
Jewish Activism in the United States

Is J Street a Passing Phenomenon?



Gilbert N. Kahn

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United States Program

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Ce qu'il faut retenir

Si la communauté juive ne représente qu'environ 2,5 % de la population américaine, elle est cependant très visible, que ce soit dans les professions libérales, la fonction publique ou le domaine politique.

S'inspirant des différents mouvements revendicatifs des années 1960, et notamment de celui des Noirs pour les droits civiques, les Juifs américains ont depuis cette époque cherché à défendre certains intérêts communautaires, au premier rang desquels les intérêts de l'État d'Israël.

Le lobby pro-israélien AIPAC (American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee) s'efforce d'unifier les différentes tendances de la communauté juive américaine pour parler d'une seule voix auprès des membres du Congrès américain. AIPAC se met par principe au service des politiques mises en œuvre par le gouvernement israélien, quelles qu'elles soient.

Créé à l'automne 2008, J Street veut relayer l'opinion des Juifs américains qui ne se reconnaissent pas systématiquement dans la démarche du gouvernement israélien et souhaitent une démarche pro-paix plus active de la part du gouvernement américain. Contrairement aux autres groupes créés sur la même ligne dans le passé, J Street a un statut de « Political Action Committee » qui lui permet de soutenir directement des candidats à des élections et a démarré sous de bons auspices avec d'importants soutiens financiers.

Pour le professeur Gilbert Kahn, les chances de succès d'une telle démarche restent pourtant limitées. Chaque déviation de la ligne AIPAC est dénoncée comme idéologique et inacceptable. Il est certain que J Street brise la méthode du consensus mise en place depuis des années. Il est donc très peu probable que les membres du Congrès osent rallier ce nouveau lobby.

Tant que J Street sera actif, les idées pro-paix qu'il défend (gel des implantations, reprise des négociations, etc.) seront néanmoins plus présentes dans le débat public américain, notamment sur les campus universitaires.

Executive Summary

The Jewish community represents approximately 2.5% of the population of the United States. It is present in most high-profile professions however, including elected and appointed positions throughout the country and on Capitol Hill.

Ever since the Civil Rights movement inspired them, Jewish leaders have sought to promote communitarian goals, and first and foremost the interests of the State of Israel. The pro-Israel lobby AIPAC (American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee) has made—its mission to bring together the many voices of the Jewish community throughout the States to lobby Congress and the Executive Branch with a single unified message. AIPAC unwaveringly supports the policy choices of the elected Israeli government whatever it may be.

Created in the Fall of 2008, the J Street movement seeks to represent those in the Jewish community who do not systematically agree with the Israeli government and would like Washington to be more active in supporting a lasting peace in the Middle-East. Contrary to other similar groups in the past, J Street chose to create a Political Action Committee, with the possibility to directly support political candidates. Unlike other earlier attempts to create alternative advocate groups, J Street also began with considerable financial support.

According to Professor Gilbert Kahn, J Street's chances of success, however are slim. Every time J Street deviates from the AIPAC line on issues, it is harshly criticized for being dangerously ideological and for shattering the one-voice facade of the Jewish community. It is therefore very unlikely that Members of Congress may dare to join J Street any time soon.

In the meantime though, and as long as J Street operates, the ideas it defends (settlement freeze, new negotiations, etc...) will receive more attention, especially on university campuses.

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Introduction

Despite the numerous issues facing this troubled world, the opening days of the United Nations' 66th General Assembly meetings in New York in September 2011 were largely focused on the question of whether to recognize Palestine and admit it as a member or not.

After much discussion and deliberation, the matter went to the Security Council which did not muster sufficient votes to admit Palestine. While this issue was still being discussed, on October 31, UNESCO (the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) independently admitted Palestine by a vote of 107 to 14 with 52 abstentions.¹ Immediately thereafter the U.S. Government announced that it was cutting off its \$80 million in dues (approximately 22% of the total UNESCO budget) pursuant to statutes signed by Presidents George H.W. Bush in 1990 and Bill Clinton in 1994. President Obama announced his intention to comply with the law and not to seek its repeal.² AIPAC, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby in Washington, declared its support for the prompt de-funding of UNESCO by the Obama administration.³ J Street, meanwhile, the almost four year old "political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans", issued a statement calling upon Congress to amend the current law to permit continued U. S. funding for UNESCO.⁴

This recent episode raises the very essence of the question to be discussed in this paper. It suggests to some that there is a mixed view -in public- of how the United States should address events in the Middle East. There is a clear question as to how important are the views of J Street and how large a segment of American Jewry does

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¹ http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/general_conference_admits_palestine_as_unesco_member_State/

² <http://www.State.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/10/176418.htm>

³ <http://www.aipac.org/~media/Publications/Policy%20and%20Politics/AIPAC%20Analyses/Issue%20Memos/2011/11/AIPAC%20Memo%20-%20Palestinian%20U%20N%20%20Bid%20Undermining%20World%20Body%20Peace.pdf>

⁴ <http://jstreet.org/blog/j-street-calls-on-congress-to-maintain-american-contributions-to-unesco-other-un-institutions/>

their opinion on this and other matters represent? Furthermore, there is the critical question for Israel and all her supporters, whether such a public pronouncement could endanger Israel, or if it contributes to a possible alternative narrative that is present in Israel as well as the Diaspora? In other words, this set of reactions poses the question of whether J Street is developing into a formidable organization or is a fleeting phenomenon.

From the time that they first arrived in the United States in 1654 largely to escape religious persecution in Europe, Jews have endeavored to establish a place for themselves in the society and in the political life of the country. They were few in number but asserted their interests and rights to participate in the affairs of the Colonies, then in the American Revolution, and, subsequently, in the nation. The right of individuals or groups to petition the Government was affirmed in the Bill of Rights when the first amendment to the Constitution was ratified by the United States in 1791 two years after the Constitution took effect. Religious freedom was likewise guaranteed by the First Amendment. Jews cherished these rights, yet when it came to their religion most of them maintained a low public profile.⁵

Jewish participation in American political life evolved clearly in the 20th Century, especially following the Second World War. In the post-Holocaust era and since the establishment and growth of the state of Israel, Jews in America have assumed an even more active and visible rôle, which eventually matured into a clear willingness to speak out more publicly on issues of importance to the American Jewish community. This confidence would also evolve into a situation where different voices and opinions among American Jews and within the Jewish community became public as well. It is with respect to U.S. policy in the Middle East and attitudes toward Israel that a diversity of opinions would eventually produce a group such as J Street. It is in the context of the behavior of American Jews in general, and their collective and particular behavior towards and in support of Israel, that the emergence of J Street must be understood. Furthermore, this must be seen in the much larger picture of group behavior in general in America and the political conduct of Jews, historically.

5 The most thorough and respected study of Judaism in America is to be found in Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2004. Professor Sarna mentions two important details concerning the nature of life for Jews in America. Unlike many other countries, Jews obtained their rights, protections, and guarantees with all citizens and all religions, not through "Jew Bill" legislation. He adds as well that by the end of the 18th Century, Jews "...had received an unprecedented degree of 'equal footing'" at p.38.

« Factions » and Lobbies in the U.S. Political System

In Federalist Paper No. 10, James Madison warned the Founding Fathers and the American people to beware of “factions”. Madison was reflecting on what had transpired at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 to which he had been a delegate from the Commonwealth of Virginia. This assertion by Madison has generally been interpreted to have sounded the first historical alarm to future policy-makers in the U.S. that political parties and interest groups may well emerge and interfere with the orderly process of decision-making and, as Madison himself said, create “mischief”. While Madison’s perspective was surely astute, in fact, it actually went much further. Madison’s definition captured until this very day precisely the role that did evolve and is played in American politics by those non-institutional players, political parties and interest groups, which seek to influence the decision-making system.⁶

Madison’s understanding of these non-institutional players in the American political process was profound, yet his fears, while well founded, have never come to be. Admittedly, both parties and interest groups traditionally have been identified as corrupting forces in the “pristine” behavior of American politics. While visiting the United States in the 1830’s Alexis de Tocqueville observed precisely this tension in factions when he wrote of “associations”:

It cannot be concealed that unrestricted freedom of association in the political sphere is, of all freedoms, the last that a nation can tolerate. If such a freedom does not lead to actual anarchy, it does ever bring it, so to speak, close to that brink. But such a freedom, though dangerous, offers guarantees in one direction: in countries where associations are free, secret

⁶ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, & John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, Mentor, New American Library, (New York, 1999). Madison, the author of Federalist Paper No. 10, pp. 45-52 at 46 wrote: “By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse (sic) to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”

*societies are unknown. In America, there are factions but no conspiracies.*⁷

Yet, functionally, those who have benefitted most from the system of parties and groups have recognized them as integral parts of the American political process. They have been praised as helping to sustain and even initiate much of the political conversation that has contributed to making the American democratic system so vibrant and viable.

