

# JEWES, JEWISHNESS AND ISRAEL'S FOREIGN POLICY

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*This article seeks to clarify the nature and manifestations of the Jewish dimension in Israeli foreign policy. Sensitivity to the interests of diaspora communities is generally subordinated to raison d'état. External Jewish intervention in Israeli foreign policy is negligible, though greater involvement on the part of diaspora leaders can be detected. The impact of Jewish psycho-cultural factors on Israel's external relations is decreasing as a result of the secularization of Israeli society and the diminishing weight of Jewish cultural baggage.*

## Introduction

Israel is a Jewish state. It is different from other states in the people living there and in their cultural heritage. Furthermore, it claims to be the center of the Jewish world and to be keenly interested in the destiny of the Jewish communities in the diaspora. Several analysts assume that the weight of Jewish history and the close Israel-diaspora relationship have clearly influenced Israeli foreign policy to endow it with a significant Jewish dimension or quality.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the Jewish dimension and the manifestations of it which are to be expected in the foreign policy of Israel is first clarified. Then Israeli foreign policy is reviewed in order to ascertain the impact of the Jewish factor. This author offers a rather skeptical view of the real salience of the Jewish factor on policy-making in the area of external relations.

## The Jewish Dimension

The term "Jewish dimension," when applied to foreign policy, needs clarification. Jewish history, characterized by long periods without a sovereign entity, does not encourage the study of inter-state relations. Indeed, Susser and Don-Yehiya, in their survey of the issues which have been the focus of political inquiry in the Jewish political

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tradition, mention only in passing the problem of "the legitimate purposes and methods of war," while other areas of interest to the student of international relations are conspicuously missing.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Elazar and Cohen, in their comprehensive overview of Jewish political organization from biblical times to the present, pay little attention to the institutional arrangements that served the Jewish communities in their relations with the surrounding environment.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Jewish communities and organizations have occasionally participated in international interactions. Some of the more recent international activity was extensively documented.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, contemporary theory recognizes the role of non-state actors in world politics.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Jewish past practice can serve, to some extent, as a point of departure for pre-state Zionist and Israeli foreign policy. Overall, however, there is little that the Jewish political tradition has to say on how a Jewish state should behave in the international arena.

Two other meanings to "Jewish dimension" seem to be more relevant to our discussion, however. The first seems to point out the fact that most of the Jewish people live in the diaspora outside the State of Israel and the Jewish state is quite interested in the Jews abroad. This would lead to an Israeli sensitivity to the interests of Jewish communities in the diaspora. The relevant issue is, therefore, the analysis of Israel-diaspora relations in the area of Israel's external relations.

The second useful meaning refers to the Jewish prism of Israeli foreign policy. To what extent are foreign policies influenced by factors such as national character, cultural heritage, and historic experience? There is no universally accepted answer to this question. Systemic explanations of international relations tend to discount the importance of such domestic and internal variations within the separate nations.<sup>6</sup> An analysis predicated on national interests similarly discards the psycho-cultural factors as having much explanatory value. A more balanced approach, to which this author subscribes, recognizes the influence, albeit a limited one, of such factors in the formulation of short and middle range national goals and in the implementation of foreign policy.

This approach assumes that the historic and psycho-cultural baggage which the Jews brought with them to the Land of Israel created particular dispositions or a certain operational code in the Israeli political culture and within the Israeli political elite. In this area of inquiry, Jewish psycho-cultural influences on the conduct of foreign policy are assessed.

## **Israel vis-a-vis the Diaspora**

First, it should be made clear that the Israel-Jewish diaspora situation is not an entirely unique Jewish condition and its mere existence does not provide for a "Jewish dimension" per se. For example, the diasporas of China, India, Italy, Greece, or Ireland play roles similar to the Jewish one. One aspect of the relationship between the homeland and those living outside it is of political significance. Diasporas lend political support to the homeland. The realization that a state-centered framework of analysis does not capture all important international interactions, as well as the emergence of a complementary transnational perspective of world politics, has contributed to the interest in diaspora-homeland relations. The international dimension of such relations was recently recognized and has attracted the attention of an increasing number of scholars.<sup>7</sup> The contributions to this nascent field allow a comparative perspective to enrich the essentially national focus of this essay.

The relationship between Israel and the Jewish diaspora is in several ways different from other such two-sided relationships. Israel is a younger political entity than most of the diaspora's political structures. It also makes claims on human and material resources found in the diaspora. Furthermore, its claim to be the center of the Jewish people is not universally accepted by all Jews. Therefore, it is also in continuous need of legitimizing resources from the diaspora.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of the fact that there is a certain dependency upon the diaspora, Israel has become the stronger party in the relationship. After all, it is a politically sovereign state with all the trappings and instruments of power, while the Jewish diaspora communities and their organized bodies, whatever their base of organization, are essentially voluntary associations. This is one of the causes for the asymmetry. Furthermore, the mere fact of being a state and located in the Land of Israel provides Israel with an array of status symbols which it distributes to those favored in Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there is great deference, though gradually decreasing, on the part of the diaspora leadership to the Israeli political elite.

