

American Jews, Israel and Public Policy

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Israel the David has become Israel the Goliath. In the eyes of millions, a much-admired underdog withstood heroically, even miraculously in June of 1967, the threat of annihilation from the giant military menace of the combined Arab armies. Four and a half years later this underdog has become, in the minds of those same millions, an aggressive, obstinate, muscle-bound upstart, not only blocking all possibilities for normalcy in the Middle East but, far more dangerously, threatening the peace of the world. As this reversal of image hardens, political postures change. Here in America, those in the political center see Israel as an obstacle to broader economic trade and thus to easier diplomatic relations with the vast Arab world, while from the left, Israel stands condemned as an imperialist tool of the capitalist powers, preventing the legitimate national liberation of millions of oppressed Arab *fellahin*. The steadiest and sometimes strongest support for Israel comes, paradoxically, from the more conservative-minded elements of the population: religious fundamentalists who see in Israel's continuation a necessary precondition for the Second Coming, and political conservatives who believe that in the Middle East maelstrom Israel alone stands as a bulwark against total Communist takeover.

As the formerly friendly Left becomes an antagonistic New Left, and as a previously suspicious Right brings conservative support, American Jews find themselves with new and surprising political and social companions. And for the sake of Israel—a cause they hold most precious for the preservation of their own Jewish identity—they are willing to adopt a more conservative stance in international politics, as unprecedented as it is out of character with the popular image of Jewish social and political positions.

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It could have been expected. The social radicalism that Jewish immigrants brought with them to these shores seventy years ago died as Jews moved from the sewing machines and cutting rooms into the managerial class of the needle trades. We have made our peace with this fact of life and have grown comfortable with the condition. But what pains is that with this shift America may also be witnessing the demise of Jewish support for and involvement in those causes which, while not socially radical, are still considered to be of a liberal bent. Except for the young in their midst, the Jewish community seems to have withdrawn from active engagement in the social concerns of the larger community. One has to search long and hard to find the establishments or their leaders actively involved in campaigns to expand the base of welfare rights legislation, programs of urban renewal, projects directed to the conservation of our natural resources, movements to end the draft, programs to help resisters and deserters and the anti-war movement.

The rationale for this retreat, the one most commonly heard among Jews, is: "We are too marginal to do anything anyway." "We are unloved." And, most important: "If we are not for ourselves, who will be for us?" "It is time," most Jews argue, "for Jews to save Jews and Jewish life by concentrating on Jewish things." First and fundamental to that effort is financial support for and work on behalf of the security and survival of the state of Israel.

The ideological justification for this emphasis finds its most sophisticated articulation in the pages of *Commentary* magazine, considered by many to be American Jewry's most prestigious intellectual forum. Last year, in its February issue, historian Walter Laqueur made a searing critique of Jewish radicals who support the New Left's anti-Israel posture ("Jewish radicalism in America is, of course, a form of assimilation . . ."). And he began to sketch out the scenario:

Given the constant geopolitical factors and Soviet ambitions in the Middle East, the survival of Israel as of other small nations depends on a global balance between the two superpowers. If this balance is radically upset, if America is seriously weakened, the Soviet Union will emerge as the predominant power in the Middle East. Such a development has, to put it cautiously, grave consequences for the independence and the very survival of the state of Israel. This is the basic fact of Middle East politics and there is no getting around it. Any nation which upsets the balance of power is bound to strengthen the Soviet Union and jeopardize the state of Israel.