There are some, however, who argue that indeed parties and interest groups have corrupted American politics. Those who have been negatively impacted by the fact that America has essentially sustained only a two party system, bemoan what they perceive as America's lack of a democratic character. Critics of interest groups suggest, as they have even more vehemently over the past several years, that Washington is controlled today by outside interest groups, by the lobbyists on "K" Street, and by the heavy contributors to political parties and their campaigns. These voices argue that groups and parties have had a divisive, controlling, and polarizing effect on Government. According to either view, it is evident that factions have become a central part of the American political system. It is not at all clear, however, if Madison—and certainly not Jefferson—would be terribly disappointed in how these extra-institutional bodies have emerged as an integral part of the American system.

Operationally, parties are the more traditional and universal form of faction. It might be suggested that parties, representing alternative responses to political events or policy options, are a fairly normal or classical form of factions. Existing for the expressed purpose of getting someone elected to office and to building a local, regional, or national cohesive ideology, parties are truly a more natural faction for a democracy. In the United States' experience, largely similar to the British form of democracy, there historically have only been two major parties; unlike the multi-party systems prevalent in many European democracies. It might well be, that it is precisely such a multi-party system which Madison feared would be most threatening to the American experiment. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that in fact democracies with multi-party systems and a clear tradition of coalition government were precisely the faction burdened form of democracy that Madison would have opposed and would have wanted to avoid.

As for interest groups themselves, it is not clear what Madison might have envisaged. It must be assumed that he certainly did not expect what we know today as pressure groups. Theoretically, interest groups are the articulation of interests. Groups assemble to

⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (Translated by Gerald E. Biven), Penguin Books, New York, NY, 2003, p.224.

address and present specific positions on issues. They represent an explicit point of view and do not seek to compromise or modify viewpoints to satisfy a broad constituency as do parties. Absent a multi-party system, today's pressure groups do assume a role similar to that which minor smaller parties perform in many other multi-party democracies.⁸

In contrast, the theoretical notion of "party" is that it is seen as the aggregator of interests. Parties have positions on all major issues facing the nation and aggregate them and compromise them under a single banner. When one studies, for example, the party platform of any presidential candidate one sees a complete roadmap of the issues which face the nation at any moment in time. One can see positions on the entire range of economic or social issues as well as international ones.

Operationally, political parties in the United States are largely loose associations of local, state, and national parties bearing the same name with very limited cohesion. Republicans and Democrats in various parts of the country throughout history have often had little contact or relationship from one state to the next or one part of the country to another except at the national level. They operate fairly independently with the one general exception being that they come together to varying, and differing degrees throughout history—every four years—for the purpose of selecting and then electing a President who carries their banner. It is the task of the citizenry to engage in the political system in the U.S. not only by participating in elections at a multitude of levels, but by seeking to influence public policy. They can do so by joining in and working for political parties and whatever interest group(s) reflect their major concerns. For American Jews, therefore, this became the natural entrée into the political world once prejudice broke down and opportunities presented themselves, as Jews sought to insure that their concerns too were being properly represented.

⁸ There is an enormous range of interest groups in the U.S. from very specific to very general, from grass-roots to elites, from ideological to economic to religious to humanistic: e.g., labor unions, suffragettes, peace (or anti-war) movements, environmental groups, and all types of economic groups.

Jews in the American Political System Before the 1960's

Participation of American Jews in the political life of the United States in any capacity developed rather slowly. Like all of the non-establishment communities in America, Catholics, Blacks, or women, Jews moved very tentatively into the mainstream. There was an array of Jews who were engaged in politics prior to the Second World War—even as far back as the American Revolution—but they were the exceptions. Unlike most European countries where Jews intersected with their Christian neighbors to varying degrees for centuries—frequently as the victims of persecution—the U.S. was a new nation composed largely of immigrants. The Jewish population in 1880, prior to the beginning of the large-scale Jewish immigration which began from Europe at the end of the 19th Century, was between 230-300,000, representing approximately between 0.46-0.60% of the total U.S. population.⁹ They needed to establish themselves in the “new land” before they began to participate more formally in the political process.

While there were Jews with high visibility in American political life especially by the first decades of the 20th Century, most of these Jews behaved as Americans who happened to be Jewish and not as advocates for concerns and issues of Jewish interest. From Justices Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter to F.D.R.'s “braintrusts” such as Samuel Rosenman and Ben Cohen, to financier Bernard Baruch and Senator Herbert H. Lehman and Congressman Sol Bloom, Jews were present in the highest echelons of American political life. The fact that they were Jewish was largely not evidence of anyone's sensitivity to those issues which might concern American and world Jewry.

Even during World War II, President Roosevelt's Jewish Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau was only persuaded very late by Jewish leaders to intercede on behalf of the Jews being annihilated by the Nazis. Morgenthau, with great ambivalence and hesitation, arranged a meeting with the President and Jewish leaders to urge Roosevelt to elevate public and governmental action on behalf of the plight of the Jews of Europe. By the time an actual

⁹ See Sarna, *op.cit.* , Appendix , p. 375.

meeting was held, close to 4 million Jews had been slaughtered.¹⁰ It was only beginning in the 1960's that Jewish concerns as well as the interests of American Jews and/or the needs of the state of Israel could reach the doors of the White House with regularity.

10 For extensive discussions of this issue see, Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died*, Random House, New York, 1967, pp. 313-349; Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ, 1970, pp. 208-294; and David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, Pantheon Books, New York, NY, 1984, pp.209-340.

U.S. Early Policy towards the Middle East and Israel

In his former profession as an historian, Israeli Ambassador to Washington Michael Oren, produced a valuable study of the role of the U.S. in the Middle East. He traced America's involvement there to the days of the Barbary pirates who were harassing U.S. merchant marine shipping passing through North Africa, largely from their bases in Tripoli. It would be the new U.S. Navy during the days of President Thomas Jefferson which ultimately would resolve the conflict; but it would not be until after the end of the War of 1812 that the U.S. finally would cease the payments of tributes or ransoms to these pirates.¹¹

American involvement in the region throughout the 19th Century and into the 20th Century was much less than those of Europe. The major contacts which the U.S. had with the Ottoman Empire and the entire Levant was conducted largely by Christian missionaries. Even World War I and the Versailles Treaty would not give the U.S. a very visible role in the Middle East. Prior to the discovery of the huge oil reserves in the 1930's in Arabia, even American economic interests in the Middle East were minimal.

Beginning in 1933 with the arrangements between the Government of Saudi Arabia and Standard Oil of California (Socal), however, U.S. focus on the region grew dramatically. With the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938, driven largely thereafter by corporate interests and economic necessity, U.S. governments, beginning with that of President Franklin Roosevelt, established a clear economic self-interest in placating Saudi leadership on all regional issues. All efforts were made to insure a constant flow of cheap oil from the region for itself and its allies not be disrupted. So critical was U.S. interest in Middle East oil, that an already seriously ailing President Roosevelt stopped to see King Ibn Saud in February 1945, before returning home from the Yalta Conference. On the one hand, the President was already looking ahead to post-war economic

11 See a full description of America's first foray in the Middle East in Michael Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, NY, 2007, pp. 17-40. Oren's book is excellent on the early (pre-Zionist) history of the region; however, as he gets closer to contemporary events—especially since the Oslo process—he appears to be too close and too involved to maintain the historian's objectivity.

needs for huge amounts of petroleum, which he wanted to insure would be forthcoming. On the other hand, the President must have felt a need to clarify for the Saudis that the U.S. would not seek to change its involvement in a post-war Palestine without consultations not only with the Jews but also with the Arabs. It would be this meeting, probably more than any other clear public action which suggests the extent to which U.S. involvement in the Middle East would develop.¹²

At the same time, after the British issued the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917, Jews throughout the world, including Zionist leaders in the U.S. sought to encourage and support this British initiative. Louis Brandeis, for example, who chaired the American Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, met with world Jewish leaders and also sought governmental support for the growing community of Jews in mandatory Palestine.¹³ There were no major demonstrations or public events but there were overtures made already at Versailles with President Wilson during the peace conference to gain U.S. backing for this British initiative. Discussion during the 1930's and even during World War II, about the suffering of the Jews in Europe as well as the British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, nevertheless fell largely on deaf ears in Washington.¹⁴

