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THE JEWISH AGENCY: REORGANIZING FOR TOMORROW

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Expanding Representation in the Governing Bodies / The Board of Governors as Manager / BOG Committees as the Power Center / An Executive, Not an Executive Committee / When Israeli Party Politics and Diaspora Institutional Politics Meet / Realizing the Full Potential of Power-Sharing

Expanding Representation in the Governing Bodies

The Jewish Agency is the linchpin of the major fundraising and Zionist organizational bodies in the Jewish world representing both Israel and the Diaspora. In examining how well the Agency is functioning, its governing bodies must be evaluated as to how they operate within both the formal and informal power centers in the structure. The thesis within which I approach this subject is that the *process* of Israel-Diaspora relations must be one of power-sharing, not power struggle, if it is to function effectively, efficiently, and constructively on behalf of Israel and the Jewish people.

The composition of the governing bodies of the Jewish Agency is based upon the 1970 Agreement for the Reconstitution of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which mandated that 50 percent representation emanates from the World Zionist Organization, and 50 percent from the communities or fundraising entities, broken down into 30 percent from the United Israel Appeal, Inc. (U.S.A.) and 20 percent

from Keren Hayesod. The United Israel Appeal represents the Jewish Federation system in the United States. Keren Hayesod represents the campaign organizations throughout the rest of the world.

The Jewish Agency Assembly is supreme and the largest of three governing bodies. It meets annually, and is responsible for determining basic policies and goals. It elects the Board of Governors, and reviews and acts upon annual budgets. Although the Assembly has a right to change the budget, in practice, what is involved is basically the *de facto* approval of a budget that has already been in operation six months by the time the Assembly meets. However, in order to increase its authority, a few years ago the Assembly amended the Reconstitution Agreement so that it may determine Jewish Agency priorities and apply those to the ensuing budget.

Acting as a legislative body, the Assembly debates and adopts binding resolutions in order to establish new directions and policies. Such resolu-

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tions have resulted, for example, in the funding of programs of the major religious streams, and the funding of innovative and creative services in Israel sponsored by various Israeli institutions, activities which are today part and parcel of the Jewish Agency budget. As a result, there is now a foundation-like process operating within the Jewish Agency called "Allocations and Program Grants." On the basis of total dollars allocated annually, the Jewish Agency has become one of the largest foundations operating in Israel; considering the number of annual non-capital grants, it appears to be the largest or most active grantor in Israel.

In June 1994, the Assembly amended the Reconstitution Agreement to enlarge itself from 398 members to 518, with the Board of Governors changing from 75 members to 121. The actual number of Board members in the Reconstitution Agreement is 120 plus the founding Chairman of the Board, Max Fisher, who is a member for life of both the Board and the Executive. In this context, Fisher has said he would never break a tie vote. The WZO received 23 additional Board members, the UIA 14, and Keren Hayesod 9. The Executive has not changed in size, remaining at 19 members.

As part of the decision to increase WZO representation on the Board of Governors, the UIA and Keren Hayesod prevailed upon the WZO to accept six new categories of Israeli leaders: industrialists and economists, development town mayors, settlement leaders, academicians, immigrant associations and leaders of voluntary organizations, and miscellaneous leaders. Observers will now be watching to see if the selection of these individuals by the WZO will be made by party key, or if it will be outside of party considerations. It is hoped that there will, in reality, be a true broadening of representation from Israel, in accordance with the objective of the Diaspora Leaders.

With regard to the increase in UIA and Keren Hayesod representation, the quid pro quo was a more general statement of the need to bring to the Board the current leadership of large Federations and other outstanding Jews prepared to be involved in the work of the Jewish Agency, i.e., individuals who could represent Diaspora interests beyond those of fundraising. Yet it will remain to be seen to what extent academics, rabbinic personalities, and literary figures who are prepared to be involved in governance will be included as members of the Board. More importantly, to what extent will their voices be heard or their ideas included in order to potentially help bring about a more open, substantive, democratic decision-making process?

The Jewish Agency has been criticized, often correctly, as being too much an Israeli-North American partnership. As it increases its representation, will Keren Hayesod genuinely broaden participation from Europe, South America, and Oceania to a far greater extent than currently exists? In addition to Keren Hayesod's quantitative growth, will there be an increased qualitative involvement on the part of the representatives, and will this be welcomed and fostered, particularly on the part of the current UIA and WZO members?