To what extent do the specific interests of the Jewish community organized in the State of Israel take precedence over the interests of the international Jewish community? The unequivocal answer of the Israeli political elite has been for over forty years that Israel's well-being is the paramount interest of the Jewish people and all other considerations are to be subordinated to it. Actually, this feature was a continuation of the Palestinocentric approach to foreign policy of the Yishuv leadership.<sup>10</sup>

David Ben-Gurion gave expression to this policy in an interview: "It was always my view that we have always to consider the interests of diaspora Jewry, any Jewish community that was concerned....If it was a case vital for Israel, and the interests of the Jews concerned were different, the vital interests of Israel come first — because Israel is vital for world Jewry."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in this interview Ben-Gurion emphasized that he was willing to consider diaspora interests as he defined them and not as perceived by the diaspora Jews themselves.<sup>12</sup>

In 1989, when President Chaim Herzog defended the government decision to send him to the funeral of Hirohito, Japan's deceased emperor, and to authorize his official trip to Germany — the first Israeli President on German soil — he explicitly relied on Ben-Gurion's approach: "...the most precious thing the Jewish people has is the State of Israel and the first national priority is to secure the state's future and its prosperity."<sup>13</sup>

The Zionist belief in the centrality of Israel, coupled with considerations of *raison d'état*, minimize Israel's sensitivity to the concerns of the Jewish communities in the diaspora. Such a finding is supported by the literature on other diasporas. Reasons of state normally take precedence over other claims, including the status of diaspora communities.<sup>14</sup>

In general, Israel tries to mobilize the diaspora as an agent to influence public opinion and home governments to support its external goals. The presence of Jews usually facilitates the activities of the Israeli government in that country. This Jewish connection in Israel's foreign policy is not documented for obvious reasons. It is, as one perceptive observer of Israel's conduct of its foreign affairs noted, "perhaps the most elusive aspect of Israel's external relations."<sup>15</sup> Yet, it is quite clear that Israel is the side that decides on the agenda and in many cases also on the tactics of how to use local Jews and communities.

Despite the claim that sensitivity for the delicate situation of several Jewish communities served as a restraint on Jerusalem's freedom of reaction, Israel, as a matter of fact, displayed little sensitivity to the interests of Jewish communities abroad.<sup>16</sup> Even the future of South African Jews, usually given as an example of Israel's consideration of diaspora Jewry, is actually illustrative of the opposite. Israel's spokesmen have often explained that its relations with South Africa, which were criticized in many quarters in Israel and abroad, were to be continued because such ties also served the interests of the South African Jewish community. A discussion of Israeli interests in its relationship with South Africa is beyond the scope of this work.<sup>17</sup> Yet, it is clear that the upgrading in the relations between the two countries in the post-1973 period was primarily connected to the African states' decisions to sever their diplomatic ties with Israel. Then, only the benefits of the connection with South Africa were taken into

consideration, since its possible price — a deterioration in relations with Black Africa — had been paid already. Conspicuously, Israeli policy toward South Africa before 1973, when its policy was more militant against the apartheid regime than other Western countries, displayed little consideration for the interests of the Jewish community in South Africa. Similarly, the March 1987 governmental decision to lower the profile of its relations with South Africa was a response primarily to American prodding and had little to do with the fate of South African Jewry. The fluctuations in the policy toward Pretoria indicate that the Jews in South Africa served occasionally as a convenient pretext for concealing more mundane concerns.

Israel has been obviously interested in Jewish immigration (aliyah) from all possible sources. Undoubtedly, state organs have been active in encouraging aliyah and Israeli agents have undergone great dangers to save Jews and bring them home to Israel. In such an endeavor Israel has indeed shown responsibility for the welfare of Jews living in the diaspora, but this was when they were expected to be on their way to Israel. For example, in the 1948-1956 period, the general orientation of Israeli foreign policy and particularly its policies toward Eastern Europe were definitely influenced by this concern.<sup>18</sup> Yet, at that time Israel preferred not to raise the issue of aliyah with the Soviets. The attitude toward the Jewish community in the Soviet Union seems not to be very different from that toward the community in South Africa. Indeed, since the late 1960s, charges were made by diaspora leaders that Israel did not do everything to help Soviet Jewry in order not to antagonize the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup> There is no doubt that the spearhead of the struggle for allowing emigration for Soviet Jews was not Israel, but the Jews in the diaspora. In contrast to the confrontational style pursued by the diaspora Jews, Israel advocated low-profile, discreet contacts with Moscow. After all, the Soviet Union is a superpower, which a small state like Israel has to be careful not to challenge too often.

When the great majority of Soviet Jews leaving the USSR showed a preference for destinations other than Zion, Israel lost much of its interest in their destiny. Israeli officials made great efforts to decrease American philanthropic support for resettling Jews in the U.S. The demand was also raised that the U.S. should refuse to grant Soviet Jewish emigres refugee status in that country in order to limit their choice of destination. Jewish organizations in the diaspora did not see eye-to-eye with the Israelis on this issue. The campaign to allow Jewish cultural activity in the Soviet Union also was not led by Israel. Cultural autonomy for Soviet Jewry was palatable to Jerusalem probably only as a vehicle for promoting Zionist educational programs that could lead to aliyah.

Similarly, Israel was accused of turning a blind eye to the mistreatment of Jews in Argentina in order not to jeopardize military sales

to that country.<sup>20</sup> Israel occasionally engaged in quiet diplomatic efforts in favor of "*desaparecidos*," but refused to add its voice to the international campaign against Argentinian transgressions of human rights.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Israeli relations with the juntas in Argentina and Chile or weapon sales to Iran were expressions of perceived Israeli interests rather than consideration of Jewish interests, even if so presented. Israel usually follows its own interests even when they conflict with the positions of a Jewish community in the diaspora.