As was indicated earlier, American Jews did not seek to draw public recognition to their cause or concerns before and during the the Second World War. After 1945, American Jewish leaders appealed to Government officials and U.N. Commission members on behalf of the Jewish refugees from the *Shoah* who were gathered in the Displaced Persons (DP) Camps in Europe.¹⁵ Most of these initiatives were done by religious or Jewish communal organizational leaders reaching out to public officials on humanitarian not political grounds. As most of the Jewish communities in Europe were destroyed, the only place where Jews could try to mobilize themselves was in the U.S. Even in America, however, Jews like most immigrant groups at

12 The meeting with King Ibn Saud produced an important letter from the President which was sent one week prior to his death. President Roosevelt's letter was a response to the King's letter which had explained how critical it was for the King to reiterate the position he had articulated to the Americans in their meeting concerning any future possible U.S. support for Jewish immigration to Palestine after the end of the War. Roosevelt's letter exchange would quickly become President Truman's problem. See letters: <http://www.mideastweb.org/roosevelt.htm>

13 <http://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/exhibits/brandeis/zionism/zionism.html>

14 See especially, Michael Makovsky, *Churchill's Promised Land*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2007. Markovsky also discusses the British response to Truman's urging to permit Jewish Holocaust survivors to obtain refuge in Palestine.

15 See especially the recent book on this subject: Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry Truman and the Founding of the State of Israel*, Harper Collins, New York, NY, 2009, pp.92-111.

that time, were working to assimilate and acculturate in American society and did not want to draw dramatic attention to their former national identity or their religious affiliation; especially a group as small as the Jewish community. In addition, there remained Jews in this period who did identify as Jews but were not Zionists or supporters of Jewish settlement in Palestine, especially within the Reform movement. Responding to this situation—together with the change in the nature of pressure group behavior—eventually would serve to galvanize American Jewish activism.

President Truman, unlike his predecessor, began with a more sympathetic attitude towards the Jews remaining in Europe after the war. Already in the Senate during the War, Truman had sought to encourage those Members of the Administration as well as Congress to foster, support, and advocate settlement (and then resettlement) of Jews in Palestine. At the same time, prior to the establishment of Israel as an independent Jewish state on May 14, 1948, Jews in the United States and their supporters had sought to persuade the Truman Administration not only to vote for partition of the British mandate in Palestine at the United Nations on November 29, 1947, but to work to gain a large enough majority to insure its passage.

The fact that six months later President Harry Truman was the first head of state to recognize the existence of the state of Israel as a free and sovereign state, within minutes of its declaring its independence, did not presuppose the relationship between the two countries which exists today.¹⁶ Most American leaders had generally positive feelings towards Israel, but the strength and depth of that relationship fluctuated greatly from Truman until President Lyndon Johnson in 1967. Certainly, President Eisenhower and especially Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were not especially supportive of Israel. While in Eisenhower's case it was more of a neutral position, it has been suggested in many circles that Dulles indeed was anti-Semitic.¹⁷

President John Kennedy had many strong and close Jewish friends and advisers and, unlike his father, he had no history of cordial relations with the Nazis. The Kennedy Administration had numerous visible, high profile Jews not the least of whom was Secretary of Labor Arthur Goldberg. Kennedy did not distinguish himself during his 1000 Days in office, however, with any dramatic

16 The story of the U.S. role in the Palestine partition fight has been told in many places as has President Truman's decision to immediately recognize the creation of the State of Israel. Of late there is a growing suggestion that despite Truman's long-standing humanitarian sympathies for the Jewish refugees now languishing in Europe, by May 1948 he was also growing increasingly aware of the tenuous lead he held among Jewish supporters going into the November presidential election.

17 Indicative of the general feeling in the Eisenhower years towards Israel, Michael Oren notes that Secretary Dulles in fact referred to the Jewish State as "the millstone around our necks". Oren, *op.cit.*, p.513.

show of support for Israel. In terms of aid, during most of the first 20 years of its existence, Israel sought out and received most of its military support from France, from Eastern Europe, and from the British. Ironically, it was mostly from Germany that Israel would receive financial aid. The amount of the World War II reparations program negotiated with the West German Government by the Jewish Agency reached \$1.5 billion. Beginning in 1951 the reparations which were paid out over 14 years were a considerable help to Israel's young and struggling economy.

The truly dramatic change in the political behavior of American Jews in terms of their concerns and their advocacy on behalf of the state of Israel would grow out of their observation of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 60's. It would be the outspokenness of black leaders, their demands, and marches coupled with the anti-Vietnam war movement and the public growth of the feminist and gay movements which had a dramatic effect on the behavior of American Jews. It was the confluence of these events at home plus Israel's dramatic victory in the 1967 Six Day War which brought American Jews to a political place from which they have continued to grow and develop.

A Very Visible Jewish Community

The American Jewish community is also extremely well organized. Historically, Jews always developed religious and social service organizations to address the needs of their community. From dealing with the poor, the elderly, and the indigent as well as the community's ritual needs, Jews always had a set of agencies—formal or informal depending on the size of the community—which handled their requirements. In addition, Jews traditionally created methods or arrangements for addressing and communicating with local and national authorities; especially during times of need, or struggle or persecution. Similarly, over the past 100 years or more in the United States, as the Jewish population increased and spread throughout the country, American Jews developed a set of Jewish national agencies, with local and/or regional operations to manage and advocate on behalf of the needs of the Jewish community. Jewish political problems were championed by leaders and reflected at the ballot box. Even before campaign contributions became the pervasive force they have become today, Jews understood the importance of political giving as well as the power of the vote.

Compared with other ethnic groups, Jews have always voted in very high numbers. While national averages of overall voter participation has recently slowly begun to rise, percentages of Jews who voted immediately after they received their citizenship as immigrants, as well as for the American-born population was reported to be over 90%. Politicians comprehended that Jews understood the system and were ready to “deal” so that at least some of their concerns might be addressed.¹⁸

There are approximately 6 million Jews in America today representing less than 2.5% of the national population.¹⁹ Jews are

18 According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, at least 84% of Jews are registered to vote and virtually all of them turnout; the highest of any ethnic, racial, or religious group. Most Jews are registered Democrats and have been so since such statistics were first developed. Jewish support for Democrats in some cases reached 90%. There has been some drift over the last 30 years at least at the national level, but Jews continue to constitute a generally reliable 70% for Democratic candidates.

19 There is considerable debate as to this number based on religious determinants as to “who is or is not Jewish.” The numbers used herein tend to be the generally accepted figures but they can and are questioned by some sectors of the Jewish community. Suffice to say that this internal debate bears no substantive impact on the general thesis presented here that Jewish involvement in public life is

concentrated in major population centers, large states, and large cities. They are active in all aspects of American public life from law to medicine to academia to the arts to politics. Jewish representation in many areas of American life dramatically exceeds its percentage in the national population. In the 112th Congress, 13 of 100 Senators identify themselves as Jews, and 27 out of 435 Members of the House of Representatives do as well. Three out of the nine Supreme Court Justices are Jewish and there are innumerable Jewish jurists in the lower federal courts and throughout the 50 state court systems. While Jews do live predominantly in the large states and within large cities, it is worth observing that there are Jewish members in Congress from New Hampshire with a Jewish population of 10,000 (0.8%), Tennessee with a Jewish population of 19,000 (0.3%), and Kentucky with a Jewish population of 11,000 (0.3%). It might be understandable that there are two Jewish—both female—Senators from California with a Jewish population of 1.2 million (3.3%), but until 2009, the state of Wisconsin was represented by two Jewish Senators, although there are only 28,000 Jews in Wisconsin or 0.5% of the overall population.²⁰

Despite the fact that they are small in total numbers, Jews are extremely engaged and active in America politics. Their participation is not limited to the elected level. In addition to the judicial branch, all national governments for at least the past 80 years have had numerous Jews in high level appointed positions, even in the State Department. At a staff level, in the White House or Capitol Hill, and throughout the federal bureaucracy there are Jews at every key level. Similarly, there are Jewish activists who are engaged in political campaigns for both parties and at all levels of Government.