The sentiment of this paragraph seems to have the support of the rank-and-file American Jew. Few American Jewish organizations and even fewer individual American Jewish spokesmen, rabbinic or lay, were willing to criticize publicly Mr. Johnson's foreign policies in Southeast Asia when the virus of the war infected this country with the near-fatal disease of protest; few are willing to criticize his successor's policies in that part of the world, even today, when such opposition has become a "safe" issue. The reason for the reluctance is twofold: First, Jews believe that such opposition might jeopardize the possibility of Israel receiving American-made Phantom jets and/or other military hardware (as if American foreign policy is determined by what some few American Jewish leaders say or don't say, do or don't do about the war in Southeast Asia). Second, the American Jewish community may believe that such outspokenness might lead to a recrudescence of anti-Semitism. Nathan Glazer gives substance to that fear when, in the same *Commentary* symposium, "Revolutionism and the Jews," he first complains that in recent years intellectuals have shown "less understanding of and support for Jews and Jewish interests," and then goes on to say:

I think anyone who looks to the future in America must consider this possibility—almost a probability—of the rise of a stab in the back myth, in which it will not only be students, professors, and intellectuals who are attacked [for our failure to "win the war in Vietnam"] and not only Jews in their role as members of this general community [Jews who form 3% of the American population or less, characteristically form more than a third of the faculties of elite schools and more than 10% of the faculty population as a whole—from statistics elsewhere in Glazer's article] but conceivably Jews as Jews.

Walter Laqueur seconds Glazer's concern:

The fact that Jews have been prominently associated with declarations and actions abhorred by the majority of Americans provides fuel for a re-action which will be not just anti-left or anti-intellectual but potentially anti-Semitic as well.

The implication of this type of thinking is obvious. Let Jews not rock any boats. Let Jews "stop mucking about with radicalism." Jews should be more moder-

ate and balanced, should swim more securely in the mainstream and stop finding so much fault with America. In this way, Jews will be less obvious in the American portrait and will (incidentally?) not jeopardize the military—and that means the physical—security of the state of Israel.

One wonders about this logic. Are conditions here still so tenuous for Jews and perhaps for other dissenting minorities that the counsel of prudent silence is the best wisdom that can be offered? If so, what does this tell us about the state of contemporary American life? Twenty years after the nightmare of McCarthyism, is it possible that there are no politically bold forces in the Christian community or among secular humanists to resist effectively the slander of the dealers in hate and fear? If this is our situation, then far more than the security of American Jews is in jeopardy. At stake may be the soul of America.

For better or for worse, American Jewry has taken to heart this dismal analysis of our situation. Our community is now acutely sensitive to the wishes of the White House, eager to find and say something good about the present Administration (no easy task). Many Jews seem unhappy and somewhat embarrassed that their sons and daughters are prominent in the radical sectors of the youth population and are now forming their own boisterous, radical Jewish unions which are, at times, illogically critical of Israel. Some of us have even grown contemptuous of those who advocate continuing work in and for the larger society. One Jewish weekly editorialized last June in response to my criticism of what I see as *Commentary's* drift to the right:

We see little in *Commentary's* emphasis on Jewish identity to indicate a dangerous alienation from the whole of American society. Rather, the heightened awareness of Jewish values would indicate a desire both to strengthen Jewish identity and to contribute a stronger Jewish identity to the larger American society. [*The American Examiner*, June 3, 1971.]

Whether or not intensified Jewish particularism (or Jewish identity) will indeed add anything to the larger American society depends greatly upon what non-Jews do to affect the general American climate in which Jews live, upon a change in direction by those forces in America over which Jews have little or no control.

There is no lack of empirical evidence to support and even to justify Jewish disdain for what is going on and the consequent alienation now current in Jewish life. Both the problems that provoke Jewish particularism and the positive values of particularism are clear enough to all except those determined not to see. Evidence abounds of radical Left, anti-Israel sentiment. Some black nationalists, in supposed sympathy with Third World revolution, do spew out

anti-Israel and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Denominational leadership of the Christian churches is either silent, neutral, or critical about Israel in a highly sophisticated, sometimes tortured fashion (i.e., the American Friends Service Committee's *Search for Peace in the Middle East*). Blacks have, on occasion, lapsed into anti-Semitic diatribes in their struggle for community control of the public schools against Jews well-entrenched in that system. Yet, none of these real and exacerbating situations need be resolved completely before Jews come out of their hobbit holes and once more enlist in the fight for social justice. Involvement in that fight is endemic to Jews. They have been in it for a long time and well know the price they pay in a society and/or a world where conditions of justice and equity do not obtain.