One little known example of a conflict of interest between Israel and a diaspora community occurred when the Jews of the United States were enlisted by the Greek community there to support the U.S. weapons embargo on Turkey following its 1974 invasion of Cyprus. The Greek lobby wanted to capitalize on its past help to the Jewish lobby on Capitol Hill. At the time, Israel discreetly cooperated with the Turks (against its own lobby) to influence the Congress to end the embargo. Turkey is an important non-Arab Muslim state in the Middle East that Israel has always courted, while Greece has been cool toward Israel, to say the least. For the same reason, Israel has tried to discourage the Jews in the U.S. from supporting the Armenian campaign for remembering the genocide against the Armenians perpetrated by the Turks at the beginning of the century. Allowing Jonathan Pollard, a Jew, to spy for Israel in the U.S. also does not support the thesis of great sensitivity to Jewish diaspora interests.

There are only a few examples in which Israeli deeds can be related to responsiveness to diaspora sensitivities. It seems that the Jews of South Africa were successful in keeping El Al flying to Johannesburg in the 1960s. Then Israel's behavior was even more antagonist toward South Africa than that of other Western countries.<sup>22</sup> In the late 1980s, Israel refrained from sending a new ambassador to Austria after Kurt Waldheim, with a shady World War II record, was elected as Austria's President. Then, Edgar Bronfman and the World Jewish Congress (WJC), of which he was the President, led the struggle against Waldheim, and Israel reluctantly went along. Those examples clearly indicate the type of cases where diaspora voices had an impact on Israel's behavior. The issues were marginal and Israeli interests were hardly hurt.

The institutional expression of this situation is the fate of the little-known Diaspora Department in the Foreign Affairs Ministry. That department, which was established in the early 1980s, had little impact on policy formulation and was closed in 1986. It was reopened, however, in 1989 after a string of diaspora interventions into Israeli affairs. This indeed may be a signal of greater sensitivity to what the diaspora has to say. Another organizational device to keep contact with the Jewish overseas leadership is the Advisor on Diaspora



Affairs in the Prime Minister's office. This position has been in existence since the 1950s but remains a rather low-prestige appointment.

This does not mean that Israel does not interfere on behalf of Jewish communities throughout the world. Apart from being directly and actively involved in aliyah, Israel occasionally chooses to display its sense of responsibility for all Jews. This is mainly in order to buttress its role as the world Jewish center. In 1959, Israel sent notes to a dozen countries where Jewish sites were daubed with swastikas.<sup>23</sup> A more recent example is the establishment of a government-sponsored committee to monitor and combat anti-Semitism in the world. Its report was even discussed at a cabinet meeting and Prime Minister Shamir expressed his concern at the increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the world. Significantly, the cabinet debate ended with the adoption of a declaration regarding Israel's centrality in the struggle against anti-Semitism and in encouraging immigration.<sup>24</sup>

As noted, Israel participated in the campaign for Soviet Jewry. It organized the rescue of Ethiopian Jews and their resettlement in Israel in the 1980s. Although the destination of Ethiopian Jews was Israel only, there are claims that Israeli efforts even in this area were speeded by the intervention of North American Jewry. The conflicting perspectives of Israel and some of the diaspora leaders on how to treat the Soviet Jewry problem resurfaced when the Ethiopian Jews were on the agenda. Jerusalem again preferred a low-key, clandestine approach (until internal Israeli politics brought about the disclosure of Operation Moses to rescue Ethiopian Jews via Sudan).

Raison d'état, reinforced by the Zionist ideology of the centrality of Israel, were mentioned previously as reasons for the little consideration given to diaspora concerns. In addition, the diaspora interest has no constituency in Israel. Foreign policy decision-making in Israel is highly centralized. Until the recent past no diaspora leaders have been consulted in the decision-making process. Sometimes they were briefed — even at the highest Israeli levels — yet they were merely informed. Since the late 1970s greater diaspora input can be found in certain Israeli internal policy areas (the notable examples are Project Renewal and the "who is a Jew" question). Nevertheless, Israeli unwillingness to lend any legitimacy to diaspora interference in its foreign policy has continued. Meir Shitrit, the Treasurer of the Jewish Agency, is expected because of his institutional affiliation to be sensitive to diaspora sentiments. Yet, he said bluntly: "No Jew living outside of Israel has the right to say anything on the political positions of Israel....Money does not give the privilege of criticism...."<sup>25</sup> In the Israeli political culture, the debates on governmental policy, particularly in the areas of national security, are expected to be conducted in Israel only, with the involvement of neither Gentiles, nor Jews abroad.

Nevertheless, as noted, some changes have taken place in the recent past. For reasons elaborated below, greater willingness to consult with diaspora leadership can be detected. The Israeli leadership is definitely more willing to listen to the points of view expressed by various Jewish organizations and understand that it has become more difficult to subordinate them to Israeli government thinking, as well as to get their acquiescence to policies which they oppose.