What is critically important for American Jews is that they are respected for their participation and engagement. While some anti-Semitism persists in the United States, Jews have virtually no compunctions about being visible, public, and positive about both their politics as well as their religion. As was mentioned this has been even more so since the 1967 Six Day War which coincided with the change that the civil rights movement brought to ethnic, sexual, and religious political activism. Since the late 1970's beginning with President Jimmy Carter, there has been White House participation in lighting the National Chanukah Menorah. President Bill Clinton held candle lighting ceremonies at the White House and President George W. Bush began to hold Chanukah Parties. President Obama even arranged and attended a Passover Seder.

dramatically greater than their numbers. In general a public figure who identifies him/herself as Jewish is considered here to be Jewish.

20 www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0077.pdf

Jewish Support for Israel: The AIPAC Machine

It has been in the area of developing support in the U.S. for the state of Israel that Jewish activism became the most pronounced, visible, and effective. An analysis of the behavior of the American Jewish community is a microcosm of how pressure groups have developed and evolved in America since the end of World War II. It exemplifies precisely the role an effective pressure group can have in the United States. It also is an example of how well organized groups influence the political process. In this case, the story is one of how Jewish support for Israel has grown; how group (Jewish) behavior has changed; and how the political system has evolved in response to the role played today by groups seeking to influence the entire political and governmental process.²¹

In the period shortly after the creation of the state of Israel, numerous Zionist organizations in the United States sought to find ways to promote and support the nascent Jewish state. While there were numerous Zionist groups across the political spectrum in the United States throughout the 20th Century, it would be in 1951 that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) would be conceived as an outgrowth of the American Zionist Council (AZC). It was more formally established in 1954 when its leader I.L. (Si) Kenen became the head of AIPAC, where he would remain until he retired in 1974.²²

Kenen registered as a lobbyist for Israel in 1951 and succeeded in obtaining a combined total of \$65 million of aid for Israel; \$15

²¹ Even the judicial branch has been affected by the growth of groups. During the 1960's Senator J. William Fulbright (D-AK), then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, periodically raised the question whether the Justice Department and/or the Internal Revenue Service ought to move against Jewish charities because, Fulbright suggested, they were acting in violation of their tax exemption. <http://irmep.org/ILA/01161964USTreasury.pdf>

²² See I.L. Kenen, *Israel's Defense Line*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y., 1981. Although Kenen's autobiography, it tells in intimate detail the growth, development, and role played by AIPAC during the first decades of the existence of the State of Israel. Much of Kenen's argument and rationale are decried and assailed in John J. Mearsheimer & Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby, Farrar, Straus and Giroux*, New York, 2007, which attacks the power of the Israeli lobby and of American Jews' influence on U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

million in economic assistance and \$50 million in refugee re-settlement. By the time Kenen would leave AIPAC, Israel would be receiving annually more than \$3 billion of aid from the U.S. both in economic as well as military assistance. It was out of this small beginning first with Kenen and then under its subsequent leaders that today, AIPAC has developed into one of the most effective, reliable, and formidable interest groups in Washington.²³

While it took time for a formal strategy to develop, Israeli leaders and their American Jewish supporters understood the need to befriend and insure the backing of the most powerful country in the world. Their politics were based first on the notion that even with great community generosity—which no one knew would be forthcoming—Israel and the interests of American Jews were small concerns for any American president or aspirant. Second, they understood that they did not have the potential to fund-raise to a level that would, by itself, demand recognition for Jewish or Israeli concerns. Third, they knew that Presidents come and go but Congress was a different matter. Different political parties are in power for varied periods of time, but Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle frequently remain in office for 20 years or more. Soliciting and insuring their support for Israel would enable Israel to maintain a solid core of backers who could be relied upon regardless of the circumstances. Congress, they understood as well, is the constitutional keeper of the purse. U.S. assistance to Israel—initially largely only economic—would need to be enacted by Congress regardless of the support that they might have from any given Administration in the White House. Consequently, maintaining strong, bi-partisan relationships with Congress, could be the ultimate key to good relationships with the United States.

Conversely, all of these Senators and Representatives needed to be re-elected and their constituents—Jewish or non-Jewish—could play a role. Members of the Jewish community and especially Jewish constituents wanted their Members to support strong U.S.-Israel ties. In House or Senate races Jewish donors could be more significant and influential in the aggregate than they could be at the national presidential level. In addition, constituents in the U.S. can and do approach their Members on issues important to them. Single member districts require Members to pay attention to the concerns and needs of their constituents at least as much as they follow the directions of their party or their leaders or even their own personal ideology. Adoption of this strategy, with years of very hard, dedicated, and diligent effort, worked.

To its supporters as well its detractors, AIPAC today is recognized by its ability to muster grassroots support throughout the

²³ Kenen, *Ibid*, pp.66-80. See also, Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby*, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 1987, pp. 34-39.

country on behalf of the state of Israel. Using a series of approaches—adapted and modified as times and needs have changed—AIPAC comes armed today with a network of members reportedly exceeding 100,000. There is virtually no Member of the U.S. Congress—both in the House and the Senate—who is not regularly visited and spoken to by AIPAC lobbyists and/or home-town constituents who are members of AIPAC to solidify their support for sustaining strong U.S.-Israel relations. This is accomplished by insuring that Members understand how their “folks” back home feel about specific issues which Congress is considering that affect U.S.-Israel relations.

Members also know that AIPAC has been the quiet voice in the background producing data about the voting records of all congressional incumbents on matters affecting the U.S. relationship with Israel. AIPAC developed and for years has regularly systematized a process whereby it evaluates the voting records of House and Senate Members on what they determine to be “key” votes in Congress.²⁴ These scores are made public and are available for those supporters of AIPAC who seek to assist “friends” of Israel with political campaign contributions. Members of Congress who are viewed as strongly pro-Israel know that they are likely to be able to parlay a strong pro-Israel record into assistance in their political fundraising efforts. AIPAC does not engage directly in political campaigns or directly advocate for any candidate.²⁵ This is not a *quid pro quo* but as is the case on all national political issues in Washington, friends (in this case the Jewish community) will help friends (Members in Congress who believe that strong U.S.-Israeli ties are in the best interest of the U.S.)

AIPAC’s effectiveness has grown consistently since the 1950’s. In political terms, many observers cite the defeat of Representative Paul Findley (R-IL)—the Member that AIPAC supporters called Yassir Arafat’s man in Congress—in his 1982 re-election bid as one of the first and most dramatic examples of how effective the Jewish community had become in participating in the electoral process. Findley was beaten by a young Illinois Democrat, Dick Durbin, now the senior senator from Illinois and Senate Democratic Majority Whip, in part because of extensive Jewish financial support for Durbin’s campaign.²⁶ The subsequent defeat of Senator Chuck

24 These might be votes on foreign aid, on military support for Israel, in favor or opposed to arms sales to various Arab countries, on anti-terrorism legislation, and on key congressional letters to a President, urging or opposing a Middle East policy direction.

25 As will be explained later, this is one of the very important operational differences between AIPAC and J Street.

26 After Findley was defeated in 1982, he charged alleged collusion of pro-Israel political action committees in jointly targeting his race. He argued that this was being done in direct violation of Federal election law. Ultimately, in Federal Election

Percy, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, coincidentally also a Republican from Illinois, by Representative Paul Simon in 1984 was seen as a further affirmation of the extent to which financial support from the pro-Israel community could defeat even political giants in the U.S. Senate. AIPAC had mobilized its troops to defeat a sitting senator deemed to be too closely aligned with Israel's oil-producing neighbors and thus damaging to Israel.²⁷

AIPAC members also adopted a rule which they followed scrupulously as they became more and more involved in political contests; viz., the "incumbent" rule. When a sitting Member of the House or Senate—who has been rated as supportive of strong U.S.-Israel relations—is challenged by someone who appears to be equally strong, AIPAC supporters have always backed the incumbent, or at minimum not supported the opponent. The classic example of this was in the 1988 Connecticut Senate race when the national Jewish community urged its friends to continue to support incumbent Republican Senator Lowell Weicker, despite the fact that he was opposed by the then Connecticut state Attorney-General Democrat Joseph Lieberman, a strongly committed Jew.