In October 1994, the UIA included two academic personalities among their fourteen new appointments, and Keren Hayesod designated six individuals, two each from Europe, South America, and Oceania, among their new members. Thus, steps have been taken in the right direction.

The Board of Governors as Manager

The Board of Governors is the most fascinating of the three governing bodies. In reality, it is the formal power center within the Agency. According to the Reconstitution Agreement, the Board "determines policy"; it also "manages, supervises, controls and directs Agency operations and activities within those policies set by the Assembly." This must be seen as very strong language, in fact, unique in its description of powers provided to a Board of Directors/Board of Governors. Where most boards would have policy and oversight responsibility, the Jewish Agency Board has the authority for management and supervision, for control and direction of operations and activities.

Most of this language was in the initial Reconstitution Agreement of 1970, when it was affirmed that part of the design of the newly constituted Jewish Agency was to give the Diaspora (read "the fundraising leadership") far greater accountability than it had before, at least on paper. The irony is that in recent years, with greater Diaspora involvement and sophistication, with greater Diaspora knowledge of the Agency and how it works, and with an increased functioning of various Board committees, far more tension and conflict has been generated between Diaspora and Israeli leadership. Why? As the fundraising leaders have begun more and more to utilize the powers provided, the WZO leaders, particularly the Israelis, have felt an infringement on their daily administration of operations (the stated role of the Executive; see below), or what they see as management of the Jewish Agency.

The Board meets three times a year; thus, between its meetings there is, objectively and realistically, a

strong element of absentee management. In the best of all worlds, where the governing bodies would operate within a fully integrated model, this is precisely where the Executive should exert itself and act as a bridge and unifying factor, and even a catalyst for Board action. But for both its own reasons and those referred to above, it has been unable to be more than a formalistic body. Perhaps more thought must be given in the near future to a better power-sharing arrangement between these two governing bodies, including possible changes in their definitions and in the language of the Reconstitution Agreement, as will be discussed below.

BOG Committees as the Power Center

The committees of the Board of Governors have become the most operative part of the three governing bodies. They are, in essence, functionally, the power mechanism within the Board and within the Agency as a whole. Inside the committees there is even an informal power center that centers around budget. Essentially, what has evolved is a finance cabinet that includes the Chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee, his subcommittee chairmen, and the Treasurer.

In essence, this results in a situation of budget driving policy as opposed to policy driving budget. This has been somewhat counterbalanced, previously by the work of a Strategic Planning Committee, and now through the efforts of a Goals and Priorities Committee.

Ironically, the committees of the Board of Governors have developed as a power center even though they do not generally function according to standards acceptable to most parliamentary or governing bodies. They meet only three times a year for only a few hours at a time, within the framework of the Board meetings. People serve on multiple committees, both Board members and a certain number of Assembly members who are selected for committee participation.

In the departmental committees there can be as many as 40 members on a committee. In the budget areas, within the subcommittees, the number of members is generally eight to twelve members. Outside of meetings, contact among the members tends to be very loose, neither weekly or even monthly as a standard. As time grows closer to meeting periods, a flurry of activity begins. The current staff people are most often those who first and foremost have other functions in their respective departments, and who largely work on committee matters only prior to ensuing meetings.

In other words, the Jewish Agency has not yet

developed the notion that there should be ongoing committee involvement, meaning that there should be a commitment to an independent system that would support the committees of the Board of Governors. In a modified sense, such a system would operate like that which serves the committees of a Parliament, a Knesset, or a Congress. This would provide for greater activity and objectivity, as well as checks and balances, all factors critical to good, participatory policy-making.

In the current reality, much of the contribution these committees can make toward policy development and priority determination depends upon the extent to which a Jewish Agency department is willing to open itself up on certain issues and lay them out before the committee for decision-making purposes. The alternative, as almost uniformly happens today, is the presentation of a fait accompli, often lapsing into "show and tell," or at best having the objective of creating an advocacy group within the Board of Governors in order to support specific programmatic or departmental interests while often rejecting those of the other departments. At present, the committees in reality are not properly driven, nor do they serve the Board of Governors and the Jewish Agency to the maximum extent possible.