In spite of the *realpolitik* perspective of world politics that is dominant in the Israeli government, which emphasizes self-reliance, Israelis have regarded world Jewry as their only dependable ally. Indeed, in the past Israel could count on Jewish communities, particularly in democratic countries, to attempt to influence their host governments to adopt pro-Israeli policies. Yet, since the late 1970s, particularly after the Likud became a major political power, more Jews have felt uncomfortable with Israeli policies and have therefore been less willing to unequivocally support Israeli foreign policy goals.<sup>26</sup> Israel has gradually become more isolated in the international community.<sup>27</sup> This makes Jewish support for Israel more problematic, since Jews prefer not to deviate too much from the consensus in their own countries on Middle Eastern problems.

Growing Israeli difficulties in the international arena and subsequent greater Jewish discomfort with Israeli positions seems to have led to greater sensitivity in Israel to diaspora views. The Jewish community in the U.S., in particular, is seen as a key player in the prevention of further erosion in Israeli status in Washington. Securing American Jewry's support has always been part of Israel's American policy, rather than a response to Jewish sensitivities abroad. In 1989, a solidarity conference of Jewish communal leaders from all over the world was convened in Jerusalem to enhance Israel's position versus the newly-elected American administration of President Bush. In spite of the greater need for American Jewish support, Israelis do not dream of giving diaspora Jews a veto or much say in their foreign policy decisions.

Some Jewish organizations, like other transnational actors, are actually engaged in independent international interactions. One such example is the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and its influence over Israeli policy toward Austria, as noted earlier. Israel has benefited from the perception that through its control of American Jewry, it has considerable influence over the formulation of American foreign policy. Yet, some countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, developed relations directly with diaspora organizations like the WJC and the "Joint" (Joint Distribution Committee). This increases the potential for friction between Israeli agents and representatives of diaspora organizations. For example, Israeli efforts to coordinate the Jewish educational presence in Eastern Europe (a presence of political significance) through the



World Zionist Organization confront the independent activities of several diaspora actors. Yet, this competition also enhances the need for greater coordination with such Jewish transnational actors. The WJC actually called for decentralization in the area of Jewish relations with Moscow, which means a greater role for other organizations at the expense of Israel.<sup>28</sup>

The efforts of Israeli political leaders, beginning in the 1980s, to raise money for their parties in the diaspora, and their attempts to mobilize the support of American Jews for their positions in the ongoing Israeli debate on the peace process offered another opening for a somewhat greater role for diaspora Jews in foreign policy debates. The attempts to bring American Jews into Israeli quarrels initially ran up against the reluctance of most diaspora Jewish leaders to get involved in partisan politics in Israel, but, in the end, the temptation was too great to be overcome. In addition, American political culture obviously permits a donor to make some demands upon the body that benefits from his generosity. Asked to provide funds for partisan purposes, diaspora Jews became more demanding. Furthermore, as Israel has become the focus of the Jewish identity of many American Jews, their interest in Israel and how it appears to the world has grown. This has led to diaspora demands for greater Israeli acceptance of outside Jewish interference even in the area of foreign policy. Such demands were voiced in the name of the Israel-diaspora partnership.<sup>29</sup>

The present Israeli leadership is also less revered than the founding fathers such as Ben-Gurion and Menachem Begin. First-hand contact with the present generation of Israeli leaders has stripped the latter of much of the glamour of their predecessors. Therefore, the previous pattern of behavior of diaspora Jews, which emphasized non-interference, has been somewhat eroded. This is true particularly in gray areas. One such example is the American Presidents' Conference's call for unity in Israel behind the government peace initiative after Labor threatened to leave the national unity government in July 1989. Unity is, of course, an important motif in Jewish psycho-history. This obviously constituted a gentle plea to Labor to consider again its disposition to abandon the government led by Yitzhak Shamir of the Likud, who made similar pleas. A rather unusual example of behavior by a diaspora organization was the breakaway public stand taken in the 1980s by the American Jewish Congress on the Arab-Israeli peace process.<sup>30</sup> Its open criticism of Israeli policies was not characteristic of Israel-diaspora relations on national security affairs. Another barrier against diaspora intervention was the lack of legitimacy for such outside participation in the Israeli political culture, as noted earlier.

## The Psycho-Cultural Dimension

The limited impact of psycho-cultural factors on foreign policy in general was noted already. The lack of experience in being a state actor upon which contemporary Jews can draw was also mentioned. Yet, an impact of Jewishness can be detected in several areas. First, setting national goals is clearly influenced by a nation's historic heritage. The claims for Greater Israel or the settlement effort in the Land of Israel stem not only from strategic considerations, but from primordial links to an historic homeland. Such feelings preceded the establishment of the State of Israel and had little connection to *raison d'état*. Education and the socialization process create dispositions which are translatable into operational foreign policy objectives. Indeed, there seems to be a direct relation between reluctance to part with territories and attachment to Jewish tradition. The belief system of a society, which is the result of a dynamic relationship between the interpretations of the past and the present, undoubtedly has some impact on foreign policy.<sup>31</sup>

There is also a Jewish prism through which to read the events happening in the international arena. The attitudinal prism is the psychological dispositions through which images are filtered.<sup>32</sup> Israel's foreign policy has always displayed a healthy measure of skepticism about the nature of international relations. Israel has from the outset seen the systemic threat in world politics and assumed that over the long run no state actor can ever be certain of its security.