Throughout the years, AIPAC has helped its supporters maintain what they refer to as a strongly pro-Israel Congress. At the same time Members turn to AIPAC's analysis and direction on what is best for the U.S.-Israel relationship, regardless of the number of Jewish constituents that reside in their district and regardless of their political party. As for political aspirants, over the past twenty years or so, anyone seeking congressional office in the House or the Senate from either party, has found his/her way to AIPAC's offices to present his/her views on issues that affect the U.S.-Israel relationship. Aspirants have developed position papers which outline their level of commitment to this relationship. Such action has not given candidates any endorsement from AIPAC, but it has insulated them from receiving any negative feedback from segments of the Jewish community for questionable positions on key Israel-related issues. The very fact that candidates feel the need to follow this ritual with AIPAC speaks legions about the power of the Jewish community

Commission vs. Akins, 524 U.S. 11 (1998), the U.S. Supreme Court did not accept this interpretation. For a report on the decision, see:

<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/02/us/high-court-lowers-shield-election-panel-also-agrees-hear-deportation-appeal.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

²⁷ In the case of the Percy-Simon Senate race, unlike the Findley-Durbin House race, there was also a significantly large Jewish community in Illinois whose solid support for Simon it was known could also positively shift the direction of the contest. It is also important to consider the fact that the Arab oil producers could easily outspend Jews ready to back Simon, but their engagement was not effective or organized. While it did gain corporate support, unlike the AIPAC "troops" there were few Arab-Americans or Arab-American organizations which were sufficiently well trained to match AIPAC's muscle, and that of the voters of Illinois.

among candidates and vis-à-vis voters and potential financial supporters. This well-organized machine is the political system which J Street seeks to challenge.

It is in the policy arena and the legislative domain, however, that AIPAC operates as an equally formidable venture. Here it functions as the registered lobby for the state of Israel. Perhaps the most critical explanation for AIPAC's success as lobbyists on behalf of the U.S.-Israel relationship is that they have proven themselves over the years to have been factually incredibly reliable. AIPAC's information has been consistently accurate. There is a cardinal rule in Washington concerning Members and their relationship to lobbyists: Never present a Member with information which is even possibly inaccurate. If a Member of Congress is embarrassed or proven wrong on anything he/she asserts as factual, the group and the lobby will never have access to the Member or his staff again. In this regard AIPAC's record has been virtually flawless.

As lobbyists, AIPAC works at two levels on behalf of the interests of the state of Israel. First, from the beginning, AIPAC developed an extremely dedicated and respected team of professionals. Most of the senior AIPAC lobbyists have extensive, prior Capitol Hill experience. By the 1980's many of them also had experience in the Executive Branch as well. They were totally conversant in all the subtleties of the issues as well as all the arcane procedural nuances of both the House and the Senate. Many of the lobbyists knew the Members and their personal and key committee staffs intimately. This enabled AIPAC to have regular, prompt, and effective access if and when necessary. As was mentioned, their most important asset beyond the perceived credibility of their client—the state of Israel—was the accuracy of the information provided to Congress and to the Administration.

AIPAC also had another level of non-professional lobbyists which it cultivated from its inception but especially beginning in the 1970's: constituent lobbyists. While AIPAC recognized the need for a sophisticated staff approach to representing the pro-Israel case in Washington, it now devoted more time to recruiting a larger and national grassroots organization composed largely of Jews who understand the AIPAC message on Israel. AIPAC sought to create a huge cadre of constituent lobbyists who could and would develop personal relationships with their own individual Members in the House and the Senate. As constituents and voters, AIPAC members brought a further key element to AIPAC's desire to sustain Congress' interest and support for strong U.S.-Israel relations. Through very hard work, AIPAC succeeded in finding and securing pro-Israel supporters in every state and every House district in the country, despite the fact that in many parts of the U.S. there were very few Jews. This meant that AIPAC had constituent, pro-Israel supporters throughout the United States. It is equally important to note that Members of Congress knew that as well, and recognized that were always some "folks back home" who were taking notes or being

informed by AIPAC on how they were voting and speaking on issues related to U.S.-Israel relations.²⁸

AIPAC has also adopted another very effective technique to buttress the support of Members for their issues and to underscore the trust and confidence to insure support for key votes: AIPAC arranges for Members to visit Israel. AIPAC seeks to find support from its membership to organize trips to Israel for House and Senate Members as well as the staffs of Members, frequently with their spouses as well. The outcome of these trips in terms of solidifying support for Israel in Congress over the years has been remarkable. AIPAC also reaches out throughout the country to state-wide and even local political leaders (the next generation of Members of Congress) to educate them as well about Israel. Together with Jewish community relations groups and Jewish federations throughout the country, local and state-wide politicians (and frequently key staffers as well) are courted and brought into the information loop about the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Perhaps the most remarkable measure of AIPAC's political clout in Washington is the turnout for the annual Washington policy conference and in particular the participation and attendance of Members of Congress at their gala dinner. At their most recent 2011 dinner, AIPAC's "roll-call" of Members of Congress included 70 Senators and 270 Members of the House of Representatives, together with numerous congressional staff people, representatives of numerous Administration departments and agencies, and members of the Washington diplomatic corps. Members of Congress—even those with long-standing impeccable pro-Israel credentials—know that they miss appearing at this dinner at their "political" peril.

A further indication of AIPAC's outreach over the past 20 years or so is its expansion of its ranks of supporters in new directions. These have included Jewish college students (through the creation of AIPAC campus groups); Jewish and non-Jewish college campus political leaders and campus activists; outreach into predominantly Black colleges and universities; and, most importantly, into the Christian evangelical community.²⁹

28 Evidence of the reach and support that AIPAC was able to develop can be seen by examining, for example, resolutions or letters to the President. Many of these initiatives, while drafted by AIPAC together with congressional staff, have as their key sponsors, not only the expected congressional leaders in foreign and national security policy, but Members who came from areas of the country where there were few Jews.

29 One of the most dramatic events that has occurred at an AIPAC policy conference, happened in March 2007 where a major presentation was made by Reverend John Hagee, the head of the Cornerstone Church in Texas, CEO of Global Evangelism Television, and President of John Hagee Ministries. The Church has a membership of over 20,000 and his weekly services are seen worldwide in 245 countries. Reverend Hagee presented his views about the need to support Israel

There is a need to understand this last relationship in a number of contexts. Historically, Jews have built relationships with Christians out of a sense of extreme confidence or enormous trepidation. Given the long history of Church-based anti-Semitism, there has been much skepticism within many Jewish circles as to the motivation of Christians seeking alliances with Jews. Many Jews have always questioned whether the Church was seeking really only to proselytize Jews and did not truly seek improved relations and constructive engagement with Jews. While certainly there has been much progress in Christian-Jewish relations since the end of World War II, matters such as Pope Pius XII's questionable silence during the war have also always hung over the head of these new initiatives.

Pope John XXIII and Vatican II *Nostra Aetate* as well as Pope John Paul II outreach to both Jews and their suffering during the Holocaust as well as his visit to Jerusalem all demonstrated serious efforts by the Church to begin to change the record on the Church's relationship with the Jewish community. Among many Jews, nevertheless, there remained much anxiety.

Similarly, the relationship of mainline Protestant Churches with Jews and the Jewish community, although better than the Catholic Church's, was also affected by many of their own missionary groups historically operating in the Holy Land. Jews never reached out to Christian bodies per se for support, as much as they sought to insure a non-objectionable, tolerable strategy from these Church groups.

On the matter of both groups' relationship with the state of Israel, the Arab world, and Muslims, Christian groups generally were perceived as less sensitive to the Jewish-Israeli narrative. Israel and its supporters have always felt that Christian concerns for Arab refugees or Palestinian rights have raised far greater sensitivities within various Christian circles than Jews being attacked by terrorists or living under a constant threat of people or groups threatening their annihilation.

It is in this context that the growing support emerging from within Christian evangelical, fundamentalist circles must be seen. Jewish suspicions, therefore, were exceedingly high although some Israelis tended to be considerably more cavalier, arguing that they were interested in receiving support and friendship from any circles without concern or investigation of any underlying motive. For them, the theological or philosophical rational basis underlying this support was totally irrelevant.

before 8,000 delegates, primarily Jews. While Hagee himself and his church present concerns to many in the Jewish community, such rousing support for Israel from a man who preaches weekly to thousands of parishioners and millions of viewers on television was extraordinary. See the John Hagee Ministry web site: <http://www.jhm.org/Home/About>

Within American politics, therefore, as Evangelical clergy and Church leaders increased their visible and public support for Israel, pro-Israel groups opted to follow the lead of Israeli leaders and curry their engagement with them in their now “mutual” interests in maintaining strong U.S.-Israel ties. For Members of Congress and/or those in the Executive Branch who themselves were fundamentalist Christians, while support for Israel may have been naturally part of their doctrine, Israel does not assume the dominant place it possesses within the Jewish community. Evangelical Christians fit in, rather, as a clear, significant, secondary group lobbying in support of Israel. AIPAC’s initiatives to reach out to this group, therefore, was a natural extension of its interest to show that support for Israel is broad-based.