However, Jews need evidence that bold souls in other communities (black, church, *et al.*) are making honest attempts to counteract the corrosive and often deceitful forces now alienating American Jewry. When Jews see those steps being taken, they will emerge from their protective self-isolation and seek new coalitions to replace those now destroyed. The alliance of liberal labor, Negroes, and progressive Jews which grew up around the old civil rights movement is shattered. The labor movement, with the possible exception of some of its intellectuals, has moved farther to the right than anyone would have dreamed possible thirty years ago. Negroes for integration have become blacks for separation, and liberal Jews grown accustomed to affluence have become suspicious of all but their own. The *Commentary* mood cuts deeply into American Jewish thinking. It is true that "many lower-middle-class and working-class Jews become rednecks." The fear of blacks and of social change produces Jewish votes for Mario Procaccino in New York and Sam Yorty in Los Angeles. Upper-class Jews secure themselves in the suburbs and blame the deepening crisis on "the radicals."

It is not hard to understand why Jews feel threatened by the Third World rhetoric issuing from both white radical Left and black nationalists. The New Left sifts history in such a selective fashion as to make a mockery of history itself. In his *Ramparts* article, "My Jewish Problem—and Ours," Sol Stern exposes the New Left picture of the state of Israel as an unambiguous creation of British imperialism. Britain, it is said, dumped all the Jewish immigrants into Palestine to be a colonial bulwark against the Arab masses. Stern notes that the New Left fails to mention the British White Paper of 1939 which restricted and then cut off Jewish immigration, or the British opposition to the U.N. partition of Palestine, or the Jewish underground struggle against 100,000 British occupation troops, lasting from 1944-1947. The New Left seems blind to the fact that "before it happened anywhere else in the

Third World, a Jewish underground army in Palestine had defeated and expelled a sizeable British occupying army." They fail to see the Sternists as the Weathermen of their day or to recognize that Israeli nationalism was, before it succeeded, as anti-imperialist as any current Palestinian nationalist effort.

Thus, instead of seeing the Palestine-Israel struggle as a tragic and destructive struggle between two nations fighting over the same turf, a collision that requires healing by compromise and mutual recognition, the Left applies models that have no relevance. And how futile it seems to try to point out the obvious: that Amman is not Hanoi; and the P.L.O. is not the N.L.F.; and that Tel Aviv is not Saigon.

Perhaps most tragic in the New Left picture is its omission of a very real New Left in Israel. Supported by many Jews in the United States, these Israelis agitate both within and outside the Knesset for the recognition of the Palestinian Arabs as a national entity. They are not afraid to advocate taking back refugees and are willing to make initiatives and compromises. But where is the Arab New Left calling for recognition of the Jewish nation? Perhaps it is there, newly emerging. A small booklet, "No Peace Without a Free Palestinian State," is reportedly circulating on the occupied West Bank and has produced a storm of political controversy among Palestinian intellectuals. Written by the influential Arab columnist, Mohammed Abu Shilbaya, the booklet presents a case for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and in its most controversial section contends "that the four and one-half years of Israeli occupation have been no worse—and in some respects better—than the previous 19 years of 'exploitation' of the West Bank by King Hussein and the Jordanian government."

According to reports, Mr. Abu Shilbaya directs his harshest words to Western and Arab opponents of a separate Palestinian state. Such critics "seem to know nothing whatsoever of the new realities which have been created in the occupied territories, in the economic and daily life of the inhabitants, and in the thinking of those people. They do not realize that tens of thousands of workers are now for the first time receiving wages of which they never dreamed under the Hashemite regime, that the Israeli Army has not committed even a tenth of the crimes perpetrated by the tribal Bedouin soldiers of King Hussein and that these changes are deeply meaningful to the Palestinians in the occupied territories. After all, those who were without work and who now earn 30 Israeli pounds a day will never opt for the present regime in Amman."