An independent system serving and supporting the committees would provide coordination along with checks and balances to individual departmental agendas. In addition, properly designed and operated, this system would fully integrate all factors, thereby creating policy and priorities for the Jewish Agency as a whole, rather than more simply and at best doing so for each department or activity, as is currently the case.

There is another factor which serves to inhibit the committees from fulfilling their maximum potential and, at the same time, paradoxically, may have contributed to the recent shift in the locus of power and the frequent confusion in management responsibilities. Essentially, the committees as committees generally have shown themselves not to be activist in nature. On the other hand, the individual committee chairmen are often very involved within their respective departmental or programmatic activities, or budget responsibilities. Therefore, as relationships and alliances are created between particular individual chairmen and key Israeli personnel, there is a greater tendency to be involved in management issues rather than those of policy.

The implications are two-fold: first, competing management circles frequently are created between Israeli and Diaspora leaders, and other Israelis. In other words, depending on the situation, often a Head of Department, the Director General, the Treasurer,

or even the Chairman of the Executive will be missing from the decision-making loop, or brought into it after the fact. Second, since the committees are not utilized in an ongoing fashion to confront and address serious policy and oversight issues, there tends to be an underutilization of significant leadership talent within the Board and committee system. As a result, presentation of program — "show and tell" — is the norm at committee meetings, rather than a presentation of issues aimed at debate and resolution.

The fact that this situation continues is a fascinating phenomenon in and of itself. That the individual committee chairmen find this situation satisfactory is somewhat understandable. What is more difficult to understand is the general acceptance of this situation on the part of the great majority of committee members. By and large, these same committee members are not "run of the mill," "where do we begin?," "let's get them involved" community people. They are more often accomplished local and national organizational leaders in their own right and on their own turf. In their base institutions, they are generally challenging, constructively so, seeking knowledge, and fulfilling a role as policy-maker and overseer. For some reason, short of being a committee or subcommittee chairman, this inclination and ability seems to radically change inside the Jewish Agency, from one who may challenge and catalyze the system to one who generally and simply accepts that which is being presented.

The question is why. Why does the proven leader suddenly take a back seat and allow himself or herself to become part of a system that is not utilizing his or her talents to their full potential? Perhaps there are both objective and subjective reasons, each of which must be addressed. Geography, time zones, language, culture, knowledge, and adaptability to different systems are all part of the mix. These factors should be examined and solutions devised. In essence, a strong program of leadership education (not merely leadership development) should be undertaken. Moreover, each individual, as an individual and collectively, should commit himself or herself to playing a more activist role. Personality factors always have to be considered, but committee chairmen, each committee itself, and the committee system and the Board as a whole should be pushed to the maximum toward a more participatory level. This includes: (a) qualitative agenda preparation; (b) meetings that contain a balance of learning through presentation and discussion, alongside real issue confrontation, debate, and policy recommendation; and (c) maintaining momentum and agenda-building between

meetings.

In short, there should be a commitment to a similar involvement of leadership within the Jewish Agency as there is on the part of these same leaders within their local and national organizational settings.

An Executive, Not an Executive Committee

Within the Reconstitution Agreement, the Jewish Agency Executive "administers operations subject to the control of the Board of Governors." The use only of the term "Executive" as opposed to "Executive Committee" is not accidental. Philosophically, ideologically, and historically, the Zionist movement sees the Executive functioning as a collective and the Chairman of the Executive as the first among equals. The Chairman of the Executive does not have the same powers or authority as those provided to a prime minister, or to a chief executive officer, or even to a committee chairman; he cannot necessarily control the actions of a member of the Executive, nor does he have the ultimate power of replacing members of the Executive.

An executive committee will normally be the driving force of an organization. It will include the management of the organization working in coordination with the Board, wherein will lie more normally the policy and oversight role. In this context, there is a major differentiation within the Jewish Agency, one that affects both dynamics and decision-making. It is this differentiation that often leads to cultural and organizational conflict, manifested through the struggle over which governing body, and at times which leader, might have the responsibility for deciding a given issue.