This basic sense of insecurity has been amplified by Israel's Jewishness, which preserved typical minority attitudes.<sup>33</sup> Many in Israel, including many in its political elite, even hold a Manichian *Weltanschauung*, in which the Jews alone face the hostile and/or untrustworthy Gentiles. David Ben-Gurion was one of them.<sup>34</sup> Yitzhak Rabin has displayed a similar perspective. His response to criticism from abroad about his order to the IDF to use batons against violent Palestinian demonstrators was: "Beating Jews is unimportant; but when a Jew is beating — this is news."<sup>35</sup> Such a dichotomic perspective on the world is obviously not unique to the Jews. Russian historic experience with invasions from the West, reinforced by Marxist ideology that distinguishes between the war-monger capitalists and the righteous socialists only — Stalin's two camps thesis — strengthened realistic dispositions in Moscow, just as Jewish experience reinforced a *realpolitik* outlook.

The Jewish historic experience of our century and of previous epochs also reinforced isolation in world politics as the "evoked set" of individual and collective memories.<sup>36</sup> The biblical motif of the prophet Balaam that Israel "is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Numbers 23:9) is well rooted in the

political culture of contemporary Israel. Isolation is immediately recognized and there is little chance for misperception on such a subject.<sup>37</sup> For example, in 1974, Prime Minister Rabin said: "We should have no illusions and we should know that we are isolated in the world. Out of 137 member states of the UN less than 10 support us. Israel shall dwell alone and only our military might guarantees our existence."<sup>38</sup>

A corollary feature of Israel's foreign policy which can be attributed to that sense of isolation is the exaggerated reaction to any sign of friendship or estrangement in other countries. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Israelis took much pride in the signs of friendship bestowed on them by France and De Gaulle. When France changed its Middle Eastern policy to better suit its perceived interests, Israelis felt betrayed. Similarly, it seems that Israelis are obsessed with the need to be recognized by the U.S.A. as a "strategic asset." Abba Eban observed that "a hypochondriac fear of an imminent collapse in American-Israeli relations follows Israelis across all the years."<sup>39</sup>

The basic insecurity and sense of isolation found in the Israeli political elite has been perceived by some in leftist quarters as indeed a Jewish heritage that Israelis have to shed. Ezer Weizman, for example, regards such fears as part of a "ghetto mentality," which he characterized as "a mentality that perceives everyone on the outside as an enemy."<sup>40</sup> Weizman deplores the Jewish prism that, in his opinion, hinders the peace process. Furthermore, "peace is in order to get out of the ghetto we are creating here."<sup>41</sup> According to Weizman, a peace policy could also allow the achievement of the goal of "normalization" which many early Zionists prescribed as the principal goal of the Zionist revolution. Similarly, Abba Eban relates Israel's reluctance to deal with the PLO to the Jewish prism: "Our Jewish experience leads us to be more aware of dangers than of opportunities. This tendency has to be transcended if we are to emerge into a future different from the recent past."<sup>42</sup> Eban, like Weizman, regards the Jewish heritage as responsible in some measure for the political impasse in the Middle East. Of course, others could regard that tendency in Israeli politics, detested by Weizman and Eban, as pure caution.

The Jewish-Zionist prism has also been significant for the Israeli political elite's perception of the use of force.<sup>43</sup> Often, Israel has had to use force and in most cases it has been used rationally with an instrumental approach in mind. Yet, an expressivist undercurrent can occasionally be detected. The use of violence, like any other human activity, can be instrumental, in other words, designed to promote a certain objective, and the action is judged in proportion to its success in achieving that objective. In contrast to such an instrumental approach, there is also a tendency to expressivity in deeds, in which the cause of the activity and not necessarily the objective is what is important. In this

case an act of retaliation is not so much intended to influence the enemy as to give vent to the need to pay him back or to express frustration with the situation.<sup>44</sup>

Arye Naor, who served as cabinet secretary for an extended period during the Begin governments, testified that for his mentor the idea of military action and retaliation reflected a deep inner need.<sup>45</sup> In Begin's opinion, the resurrection of a Jewish state marked the end of the long diaspora history of Jewish helplessness. This was, of course, traditional Zionist ideology. On June 5, 1982, before the start of the war in Lebanon, Begin said to his ministers: "The blackguards and the world must know that the Jewish people has the same right of self-defense as any other people."<sup>46</sup> To a great extent Begin felt that he had no choice but to react with force: "What could we do?" he asked the Knesset in a debate over the Lebanon War. "Can we allow the shedding of Jewish blood to go unavenged? Can we allow an ambassador of the State of Israel, representing Israel's glory, honor, and sovereignty, to be murdered?"<sup>47</sup> The military response to the attempt to murder the Israeli ambassador in London, Shlomo Argov, was obligatory because of calculations of the honor and prestige of the State of Israel. Begin made no mention at all of the usefulness of a military response.

Similarly, after the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor by the Israeli air force in June 1981, Begin gave instructions that an official communique be issued about the attack "because we do not act like thieves in the night."<sup>48</sup> It might have been better to have held back the official announcement, but the motif of dignified behavior took precedence over other calculations. Begin's great weakness for uniforms was also well-known.<sup>49</sup> The Israeli army, perhaps more than other things, symbolized for Begin the great change that occurred in Jewish history with the rise of Zionism.