He charges the Palestinian guerrillas with a "lack of political maturity." "Their declared aim of setting up a democratic, unitary state in the whole of Palestine for Moslems, Jews and Christians alike, was erroneous . . . for such a state would mean in prac-

tice Zionist military and economic domination over the whole of Palestine, considering the technological, cultural and military superiority of the Jews and the fact that the whole of world Jewry stands firmly behind them."

One can only speculate about the future contortions of the New Left if Abu Shilbaya's thinking prevails. But contortions there will be, for these "ideologues" are rarely disturbed by events and facts, so impervious to reality is their political philosophy. In order to untangle itself, the New Left might enlist as gurus some of the now alienated radical Jewish thinkers who understand too much to fall into the New Left's simplistic traps.

If Jews are disturbed by the New Left's twisting of history, they are angered by black nationalism's ignorance of history. In their legitimate desire to find freedom and identity at home, black nationalists have uncritically embraced non-white national liberation movements throughout the world. Some black nationalists never learned history or have conveniently forgotten that the major worldwide revolutionary struggles were by colored against colored, not by non-Caucasians rising in revolutionary rage against the forces of white imperialism. Jews would not be disturbed by these romantic fantasies were it not that they have anti-Israel, anti-Semitic overtones which damage already strained black-Jewish relations back home. If there is to be any rapprochement between blacks and Jews, some new voices from within militant black leadership must begin to clarify some issues for and with their own.

The simplification of the world into two camps, the white "haves" and the non-white "have nots," which has caused some blacks in America to take up the Arab cudgels, is indeed ironic in view of the Arab world's persecution of blacks and of the clear historical evidence that color does not create a permanent bond of solidarity among peoples. Unity through color cannot be extrapolated from the bitter experiences of atrocities by non-whites against non-whites. One thinks of the massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party, the Civil War in Biafra, the expulsion of Indians from various African countries, or of the oppression of blacks in the Sudan. Examples multiply. The lesson is clear: No color code solves political problems.

Anyone really interested in the Arab masses ought to understand that their salvation is linked to peace, not war, and to Israel's sharing of her knowledge and skills. Radicals who divide the world apocalyptically between the white "haves" and the non-white "have nots" and draw from this an anti-Israel stance, only further confuse the issues at stake in the Middle East. The crowning paradox is that their way of dividing the world is strikingly similar to the view held by the majority of the high priests of America's oil corporations, the archetype of those American

"royalists" whom radicals say they most despise.

Neither can Israel be charged with imperialism. An imperialist nation is one that exploits another nation for economic, political and/or social advantage. What nation has Israel exploited? To the contrary, Israel came into existence as a result of a long ideological, political and military struggle with England, the very model of imperialism. Israel's resistance to imperialistic patterns has not changed. Economic and social programs such as the Kibbutz movement, the Histadrut labor federation, social welfare, etc., reflect a decidedly radical socialist and anti-capitalist worldview.

Historians and economists now suggest that Israel, through its foreign-aid program, may be the world's best example of how one small nation can help other small nations develop themselves. It is not unimportant that, by the end of 1968, over 10,000 students from more than 90 countries on four continents came to Israel for training; 1,800 Israeli experts had carried out over 3,500 assignments in 62 countries; since 1958, Israel has loaned \$25 million to developing countries throughout the world. All this is the more remarkable when seen against the background of two decades of Arab hostility, necessitating an enormous outlay for military hardware.

In none of the countries aided has there been an Israeli effort to suppress freedom, to support reactionary governments, to plant the Israeli flag or to convert the citizens. Moreover, Israel continues to oppose the racist regime of Rhodesia and the *apartheid* of South Africa, and to do so publicly in the forums of the United Nations, even though such opposition jeopardizes the position of more than 200,000 Jews in South Africa.