By statute, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Assembly is from the WZO and, though not by definition, in all probability always will be from Israel; also a part of the Reconstitution Agreement is the understanding that the Chairman of the Assembly will serve as Chairman of the Executive. Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Board of Governors is from the UIA or Keren Hayesod, thus from the Diaspora. This provides something of a check and balance arrangement between the three governing bodies; conceptually, it is an institutional design for power-sharing on a leadership level. It demands, of course, that this power-sharing concept be recognized and accepted by the two leaders occupying these three positions at any given moment.

As issues have emerged in recent years, members of the Board have found occasion to remind members of the Executive that they must function subject to the control of the Board of Governors; in other words, that they work for the Board. What has been neglected

during such exchanges is the recognition that the Board of Governors must function within the policies of the Assembly. To a large extent, therefore, whether there is power-sharing or a power struggle within the Jewish Agency will depend upon the specific leaders, their personalities, and the extent to which they are committed to the idea of power-sharing. The bodies of governance are in place, designed for power-sharing. The critical factor, as always, but especially in the case of the Jewish Agency, is the quality of leadership and the personal commitment to work in a cooperative, non-confrontational manner. The greater the complexity, as is the reality in the world of Israel-Diaspora relations and thus within the structure of the Jewish Agency, the more important is the necessity for power-sharing.

When Israeli Party Politics and Diaspora Institutional Politics Meet

The complexities of Israel-Diaspora relationships and the concomitant need for power-sharing involves an interplay of three sets of politics within the Jewish Agency. The first and perhaps most pronounced is within Israel wherein there is a set of politics that is directly related to the political party system. Those parties with a Zionist basis, e.g., Labor, Likud, Mizrahi, Mapam, Ratz, or those within Meretz as a coalition, all have an affiliate within the World Zionist Organization and thus in the Jewish Agency. The interplay between these interests, foremost among them Labor and Likud, is a piece of the contemporary political reality affecting both Israel and the Diaspora, and thus the structure and decision-making within the Jewish Agency.

Not included within the system are the ultra-Orthodox or haredi parties because they are not part of the Zionist movement. Historically, however, it must be said that ultra-Orthodox parties and institutions did receive Jewish Agency money. It was due primarily to a convergence of Diaspora influences and Zionist ideology that this practice was discontinued through two key pieces of Assembly legislation (resolutions) in the mid-late 1980s. More recently, even within the last months, it has been rumored that the ultra-Orthodox Shas party is ready to be a part of the Jewish Agency, but not as a constituent of the WZO. How? Through the current effort to expand the Board of Governors so that in Israel the Jewish Agency might become more representative of the totality of Israeli society. Why? Because positions and monies could be available. Within this expansion, the test for the WZO and the system itself will be to ascertain whether or not in-

creased representation can be achieved free of the political needs of the current government and political interests in general.

Turning toward the Diaspora, there is a set of politics relating to what is sometimes called "the alphabet game" of Diaspora institutions, particularly UIA, UJA, CJF, and JDC in the United States. The first three (United Israel Appeal, United Jewish Appeal, Council of Jewish Federations) are directly involved in the governing bodies of the Jewish Agency; it is not uncommon, albeit more subtly, for their institutional interests, concerns, and politics to affect who is appointed, how, and when, or to influence the nature and substance of decision-making. For instance, who becomes a Board Member, from which community, and with what experience, or, who has particular interests in Aliyah versus Youth Aliyah versus Settlement/Regional Development, versus, most recently, Jewish education/Israeli Experience, all represent Diaspora-related elements which also create Jewish Agency realities with an impact on decision-making. Not unweighted even within the Diaspora is the influence or power attached to those who are seen or see themselves as raising the bulk of the campaign monies, versus those who, while surely involved in the campaign, are perceived as having more interest in policy and governance issues.

The Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) is seen correctly as an American organization, operating in Israel with an American board, doing things "the way Americans like them to be done." The JDC does marvelous work in Israel, interfacing with the Israeli system on an institutional and professional level, thus incorporating internally and externally its own brand of politics. Often it has been articulated to the Israeli and Diaspora leadership of the Jewish Agency, "Why don't you do things like the JDC?" But in the emerging world of Israel-Diaspora relations, there is a shortcoming within the JDC model which provides understandably only for Americans on its board, i.e., its policy-making body. On the other hand, with all of the difficulties inherent in formulation and structure, ultimately, an instrumentality of Israel-Diaspora relations which as an institution involves decision-making and implementation, must include a balance of leadership of equal standing from both Israel and the Diaspora within its bodies of governance and policy determination.