Moreover, Begin did not limit himself to reactive behavior. Begin, in Naor's words, did not like the psychology of the Maginot Line. Initiative was very important to him, and Jews, too, must not only defend themselves, but must seek out their enemies.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Begin's governments displayed greater willingness to use military force and with a higher profile than was shown by Yitzhak Rabin in his period as prime minister (1974-77). Begin and Rafael Eitan, his Chief of Staff, adopted an activist policy against terrorists. Begin's governments (1977-83) considerably increased the Israeli commitment and its military activity in Lebanon.<sup>51</sup> The Jewish prism, which was an important factor in Begin's use of violence, received clear operational expression.

A Zionist national prism, such as that described above in relation to war, is to be found particularly among extreme right-wing politicians. Yuval Neeman sees Israel's wars as something self-evident, a direct consequence of Zionism being a nationalist movement: "Where is there one nationalist movement that did not need an armed struggle?

Or a nation-state in Europe that was not forced to fight for its independence?"<sup>52</sup> The Zionist dimension was emphasized more strongly in the words of MK Geula Cohen. She attacked the critics of the Lebanon War, and, in her opinion, "among a certain section of the critics...there is also a diaspora tone. They are only prepared for pogroms. When they are on the receiving end of massacres, then they are prepared to retaliate. They love to be massacred. They are not prepared to go out and prevent massacres."<sup>53</sup> Those people who had reservations about the targets of the use of force during the Lebanon war had not yet freed themselves, in Cohen's words, from the *galut* (diaspora) mentality, characterized by lack of boldness and martial initiative. This was a most serious offense — for an Israeli.

In the continuation of that debate in the Knesset, Hanan Porat (now of the NRP, at that time still a Tehiya MK) expressed himself in a similar way: "The days of pogroms, persecutions, forced baptism and blood-libels are gone forever. Now, since our return home to build the House of Israel, a life without shame and degradation, a life of honor, has returned to us."<sup>54</sup> War does not guarantee only physical survival — life. It serves to restore Jewish honor. Hanan Porat, like Begin, emphasized the importance of a military response in an honorable existence. Beyond this, Porat ascribed a degree of holiness to military means. He quoted in the Knesset his mentor, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook: "All our arms, our weapons of defense and our weapons of security have value, have sanctity, are an expression of an honorable life in Israel."<sup>55</sup> Later in his speech, Porat quoted from the 144th Psalm, and blessed the God of Israel, "who teaches my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." He praised the Creator of the world for endowing him with the ability to honorably withstand the challenge of war.

This passage, that intertwines traditional Jewish motifs with warfare, is, however, not typical of the Israeli political culture. Jewish tradition and culture are not the bedrock of the analytical framework for national security debates. Contemporary Israeli leaders do not usually display a good knowledge of Talmudic and medieval rabbinic literature. A poignant example is the debate over the morality and wisdom of the Lebanon War. It was not couched in traditional Jewish terms of "mandatory war" (*milhemet mitzvah*) and "optional war" (*milhemet reshut*), although such traditional terminology suited rather well the issues at stake. Instead, the Israeli idiosyncratic term "no-choice war" was at the center of the heated debate.<sup>56</sup>

The Bible, in contrast, is rather well-known among Israelis and its verses are used more often by Israeli politicians. As a matter of fact, the competing schools of thought regarding the character of the international system and Israel's place in it each finds confirmation in the Jewish cultural heritage and Jewish historic experience.<sup>57</sup> Even the dovish elements occasionally explain their opposition to the continued



Israeli presence in the territories by referring to the moral code rooted in the sayings of the prophets. This shows, of course, that the direction of the influence of some of the psycho-cultural factors is far from being clear or conclusive.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the large-scale Israeli training and development programs to the countries of the Third World were perceived as embodying the Jewish mission of being “a light unto the nations” (*or lagoyim*). This psycho-cultural factor complemented the Israeli interest in leapfrogging over the immediate hostile circle of neighboring countries and in expanding the international legitimacy for its challenged existence. Yet, *or lagoyim* was a strong motif in the Israeli self-perception of its foreign policy toward Afro-Asian countries.<sup>58</sup> However, this concept has lost its currency in contemporary Israel.<sup>59</sup> This may be one example of the weakening of the Jewish component in the Israeli political culture, as well as of the dimming of the Jewish prism in foreign policy. The more secular Israeli society becomes, the further away it gets from traditional Judaism and its cultural manifestations. Though it may still influence patterns of behavior typical of Jews, the overt traditional Jewish cultural-intellectual infrastructure is clearly eroding.

The attitude of Israel toward Germany is typical of the domination of Jewish state interests over psycho-cultural factors. The Holocaust was perceived by Israel to be an unparalleled human and national tragedy. Aversion to any contacts of any nature with Germans or German culture was widespread among many Jews in Israel and abroad. The burden of recent collective memories seemed to be a formidable barrier against any official contacts with Germany. Yet, Ben-Gurion did not hesitate to have links with West Germany to buttress Israel's economy and international status. The needs of the Jewish community in Israel were extremely pressing and even Germany was an acceptable address for getting help. This policy evoked a fierce debate within the elite as well as among the public at large. In the final analysis, psycho-cultural factors were secondary to the material necessities of the Jews in Israel. The policy of establishing relations with West Germany was pursued unflinchingly, even though it met with immense internal opposition. Even Begin, one of the most vocal opponents, when Prime Minister, reconciled himself to the idea that Israel, as a state, had to pursue friendly relations with West Germany — an important international actor.