The New Left's anti-Israel mythology persists nonetheless. Part of its strength is in the logic of guilt by association. Israel is an imperialist tool because it is *now* supported by the United States. This in spite of the fact that American oil companies, the archetype of all imperialist-capitalist bogeymen, are precisely those most hostile to Israel and with whom the Arabs are most closely allied ideologically and financially.

A second source of support for anti-Israel mythology is Israel's alleged oppression of the Arabs. American blacks feel they share with the Arabs their poverty and a sense of disenfranchisement. Thus, there grows the supposition that to be black means to be pro-Arab and anti-Israel. Slowly, some blacks are coming to see the foolishness of this "logic," as they recognize that the history of black-Arab relations is a history of black persecution by Arabs. Again, the tragedy of the Southern Sudan, where even today Northern Sudanese Muslim troops wage war against Southern Sudanese blacks, is but one example.

In 1965, Northern Sudanese Muslims massacred the entire population of the town of Juba, 4,000 men,

women and children. Since then, Southern Sudanese blacks have been fleeing to the Congo, Uganda and Ethiopia. The war is financed by Kuwait with arms supplied from Egypt, Algeria and the Arab League. The painfully simple fact is that the Arab is killing the African black Christians. Unfortunately, this is not unprecedented. The rebellion of the Southern Sudanese is rooted in memory, reaching back to the time when Arabs sold blacks into slavery.

Some American black leaders recognize the transparent falsehood contained in this pro-black, anti-Israel rhetoric, as they recognize the mutuality of interests between blacks and Israel, between blacks and Jews. Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin and others have had the courage to speak out in support of both Jews and Israel, calling black anti-Semitism by its right name. For this, they have been branded "Uncle Toms" by others who either refuse to look at or who do not know their own black history. As one black leader recently said: "We don't meet Arabs, we do meet Jewish landlords." Jews are no more (or less) responsible for the exploitive practices of some Jewish landlords than blacks are for black muggers.

It is precisely at this point of urban contact that Christians find themselves between the rock and the hard place, probably unable to support Israel's claim to legitimate national survival even if they wanted to. Christianity has an investment in urban America. The urban crisis is in many ways Christianity's Zionism—a make or break issue—into which they invest enormous amounts of energy and finances. They seem to know that if Christianity fails to make its message of the social gospel effectively felt in the ghetto, it will lose its claim to importance in the lives of men. Much of that urban core is black. Some (how much?) of this urban black world feels and verbalizes an anti-Israel, even anti-Jewish, bias. For Christianity to speak out

in support of Israel it would have to do so at the risk of losing its credibility with its (potential?) black constituency. That may be too much to ask. Nor do Jews have any high expectations that Christianity will take that risk.

A tragic consequence of all this is that political and sociological facts of life have almost smothered the very promising Christian-Jewish "dialogue." This at a time when the need for closer rapport has never been greater and when, paradoxically, the possibilities have never been better. I still believe that theology should instruct behavior, and on the theological frontiers of both Protestantism and Catholicism a process is at work bringing Jews and Christians together. The process is the "Rejudaization of Christianity," or, to put it in less obscure terms, the search for the Jewish roots of Christianity. Not only is this new scholarship enormously important for Christianity, it is also an antidote to the corrosive effects of anti-Semitism which, for two millennia, has driven and kept Jews and Christians apart. That anti-Semitism was, is, and will remain a Christian problem.

Of course these are difficult times. Buffeted by attacks from the radical Left, feeling deserted by old allies, Jews now resolve to go it alone. They have "pulled in their horns" and wait to see how it all turns out. Politics as the art of the possible means Jews support those who support them and their interests. Courageous Christians, concerned blacks, a radical Left more honest with history, could, if they wished, help restore an eroded Jewish confidence in America and, in the process, involve Jews once again in dynamic coalitions to turn this nation around. Before any of that happens, however, each of these non-Jewish groups must take a long, hard look at the way they have used and misused the fact of Israel's existence; for it is the existence of Israel, above all else, that is essential to Jewish self-definition. Does this country care that much about its Jewish population? I think it does.