Speaking with One Voice

The American Jewish community over the years adopted and accepted a united operative approach as how best to lobby on behalf of Israel and to maintain strong compatible ties between the U.S. and Israel. Unlike many business or commercial lobbyists or other pressure groups, the pro-Israel community has understood that it has finite financial resources, regardless of how extraordinarily generous the Jewish community is. Unlike the National Rifle Association or the Chamber of Commerce or the oil industry, the pro-Israel community cannot approach the potential donor base that these or many other groups can reach.³⁰ The message which the pro-Israel community presents must have an inherent integrity to transcend those voices which may be able to challenge it. The Jewish community's only real question was how to present and make political demands on U.S. leaders and politicians. They arrived at a strategy which has been in place—more or less consistently—certainly since the Six Day War.

When it came to the matter of Israel's essential political and security needs, only the Government of Israel could determine its interests and policy. Political forces in Israel could challenge Israeli policy. However, American Jews have no right to tell the Government of Israel what it should or should not do. American Jews do not live in Israel, are not citizens, do not vote there and do not serve in the military. The relationship between Israel and the United States, it was argued, needs to be decided in Jerusalem, not in New York or Los Angeles. Jews in the United States should support the policies of whatever legitimate government is in power in Israel, regardless if a Jew in America agrees or disagrees. Ultimately, only Israel can decide whether a certain policy is critical for the long-term survival of the state or not. Jews on the left or the right as well as main-line groups should find ways to communicate their views to the Government of Israel, but not in public. Foreign governments, even friendly governments like the U.S., should not get a mixed message. The only true policy advocacy which Washington should be receiving is the one developed by the elected leaders of the Government of Israel.

30 For example, according to the Washington Post, the National Rifle Association (NRA) by comparison has 4.3 million members and it raised \$220 million in 2010. See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/16/AR20100605341.html>

American advocacy for the state of Israel, therefore, has evolved into a system of one and only one major voice, led by AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations (Presidents' Conference).³¹ While AIPAC is the registered pro-Israel lobby, the Presidents' Conference is composed of 52 constituent groups from across the political and religious spectrums. It includes the "Presidents" of all the major Jewish defense groups, religious groups, synagogue groups, social welfare organizations, and Zionist groups. They meet, discuss, and consult regularly about issues and policies. Groups like the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, the Zionist Organization of American as well as others do take positions on their own and remain independent, but when the Presidents' Conference's Executive or Chair speaks in public it reflects the collective view of the constituent groups.³² Groups can dissent but this is exceedingly rare. Sometimes the failure of the Presidents' Conference to present a position on a given issue is a reflection of a dissenting voice or two in the group.

AIPAC, its leadership, its Board, and its staff, generally follow the direction of the Government of Israel, although both AIPAC and the leadership of the President's Conference share, guide, and even advise Israel as to what they believe might be the best strategy in dealing with a specific issue.

Their operating rationale is that any and all opponents of Israel only need a small opening of discontent or qualification emerging from within the American Jewish community, to justify seeking a modified position in U.S. support for Israel. No one dissents or drifts off the reservation and certainly not in public. Most important in terms of policy and politics, decision-makers in governments know only one address to which to turn when it comes to their staking out a position on Israel. This has been the position during Israel's tenuous early days, during the grave existential crises of 1967 and 1973, and today, when Israel—while still very much threatened by her neighbors in a multitude of ways—is a modern, dynamic, and vibrant Western democracy.

31 The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations is today composed of 52 constituent groups from across the political and religious spectrums. <http://www.conferenceofpresidents.org/>

J Street is not a member of the organization although it participated in a number of key meetings with public and elected officials, most recently a meeting held with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice prior to the fractious opening session of the recent General Assembly session. See http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0911/Rice_meets_with_Jewish_leaders_on_UN_push.html

32 Many of the constituent groups have very large and broad agendas which extends to an entire array of domestic issues as well as foreign policy ones—in addition to Israel. There also some groups whose primary area of focus is concerns at home and only have a passing focus on Israel.

To be sure, existential crises did not totally dilute or eliminate the efforts of groups which disagreed with Israeli political decisions and the public support for those positions as articulated by AIPAC and/or the Presidents' Conference. Some of these disputes were resolved in conference rooms, most frequently behind closed doors. While sometimes such dissent has become visible, rarely has it caused a serious ruffle in the eyes of the general American public or even within the larger Jewish community. Some of the more sophisticated or tuned in among elites in the Jewish community follow and even comment on these eruptions, but generally they literarily fall away after much "huffing and puffing". More importantly, for the leadership of the Jewish community and even more so for Israel, these discussions rarely if ever make a blip on any foreign political leader's radar.

During the Clinton Administration, for example, both the President and First Lady showed extensive evidence of their longstanding friendships with the Jewish community. President Clinton, even before he developed deep affection for Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, had friends, advisers, and supporters within the American Jewish community who also had deep ties with, and were supporters of, Israel. It was known, however, that the Clintons were especially close to a number of members of Americans for Peace Now (APN) as well as Israel Policy Forum (IPF) both of which were small, left of center groups which were pro-Israel but sought to support and advance virtually all U.S. initiatives which might move Israel and her neighbors closer to peace.³³ They encouraged President Clinton and worked with him to push a more aggressive pro-peace agenda especially during the Oslo period. At the end of the day, the Presidents' Conference brought both APN and IPF into its tent, tried to maintain their discussion "within the family", and the voice of the major umbrella organizations continued to speak for the American pro-Israel community. As for groups like Peace Now (*Shalom Achshav*) or *Meimad*, which were also seen as the American branches of pro-peace Israeli groups in America—like APN and IPF—they developed small followings and were able to attract some interest but ultimately could not sustain themselves due both to inadequate financial support or because they were intimidated by

33 For the most detailed participant-observer discussion of the peace process negotiations see Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, NY, 2004. For a candid and blunt evaluation of the process and the politics and players involved, especially the dynamics between the American Jewish community and the Clinton Administration (as well as those from President Reagan through George Bush), see Aaron David Miller, *The Much Too Promised Land*, Bantam Books, New York, NY, 2008. Both Miller and Ross worked together in the State Department on various critical aspects of the Arab-Israeli peace process for over 20 years serving under Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. Miller continued under President George W. Bush, while Ross returned to serve in the Obama White House in a similar capacity until November 2011.

urgings, cajoling, and pressuring of various leaders within the mainstream Jewish community.³⁴

34 Just as these groups developed on the left so too were there groups which emerged on the right; but being stronger or “more” pro-Israel was never frowned upon, except when they supported or resorted to violence. In the 1990’s, the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) began a period of resurgence. ZOA still engages in lobbying on Capitol Hill for harder line positions. They have generated a considerable amount of publicity, but until today have not developed a significant grassroots membership. They too come into the tent of the Presidents’ Conference.

Enter J Street

As was the case historically among Jews, especially since Jewish emancipation in the 19th Century, there have always been some, particularly on the political extremes, who have dissented for one reason or another from the communal leadership. This was especially true as the religious reform tradition developed, but was equally so as Jews became engaged in movements for political and economic change. Jewish socialists, for example, were among the leading activists and advocates in the Zionist movement on the one hand and on behalf of various workers' parties that developed throughout Europe on the other. They were also extremely active in the anti-war, peace movement following World War I—certainly prior to the advent of the Nazis. Much of this trend carried over to America in the 20th Century, as Jews immigrated there.

As Jews became more comfortable in America, many of this group drifted further and further away from their practicing religious roots while maintaining much of their social-political conscience. The physical as well as the psychological security that has emerged within the American Jewish community today has also led in some circles to a growing willingness to criticize other Jews and especially Israelis and/or the Government of Israel. The engagement of Jews in left-wing causes has naturally translated, therefore, into their support or criticism of the state of Israel and its politics.

It is largely this group—although not exclusively—which is the most visible and engaged components of the J Street movement; politically left, non-affiliated, secular or cultural Jews.³⁵ There is also a following for J Street on college campuses. While it is difficult to determine how deep or wide is this interest and backing, J Street clearly is endeavoring to increase its outreach to the university community which has always been a traditional place where left-oriented support can be found. J Street even appointed early on a

35 While this is not an empirical observation, it is clear that J Street does have a preponderance of leftists, old and new; marginally religious; unaffiliated; and peaceniks, with a sprinkling of traditional Zionist Jewish activists. There also are some academics and committed Jews who are critical of Israel, but who come to the table as true left-wing Zionists. Finally, there are definitely some disaffected and/or alienated Jews.