In the rest of the Diaspora, the institutional dynamics inside the Agency include Keren Hayesod and all of its various country-related organizations or communi-

ty campaigns. The two strongest entities of these are the UIA Canada and the JIA, the Joint Israel Appeal in the United Kingdom. There is a healthy process in motion that is pushing Keren Hayesod to be more activist, to have more governance and resolutions involvement, and to have Jewish Agency committees on the local level. While generally positive, these efforts should not be undertaken at the expense of greater campaign achievement, a statement which can and must be applied as well to the American involvement in the realm of governance.

In summary, the briefly described institutional politics of the Diaspora may not be as open or visible as that played out within Israel, but it often affects the ability of the Jewish Agency to make forthright and balanced decisions as much as Israeli party politics will frequently influence governance and policy determination. Too often, the critique and the need for change is focused only on the Israeli set of politics; similarly, Diaspora institutional influences should be taken into consideration when organizational improvement and change is contemplated.

From a political science perspective, it is interesting that both party politics and institutional politics within the Jewish Agency have worked separately yet together to constrict decision-making among a few dominant individuals. In the party leader model that the WZO utilizes in governance, and in the corporate manager's model that the UIA and Keren Hayesod seem to prefer, both, for different reasons, find it comfortable to limit or constrict essential decision-making to a powerful and relatively small group of people. As a result, within both the Zionist movement and the Federation system there is a growing feeling of frustration among a significant number of individuals who come to Israel to Board and Assembly meetings and who do not feel that they are playing a real and proper role in decision-making as leaders on behalf of their organizations and communities. Unfortunately, this factor also contributes to the enhancement of the power struggle as opposed to a sharing of power. Here, too, a principal question exists with the current enlargement of the governing bodies: Will an increased number of people mean a greater dilution of involvement and power-sharing, or can the enlargement be a new opportunity to revitalize leadership education and greater participatory decision-making?

The third set of politics at play is that of Israel versus Diaspora, involving the Israeli parties and their WZO allies, their leaders and personalities, versus those of the forementioned Diaspora institutions. The impact

is felt in various governance, policy, and management dimensions. Culturally, this set of politics plays itself out frequently as management versus ideology or program. For example, how many Israeli children should we take into Youth Aliyah versus how much money do we have? What is the role of the Agency in Israeli society versus what is the role of government? What can we afford? What is the responsibility to the settlement movements versus what is the responsibility to recently arrived immigrants? Who should pay for what?

Management versus ideology is also being played out frontally regarding the WZO. The last number of years have witnessed a power struggle resulting in a diminution of WZO budget size and authority. Confrontation and debate focussing on questions such as those mentioned above have brought cost efficiencies and WZO programs into opposition, rather than constructive analysis and resolution. Management concerns have been used to limit WZO operations and to cut away the ability of the WZO to function in an independent manner, affecting both its governance process and organizational program, particularly within Jewish education. This seems to have been a determined, ongoing effort on the part of the UIA and Keren Hayesod representatives. On the other hand, neither has the WZO fostered a clear ideological program, nor has it enjoyed the strength of stable leadership which could manage the organization and its finances, and maintain and build an appropriate independence. In this scenario it is also fair to ask if there is, perhaps appropriately, an emerging and necessary interdependence, or is the WZO being made to be dependent upon the Jewish Agency.

The Jewish Federation leadership, which raises the bulk of the money, speaks of an Israeli-Diaspora partnership wherein Israel and the Diaspora each would be represented by 50 percent. Potentially, this could represent a radical change away from the current WZO-UIA/KH institutional partnership. But the Federation leadership is not prepared for the WZO to wholly own the Israeli 50 percent, or that the WZO should include American WZO representatives within its numbers (as is the case now) on the Jewish Agency Board, since the latter are perceived as not part of the fundraising system that supports the Jewish Agency. Similarly, it must be asked if the Federations will be prepared to modify their own ownership factor of a Diaspora 50 percent within a new Israel-Diaspora partnership. This would recognize that there are other players on the Diaspora stage, just as there are others in Israel. Initial indica-

tions point to a consideration of the synagogue organizations as part of the Diaspora side of a redesigned partnership, as opposed to their currently being part of the WZO (more on this below).