The impact of the burden of the experiences of World War II seemed to have been more powerful in the case of the Israeli reluctance to have diplomatic relations with Franco's Spain. Spain was obviously a less important international actor than West Germany and had less to offer Israel. Recent research shows, however, that the source of the anti-Franco feelings among many of those involved in the decision-



making on this issue preceded the Holocaust. Pro-Republican sentiments from the time of the Spanish Civil War strongly influenced the Israeli decision to reject Spanish feelers in the 1950s for diplomatic normalcy between the two countries. Significantly, Jewish memories of the 1492 expulsion from Spain or the horrors of the Inquisition were conspicuously missing from the perceptual map of the decision-makers.<sup>60</sup> By 1956, the Israeli quest for international recognition finally led it to ask Spain for normal bilateral diplomatic relations. (Then Spain, pursuing the Arab world, was uninterested. Relations between the two states were not established until 1986 when Spain entered the European Community.) In sum, Jewish psycho-cultural factors, when present, played a secondary role to perceived Israeli state interests.

## Conclusion

The Jewish dimension in Israel's foreign policy exists, but is understood in Israeli terms. Sensitivity to diaspora interests is generally admitted by those participating in the policy formulation process. The operational outcome of such sensitivity is questionable, however. Declarations about considering the well-being of diaspora communities are on many occasions mere lip service to the idea of Jewish solidarity rather than reflective of a concrete policy. The emergence of a more assertive diaspora, a development beyond the scope of this essay, reintroduces features not new in Jewish history. Tensions between the Jewish community in the Land of Israel and diaspora communities were present in the past. The dynamic relations between Israel and the diaspora under certain internal and external conditions increases to a limited extent the sensitivity of the policy-making processes to the input of Jewish leaders living abroad. This development could also bring about greater interference by diaspora Jews in matters of Israeli foreign policy, an area where such impact has been until now rather negligible.

In the area of psycho-cultural factors, this author believes that a decrease in the impact of Jewishness on Israeli foreign policy will probably occur. Unfortunately, a new generation of leaders is emerging in Israel with less knowledge of the Jewish tradition than their predecessors. Similarly, they seem to lack the warmth and the intense feelings of solidarity with the Jews living outside the homeland which were characteristic of most of their predecessors. The cultural baggage of most Israeli-born politicians, unless exposed to traditional education, is usually poorer in Jewish content than those Israelis who were born abroad. The younger members of the Israeli political elite, very similar to the typical product of the Israeli educational system, lack knowledge of and appreciation for the treasures of Jewish civilization. With the exception of a particular interpretation of the

Holocaust, other Jewish past experiences and cultural contents are given little importance. The behavioral aspect of the Jewish dimension, in contrast to the intellectual infrastructure, still affects policy-making to a greater extent, but it will gradually mellow without the reinforcement of traditional cultural content. Therefore, although today the Israeli perspective on politics is generally little rooted in a Jewish prism, the little influence this factor has on foreign policy will further diminish in the future.

## Notes

1. See, inter alia, the authoritative study of Israel's foreign policy by Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 229-44; Shmuel Sandler, "Is There a Jewish Foreign Policy?" *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 29 (December 1987): 115-121; Shlomo Avineri, "Ideology and Israel's Foreign Policy," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 37 (1986): 10-13; Moshe Zak, "The Jewish Consideration in Israel's Foreign Policy," *Gesher* 30 (Spring 1984); Aaron Klieman, *Israel and the World after 40 Years* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1990), pp. 52-54.
2. Bernard Susser and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Prolegomena to Jewish Political Theory," in Daniel J. Elazar, ed., *Kinship and Consent* (Ramat Gan: Turtledove Publishing, 1981), pp. 96-98.
3. Daniel J. Elazar and Stuart A. Cohen, *The Jewish Polity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).
4. See Mala Tabory and Charles S. Liebman, *Jewish International Activity: An Annotated Bibliography* (Ramat Gan: Argov Center, Bar-Ilan University, 1985). Most of the literature, however, lacks the international relations theoretical perspective.
5. See Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).
6. J. David Singer, "Levels of Analysis: The International System and the Nation-State," in Klaus Knorr and Sidney Verba, eds., *The International System: Theoretical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 99-100.
7. See the contributions in Gabriel Sheffer, ed., *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).
8. For an analysis of the Israel-diaspora relationship, see Charles S. Liebman, *Pressure Without Sanctions: The Influence of World Jewry on Israeli Policy* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977); Charles S. Liebman, "Moral and Symbolic Elements in the