Director of College Activities and ran special programs for students at their conferences.³⁶

When J Street was created in 2008, it was established as a pro-Israel, pro-peace interest group. It described itself as “the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans.” In its Statement of Principles it expressed its purpose very clearly:

*J Street brings together Americans to advocate for active U.S. diplomatic engagement in the Middle East and broader public and policy debate in national politics and the American Jewish community about ways to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East.*³⁷

Jeremy Ben-Ami, the President of J Street, stated more clearly in his book why he believed J Street needed to be created: “And a new voice is needed for an American Jewish community,... to redefine what it means to be pro-Israel in the twenty-first century.”³⁸ From this description one would be hard pressed to conclude that J Street was or has become the most controversial group to have emerged from within the Jewish community since the days of the American Council for Judaism which essentially disappeared after the 1967 Six Day War.³⁹

As was mentioned earlier, J Street is not the first group to seek to present an alternative approach to support for Israel or publicly challenge Israeli Government policy. Historically, there have been differing movements or groups in the American Jewish community which have sought to substitute an alternative approach to the relationship between American Jews and Israel. These have ranged from the anti-Zionist American Council of Judaism whose existence predates the establishment of the state of Israel, to Rabbi Meir Kahane’s Jewish Defense League (JDL) which advocated an extremely militant posture for American Jews.⁴⁰ There were differing

³⁶ In their college activities there were instances where they intentionally removed the “pro-Israel” slogan from their motto to encourage participation from more extreme campus groups. <http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/Article.aspx?id=158660>

³⁷ <http://jstreet.org/about/j-street-Statement-principles/>

³⁸ Jeremy Ben-Ami, *A New Voice For Israel*, Palgrave, Macmillan, New York, NY, 2011, p 224.

³⁹ The American Council for Judaism (ACJ) was formed in 1943 from within the Reform movement in the United States. Its membership was composed largely of German Jews who opposed the Zionist movement. The ACJ opposed the creation of the State of Israel and U.S. support for Israel. It reportedly reached a high point of about 20,000 members in the 1950’s. Today, the ACJ reportedly has approximately 2000 members. It has no influence within the American Jewish community nor on U.S. policy makers.

⁴⁰ The JDL was founded initially in 1968 as a group advocating in favor of freedom for the Jews in the U.S.S.R. As this cause became popularized and more mainstream, Kahane moved the group into a strong, right-wing, Zionist organization. After Kahane moved to Israel, he formed a political party there and eventually was

voices within various religious branches from the early Reform movement which was not supportive of the state to the *Neturei Karta* ultra-orthodox group which opposes any form of support for a Jewish state in Israel, absent the advent of the Messiah. In addition, there have been all sorts of voices in between.

Specifically, J Street grew out of a sense of frustration among their particular segment of the Jewish community, that the state of Israel and especially the Government of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was not moving with a serious and sincere enough purpose to reach a settlement with the Palestinian people. In light of the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process followed by the withdrawal from Lebanon, the Second Intifada, the August 2005 unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, and the 2006 War in Lebanon, many Israelis—on both the left and the right—became frustrated with the continuing *status quo* and many American Jews feared that the next major incursion against or by Israel could involve unconventional weapons. This fear and frustration led some of those on the left to believe that they were unable to move the American Jewish establishment from a blind allegiance to all Israeli governments regardless of their policies. They were prepared to advocate publicly, therefore, on behalf of an alternative, pro-peace role for the U.S. Government vis-à-vis Israel. In 2008 they decided to create J Street, a more assertive, targeted, and focused peace committed group.

Structurally, J Street made two critically important decisions. Unlike so many other dissident groups, on both the right and the left, J Street opted not only to be another tax-exempt organization which would seek to educate the community and American leaders about a vision and approach to Middle East peace, but to engage in active political action as well. They could and would collect charitable funds and use them for educational and advocacy purposes as far as the law permitted. In addition, J Street created a formal registered lobbying operation—not representing the Government of Israel as does AIPAC—as well as a political action committee (PAC). Both of these J Street arms would be funded with non-tax exempt contributions.

J Street thus became not only a group involved in political education, but also a formal political lobbying organization and a political fund-raising group as well. These separate legal entities would operate similarly to AIPAC, except that its political arm would not only openly lobby Congress, but, unlike AIPAC, would raise money and work to encourage its donors to engage in political fund-raising and political giving individually and through its PAC. J Street believed that there was a significant number of Members of Congress who were truly sympathetic to their position. The J Street leadership

elected to the Israeli Knesset. When his party, Kach, became too extremist there, it was banned and his activities also limited.

believed that Members of Congress would be far more prepared to dissent from the positions of the Jewish mainstream if they felt that there was still a serious reservoir of Jewish financial support which would support them, despite their disassociation from the AIPAC “line”. If J Street had the potential to raise and donate enough to fatten their campaign coffers, these Members would be prepared to engage the Administration and other Jewish groups as well as Israeli leadership. Most importantly for J Street, it would enable it and its supporters on Capitol Hill to urge the American Government as well as the Israeli Government to pursue a policy which was more aggressive in seeking peace with its neighbors and making bolder moves for peace.

J Street, unlike many fringe groups which endeavored to affect the mainstream supporters of Israel, began with a major substantial core of financial supporters. It knew, from the beginning, that it could create and underwrite a sizeable staff and would have funding to generate a significant amount of publicity. In September 2010, J Street said it had 160,000 supporters and had raised a total of more than \$11 million from more than 10,000 donors. While it is unclear how large their actual membership is, it became known that they did receive major financial backing from, among others, the major, global financier George Soros.⁴¹ This reality alone—the potential to raise serious funds—enabled the J Street leadership to project the organization as a serious entity within the American Jewish community. Now that the J Street leadership knew it could publicize its position, it remained to be determined for whom it was speaking, on what issues it would speak, and how it would do so.

Over the course of the past three and a half years, J Street has made numerous efforts to place itself and its views into the peace process discussion. While frequently J Street has not deviated from the general consensus, there have been a number of times when that has not been the case. For example, on May 31, 2010, after the Israeli seizure of the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara*, which was part of the Gaza bound flotilla and the killing of nine militant Turkish citizens by the Israeli commandoes trying to turn back the ship, J Street disagreed with the larger pro-Israel community’s response. J Street urged Members of Congress and the Obama Administration to use the incident to encourage the Israelis and Palestinians to seize the opportunity to move into a more engaged mode of peace negotiations and not into recriminations. It did not recognize the extent to which the Israeli commandoes only responded to the attack after they

41 According to J Street, shortly after its launching in the fall of 2008, George Soros and his family made a major donation and have averaged \$250,000 per year through 2010. Soros’ contributions reportedly constituted 7% of the monies raised by J Street organizations. Jeremy Ben-Ami had waffled in response to press questions about Soros’ involvement with J Street and this generated bad publicity for the organization. See <http://jstreet.org/blog/explanation-of-george-soros-j-street-funding/>

themselves were endangered by the reportedly “un-armed” passengers. It also sought to deflect attention away from the larger, anti-Israel (not humanitarian) motives that were behind the entire flotilla. While there were many aspects in this set of decisions, even the United Nations would eventually accept the justification of Israel’s actions, albeit not the intensity of the commandoes’ response.⁴²

With respect to the December 2008 re-entry of Israel into Gaza following continuous attacks from Hamas, J Street clearly sided with the Palestinians with only some general sympathy for the persistent pain suffered by the Jews living in the South on the border with Gaza. Not only was this position not accepted by the Jewish community, but the results of the U.N. Commission chaired by Richard Goldstone were also rejected and eventually largely repudiated by Goldstone himself.⁴³

Finally, J Street has consistently received criticism from many in the American Jewish community concerning their position on Israeli West Bank settlements. The issue here is not whether many Americans—Jews as well as non-Jews—disagree with the Israeli Government’s settlement policy, but rather who and when J Street chooses to criticize the Israelis. For example, in January 2011, after a new U.N. Security Council resolution was introduced condemning Israeli policy, J Street supported the resolution without even suggesting any qualms or qualifications to its one-sidedness. J Street gets itself in trouble and its credibility attacked not because of the sincerity of the views expressed but its own apparent ideological lockstep, which its positions reflect. The fact that it fails to be more nuanced is only one part of the problem. There is a consistent sense that J Street repeatedly appears to be interested in appeasing many of its extreme followers who lament the fate of Palestinians, while criticizing the actions of the Israeli Government.⁴⁴