Within the World Zionist Organization itself, the structure remains as it was before the establishment of the state, with only 38 percent of the Zionist movement coming from Israel; this proportion decreases as the WZO becomes a part of the Jewish Agency. The following questions emerge: Is it appropriate that in this day and age, Israel is not equally represented in the primary partnership within the Israel-Diaspora relationship? Moreover, is it appropriate that a contemporary Zionist issue or an issue of the Jewish people could be decided by a majority representing the Diaspora within the processes of either the WZO or the Jewish Agency? There are a few voices within the WZO allied with those in the UIA and Keren Hayesod, calling for major, even radical change toward a broader Israel-Diaspora, 50-50 partnership. However, there does not yet appear to be a strong constituent base of support behind these few voices.

One of the most recent and fascinating elements within the Israel-Diaspora political arena is the growth of the impact of the pluralistically religious Zionist parties on the Zionist movement and on the Jewish Agency. While historically Mizrahi has been part of the movement, its roots taking shape in the WZO in the early 1900s, in the last several years there has been a substantial increase in numbers, influence, and power within the WZO of ARZA, of the Reform Movement, and Mercaz, of the Conservative Movement. The extent of this impact was seen in 1987 when ARZA and Mercaz became the minority partners that allowed Labor to build a coalition that enabled Simcha Dinitz to become Chairman of the Executive, and where for the first time an elected Chairman of the Executive was from a party other than that of the Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

In the world of Israel-Diaspora relations, it is less the impact of the Israeli-related ultra-Orthodox religious parties and more the dominance of the Conservative and Reform religious factors that determines outcomes. This element often shifts the weight in terms of the decision-making process, a new reality that is not likely to change in the near future. Indeed, as indicated above, some of the Federation leadership are saying that their natural American allies are in fact the leaders of the synagogue world, and not the more traditional WZO organizations, e.g., the ZOA and Hadassah. If the primary local concerns are linked to Jewish continu-

ity, Jewish identity, and Jewish education in the fight against intermarriage and assimilation, then the new Diaspora partnership may be between the Federation system and the synagogue-related religious movements. This is something to watch; it could be a revolutionary development within the Jewish polity.

Realizing the Full Potential of Power-Sharing

Looking toward the future, the challenge for Israeli and Diaspora leadership alike is how to weave the threads of power-sharing into and throughout the Jewish Agency's processes of governance and institutional relationships. Attitudinal changes by the leadership will be required, as well as systematically redefining and integrating the governing bodies, including the Board committees, with the objective that all units will become a working, coordinated whole benefitting the entirety of the Jewish Agency and the Jewish people.

The most fundamental, important change to be fostered is the singular commitment on the part of both Israeli and diaspora leadership to power-sharing. As subtle as it may seem, such an attitudinal shift is absolutely critical to the functioning of the system and, for that matter, to the future of the Israel-Diaspora relationship. From the genuine presence of a power-sharing commitment will stem models of cooperation, not confrontation.

A window of opportunity presently exists. Israeli and Diaspora leadership must utilize the current and forthcoming changes in structure, representation, and administration to inculcate first the idea of power-sharing and then the appropriate functional mechanisms throughout the Jewish Agency and its worldwide institutional network. As a result, a stronger foundation will be in place to encourage the full realization of the Jewish Agency's potential.

The opportunity to realize this potential coincides with an important moment in history, one that leadership should not overlook. The Jewish people and the State of Israel, hopefully embarking upon a threshold of peace, soon will be celebrating one hundred years of the Zionist movement (1997) and fifty years since the establishment of the State of Israel (1998). More than a period for celebration, the ensuing three-year period should be utilized by leadership for introspection, redefinition, and regeneration.

Theodor Herzl's vision contains a stirring message for contemporary leadership. Herzl conceived and constructed a National Assembly as a model of power-sharing. Unity, not fragmentation, was his vision. "If you will it, it will not be (merely) legend," was his

message.

The opportunity for greater unity and further accomplishment lies before us. The basis for power-sharing, and thereby a stronger Jewish Agency and Israel-Diaspora relationship, exists within the current network. It is within our ability to fully develop this potential.

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