder of the Moral Majority and largely associated with the ‘rise’ of the Christian Right) developed a close relationship with Israeli Prime Minister and Likud Party member Menachem Begin. Falwell and the vast majority of his evangelical followers lent both ideological and monetary support to the newly-elected right-wing Likud government in Israel, which pursued an active policy of settlement building in the West Bank. The alliance between the American Christian Right and the Israeli Likud party would work toward forming a rift in the ‘pro-Israel’ community in the United States. Near the end of the 1980s, more Jewish activist individuals and groups were beginning to accept a two-state solution, criticize Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, and begin discussing the rights of Palestinians in the Land of Israel—the land that Christian Zionists believe needs to remain under Jewish control at all costs.

After Yasser Arafat recognized the Jewish state and signed the Oslo Accords with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the two-state solution became a mainstream idea within the American Jewish community. The Oslo accords were met with resistance from the traditional ‘pro-Israel’ community and especially evangelical Christians, and the late 1990s witnessed an

unprecedented polarization of the ‘pro-Israel’ community in the United States. Until 2008, there were few (if any) outlets for political activists *or* academics to criticize Israel without risk of being called ‘anti-Semitic’ and receiving public rebuke from AIPAC or the Anti-Defamation League. In 2008, Jeremy Ben-Ami founded J Street, a political lobbying group that brands itself ‘pro-Israel, pro-Peace’ and seeks to change the conversation about Israel in the United States. It breaks from traditional ‘pro-Israel’ organizations in the United States because it prioritizes the achievement of a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rather than ‘ensuring Israel’s security’ as AIPAC had traditionally promoted. The organization has had reasonable success and has successfully lobbied to earn the support of over 70 members of congress seeking a new way forward in U.S. involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel’s second invasion of Lebanon in 2006, its invasion of Gaza in 2008, and its raid on the Gaza ‘freedom flotilla’ in 2010 prompted further discussion about the meaning of ‘pro-Israel’ in the American Jewish community. Roughly ten days after the flotilla raid of 2010, Peter Beinart published his essay in the *New York Review of Books* that claimed the traditional Zionist political activists in the United States had alienated a great number of younger American Jews, who saw Israel’s settlement activities as an obstacle to peace and Palestinian self-determination.

To get a sense of the changing nature of ‘pro-Israel’ activism and discourse among Jewish college students, I’ve supplemented this essay with a

ten-minute video profiling two groups that are changing the conversation on Israel in the United States. It includes footage from Jeremy Ben-Ami's lecture at the Jewish Community Center in Syracuse from November 2011 and an interview with J Street U (J Street's college branch) organizer Mimi Micner, who spoke about J Street's appeal to college students and the younger generation of American Jews. Learning about Israel in the Middle East was founded in Fall 2011 by a group of students seeking to foster an open dialogue about Israel on campus, creating an outlet for Israel supporters and critics alike to discuss critical issues facing Israel, the Palestinians, and other Middle Eastern nations in a time of upheaval and radical change throughout the region.