These types of controversies do affect J Street’s viability and undermine a more positive dialogue. In addition, however, it also is necessary to consider its operation against the model of Jewish communal behavior discussed earlier. On an operating level, J Street is

42 For J Street’s press release in response to the attack, see <http://jstreet.org/blog/following-flotilla-clash-j-street-urges-stronger-us-leadership-to-end-conflict-now/>. For its subsequent response to the pro-Israel community’s political decision and letter circulated in Congress, see <http://jstreet.org/blog/j-street-letter-to-congress-regarding-gaza-flotilla-dear-colleagues/>. See the Report of the Secretary-General’s Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle_east/Gaza_Flotilla_Panel_Report.pdf

43 In discussing the first J Street conference in October 2009, James Kirchick in *The New Republic* observed how J Street’s position on the Gaza re-entry had alienated even one of the leaders of a mainstream organization who had been a J Street backer. See <http://www.tnr.com/blog/the-plank/trouble-j-street>

44 <http://jstreet.org/blog/new-j-street-policy-Statement-on-settlement-expansion-un-security-council-resolution/>

challenging the system which the Jewish community developed in dealing with Members of Congress as well as those in the foreign policy establishment. Those who step outside or seek to modify the united community message are perceived as absolutely marginal. This is true even when Members of Congress themselves, as individuals, are predisposed to an alternative strategy towards U.S.-Israel relations.

In considering, therefore, J Street's future viability, there are three questions to be determined:

Is J Street different when compared to any other historical example of a non-mainstream Jewish organization and if so how?

With the not inconsequential caveats noted above—the size of their financial support and the fact that they are actively engaging in political fund-raising—J Street appears to be like most other non-mainstream Jewish groups. It has a loose but enthusiastic following, but has only obtained token interest from political leaders of either party in Congress and only a nod from Administration members. There have been Members and foreign policy-makers who have appeared at their conferences and J Street has found a willingness on the part of some Members to meet with them. Largely as a result of the fact that the established Jewish community leaders have discouraged it and because Israel's leadership, for the most part, has given them the cold shoulder, J Street remains much like other historical models and, at the present, appears unlikely to change this situation.

Can J Street influence, at a minimum, American political leaders and Members of Congress that their more liberal, leftist "pro-peace" approach is not only correct but acceptable to a large but perhaps silent percentage of American Jews?

J Street's ability to influence the more liberal political leaders is likely to continue to meet with only limited success. Some Members will give lip-service to J Street, but the likelihood is that J Street will obtain its greatest traction and following among Members who are pro-peace and not viewed as especially strongly supportive of Israel, or are even pro-Arab. This would include those Members of Congress who might be predictably likely to publicly question and critique Israeli decisions, sometimes in a less than even-handed manner. While there are significant segments of the American Jewish community who are not enthusiastic supporters of, for example, Israel's settlement policy, J Street will not get them to rally in large numbers behind an initiative publicly critical of the Israeli Government.

Will adopting an alternative, non-mainstream approach which differentiates itself from the larger community approach be politically acceptable to the American voters and especially the American Jewish community? In other words, is it a reasonable path for a politician to take or is it politically risky, maybe even suicidal?

Only a very secure or a retiring Member of Congress might take on the Jewish community's ability to rally behind a political challenger or

against a Member, even in a primary. In addition, Members of Congress like issues they support to be clear and clean. They tend to be pro-life or pro-choice, favor or oppose increased environment regulation, or favor or oppose immigration liberalization. They prefer not to place themselves inside narrow debates which occur within every pressure group. They do not want to get caught inside internal debates between and among groups within the Jewish community.

A concrete example of the problem that J Street faces vis-à-vis Members of Congress, occurred in January of 2011 as a consequence of the position it took on the U.N. resolution on settlements, when it urged the Obama Administration not to veto the U.N. resolution condemning Israel. In response to their release, Representative Gary Ackerman, a powerful, liberal, senior, Jewish House Member from New York who had been a supporter of J Street, announced that he was disassociating himself from J Street because of their position. Ackerman said of their position:

“The decision to endorse the Palestinian and Arab effort to condemn Israel in the UN Security Council is not the choice of a concerned friend trying to help. It is rather the befuddled choice of an organization so open-minded about what constitutes support for Israel that its brains have fallen out.”⁴⁵

For J Street to have a genuine impact it needs to counter this pattern and there is little evidence that this is developing, despite sincere efforts on the part of its leadership. Since its inception, J Street has been subjected to criticism from every place. American Jewish leaders have attacked J Street for not being genuinely pro-Israel. They have argued that criticizing the Israeli government’s diplomatic peace initiatives in public, for example, is placing Israel and Jewish lives in danger. The critics of J Street argue that such policy may well be pro-peace but they are not pro-Israel. This argument resonates especially because there have been some instances where this has been the case, or so it has seemed. Israeli observers and AIPAC members also have argued that J Street operates as if it is in constant motion to challenge AIPAC and the American Jewish community leaders. Regardless of whether this is true or not, the ease with which they are able to sell this to friends on Capitol Hill and in the Administration undermines totally J Street’s ability to make its case.

J Street’s dissent from a monolithic position within the Jewish community is frowned upon at least by AIPAC, the Presidents’ Conference and many of the pro-Israel groups in the U.S. These organizations and umbrella groups strive to sustain the united front largely orchestrated by Israeli government leaders in determining the

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http://voices.washingtonpost.com/right-turn/2011/01/rep_gary_ackerman_blasts_j_str.html

best interests and character of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Diaspora groups, it is suggested, are not functioning political parties or even pressure groups operating within the Israeli democracy. Particularly with respect to the peace process and relations with the Palestinians, Israel must be seen as “pipping the tune”.

It is argued that the “big guys” sometimes stifle dissent within the Jewish community, insist that a united front be expressed to the outside world, and demand control over the political message. Their rationale as explained earlier is that Israel’s survival remains tenuous and Israel’s enemies are only too ready to grasp at any evidence that Jewish leaders disagree. Disagreement, particularly from the left, threatens the larger effort seeking to inform and educate political leaders as to genuine Jewish concerns. While some might suggest that such action by large “factions” vis-à-vis smaller groups is undemocratic—conceivably contradicting the essence of Madison’s argument in Federalist No.10—the mainstream Jewish organizations would suggest that when it comes to Jewish survival a totally democratic system is dangerous. They imply that concerned friends of Israel throughout the world need to accept this.

Conclusion

Pro-Israel advocacy and lobbying falls clearly within the general activity of pressure group behavior and the role of faction as discussed by James Madison. Jewish groups and particularly pro-Israel ones have generated significant attention to become a clear voice in Washington. Jewish leaders have informed, educated, and advocated on behalf of the state of Israel. Within this general group, J Street represents another voice. However, J Street's long term viability as a major political advocacy force within the Jewish community and within the pro-Israel community is dubious.

The questions posed by J Street are rather typical of new pressure groups which develop as a result of new causes or concerns or as reactions, or even as petty jealousies make them believe that the existing groups are ineffective or unrepresentative. This is true of groups in general and within the Jewish community as well. In fact, to some extent, J Street's message has even been co-opted on the one hand or marginalized on the other by the larger groups. Sometimes invited into the tent, J Street can argue that they have been recognized as an important player in policy making within the Jewish community vis-à-vis Israel. The Jewish mainstream would contend that they have brought them in and thus even further minimized their separateness and independence. J Street may be different from the mainstream pro-Israel groups, but not so different from previous or even other left-of-center ones. In addition, J Street may have a following which is sincere and genuine, but truly not consequential within the Jewish community.

Some political leaders do find sympathy with J Street. Some of these individuals do so because they are more pro-peace than pro-Israel or are even pro-Arab. Others however may not be ready to abandon their connection to the mainstream Jewish community unless and until J Street can prove itself to have gained sufficient recognition from outside the Jewish left. Admittedly, J Street does have significant financial support, but it is unclear for how long these resources will be forthcoming, absent a dramatic and more sympathetic shift in the perceptions of political leadership and the larger Jewish community as to the efficacy of J Street. Most importantly, it is unlikely that J Street will reach a point in the near future, where it will truly be able to influence U.S. foreign policy towards Israel.