- Politics of Israel-Diaspora Relations," in *Kinship and Consent*, pp. 345-354. For an historic analysis of center-diaspora relations, see Elazar and Cohen, *The Jewish Polity*, chs. 6-9.
9. For an elaboration of this point, see Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), ch. 4.
10. See Gabriel Sheffer, *Jerusalem Quarterly* 46 (Spring 1988): 107.
11. Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*, p. 232.
12. *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.
13. Chaim Herzog, "Why Japan," *Davar* (February 10, 1989).
14. See Milton Esman, "Diasporas and International Relations," in Sheffer, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, p. 348.
15. Aaron Klieman, *Israel and the World after 40 Years*, p. 171.
16. Avineri, "Ideology and Israel's Foreign Policy," pp. 10-13.
17. For a critical review, see Naomi Chazan, *Israeli Perspectives on the Israel-South Africa Relationship*, Research Report Nos. 9 & 10 (Institute of Jewish Affairs, December 1987).
18. See Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation 1948-56* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
19. Liebman, *Pressure Without Sanctions*, pp. 165-166.
20. Esman, "Diasporas and International Relations," p. 348. For the opposite argument that Israel continued its relations with the Argentinian junta in order to save Jews, see Avineri, "Ideology and Israel's Foreign Policy," p. 12. It must be noted that the Argentinian government's campaign was not directed against Jews as Jews.
21. Zak, "The Jewish Consideration....," p. 41-42.
22. Liebman, *Pressure Without Sanctions*, p. 164.
23. See Brecher, *Foreign Policy System of Israel*, p. 237-238.
24. See *Haaretz* (August 28, 1989). The emphasis is mine.
25. *Israel Shelanu* (March 3, 1989).
26. See Norman Podhoretz, "Israel: A Lamentation From The Future," *Commentary* 87 (March 1989): 15-21.
27. For this development, see Efraim Inbar, *Outcast Countries in the World Community*, Monograph Series in World Affairs (Denver: Denver University Press, 1985).
28. See Avi Becker, "Glasnost, Perestroika and the Jews," *Gesher* 119 (Spring 1989): 17.
29. See, inter alia, Stuart E. Eizenstat, "Toward a New Maturity: The Present Imperative," *Congress Monthly* 55 (May/June 1988): 6-8.
30. See Henry Siegman, "American Jews and the Quest for Peace," *Congress Monthly* 55 (May/June 1988): 3.
31. For a somewhat overstated case study of Israel, see Ofira Seliktar,

- New Zionism and the Foreign Policy System of Israel* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).
32. Brecher, *Foreign Policy System of Israel*, pp. 11-12.
  33. Jay Y. Gonen, *A Psycho-History of Zionism* (New York: Meridian, 1975) ch. 2.
  34. Brecher, *Foreign Policy System of Israel*, p. 276.
  35. *Maariv* (March 2, 1988).
  36. For the evoked set, see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 213-216.
  37. See Efraim Inbar, "Problems of Pariah States. The National Security Policies of the Rabin Government, 1974-77," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1981, ch. 3; Klieman, *Israel and the World after 40 Years*, p. 53.
  38. *Maariv* (September 25, 1974). For similar statements acknowledging isolation, see Robert Slater, *Rabin of Israel* (London: Robson Books, 1977), p. 204; Doron Rosenblum, "The 1000 Days of Rabin," *Haaretz Magazine* (May 6, 1977).
  39. Abba Eban, *An Autobiography* (London: Futura Publications, 1979), p. 598.
  40. "Interview with Ezer Weizman," *Spectrum* 6 (June 1988): 10. This is a Labor monthly published in English.
  41. *Ibid.*
  42. Abba Eban, "The 'Partner' Fantasy," *Jerusalem Post* (July 14, 1989).
  43. For a more extensive treatment of this subject, see Efraim Inbar, "Attitudes toward War in the Israeli Political Elite," *Middle East Journal* 44 (Summer 1990): 431-445.
  44. Yehoshafat Harkabi emphasized that "in the expressivist approach a cause pushes from behind; in the instrumental approach a reason pulls one forward to obtain some goal." See his *Israel's Fateful Decisions* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), p. 72.
  45. Arye Naor, *Cabinet at War* (Tel Aviv: Lahav, 1986), p. 47 (Hebrew).
  46. *Ibid.*, p. 48. On the psychological roots of Zionist activism, see Gonen, *A Psycho-History of Zionism*.
  47. *Parliamentary Minutes* (PM), 94, p. 2746 (June 8, 1982).
  48. Shlomo Nakdimon, *Tammuz in Flames* (Tel Aviv: Edanim, 1986), p. 196 (Hebrew).
  49. See Ezer Weizman, *The Battle for Peace* (Jerusalem: Edanim, 1981), p. 121.
  50. Naor, *Cabinet at War*, p. 45.
  51. See Efraim Inbar, "Israeli Strategic Thinking After 1973," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 6 (March 1983). See also Naor, *Cabinet at War*, pp. 7, 81, 93; Rafael Eitan, *A Soldier's Story* (Tel Aviv: Maariv Library, 1985), p. 192.

52. Yuval Neeman, *A Sober Policy* (Tel Aviv: Revivim, 1984), p. 172.
53. *PM*, 94, p. 2915 (June 28, 1982).
54. *Ibid.*, p. 2961, (June 29, 1982).
55. *Ibid.*
56. See Efraim Inbar, "War and Jewish Tradition," *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 9 (June 1987). For the debate over the Lebanon War, see Efraim Inbar, "The 'No-Choice War' Debate in Israel," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 12 (March 1989).
57. For the three alternative world views — "Idealist-Internationalist," "Pessimist-Nationalist," and "Realist-Internationalist" — see Klieman, *Israel and the World after 40 Years*, pp. 43-51.
58. See Brecher, *Foreign Policy System of Israel*, pp. 242-244.
59. Charles Liebman, "The Idea of 'Or Lagoyim' in the Israeli Reality," *Gesher* 81 (December 1974): 88-93.
60. Raanan Rein, "Why was Israel Alienated from Franco's Spain?" *Gesher* 181 (Spring 1989): 56-61.