ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

FEATURED: ANDREA BARRON, A. CATTIMARIT, NOAM CHOMSKY, ARTHUR HERTZBERG, DEENA HURWITZ, BURTON LEVINE, PAUL ZILSEL
Zionism is a success! The Jewish people can now stand up tall and proud, loudly proclaiming that there is a Jewish country, a nation like all others, a place where a Jew can be a person, where a Jew is no longer bound by the burdens and virtues of being one of "the chosen people", a place where life has been normalized, a place where Jews can live out their lives masters of the drudgeries and glories of ordinary existence, a place where they no longer need to bow and scrape in fear of offending the local prince, a place where they are free to choose an out-to-lunch leadership composed of flaming assholes.

Unfortunately, though the Israeli people seem, for the most part, to have accepted normalization — and with it the opportunity to oppress as well as be oppressed — American Jews and progressives have yet to accept this new status. For them, Israelis are just another bunch of Jews. Thus we are continually treated to an endless stream of equally absurd apology and invective concerning the existence, a place where they no longer need to bow and scrape in fear of offending the local prince, a place where they are free to choose an out-to-lunch leadership composed of flaming assholes.

A seeming contradiction further exacerbates Israeli-Jewish American relations. Both groups consider "diaspora" Jews as wimps. And wimps are not worthy of an equal say in a life-and-death struggle. The dominant (though by no means only) Zionist ideology considers Jewish life as liveable — or, at least, liveable with dignity — only in Israel. Non-Israeli Jews are either trapped, self-hating, or assimilationist. American Jews, feeling guilty about having prospered during the Holocaust, feeling guilty of having no desire to actually move to Israel, feeling that, as Jews, they've had it too easy, collectively have become idolators, blaspheming the true tradition of Judaism and the Jewish people. Obeisance is paid, the community bows its head and kneels not to the God of Israel, but to Israel itself. Hear, O Israel, Israel our God, Israel is One! And, God forbid, that the primacy, the unquestioned authority of God is questioned, because Israel, as God, does forbid it!

This issue of SHMATE derives from my possibly naive belief that the Palestinian uprising of the past six months presents a real, albeit small, opportunity for the majority of Palestinians and Israeli Jews to find an accommodation they can live with, a solution perceived as embodying an acceptable measure of justice, even if not hailed with great enthusiasm. The uprising and the Israeli response have demonstrated that neither leadership possesses the imagination, will, nor strength necessary to break through the morass. Though wielding day-to-day power and legitimacy, both Likud/Labor and the P.L.O. are, in a significant way, caretaker operations. However, nothing has yet evolved to take their places. Such a situation is fraught with great danger as well as great opportunity.

In planning this SHMATE I wanted to focus on realistic steps that can be taken on the road toward a solution. Historical rights and abstract concepts of justice were to be relegated to the roles of perspective and context, rather than serving as subjects of discussion in and of themselves. With that essential instruction, authors were then free to roam where they chose. I have little to add to the substance of this issue, though there are a few observations I want to make. The idea of a West Bank-Gaza state is, I believe, a time bomb and, thus, ridiculous. Bifurcated states don't work, especially when dealing with deeply suspicious (if not continually hostile) entities. Neither East Pakistan/Bangla Desh nor West Berlin offer great hope for the idea. Even Alaska, as a state, exists as a long-term practicality because almost all transportation to the lower 48 is by sea and air, and because Canada is, when push comes to shove, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the United States. The kind of trust necessary to open Israeli-Palestinian borders to the degree necessary to accommodate a bifurcated Palestinian state can be a goal, but certainly not one of the initiating conditions for a realistic solution.

The "demand" of many progressives that the P.L.O. be recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people seems counterproductive. One can advocate that Israel negotiate with the P.L.O. without excluding others. Just because the Israelis keep hoping they can invent a Palestinian puppet government as an "alternative" to the P.L.O. does not mean that we must accept the simplistic alternatives Israel sets up. Clearly the Palestinians support the P.L.O. in all international forums. However, the possibility obviously exists that the united front of the P.L.O. could fall apart under the stress of either escalating Israeli pressure or genuine
One last item concerning Israel: In SHMATE #9 I asked why it is that the Left has a habit of criticizing Israel for things it barely takes note of elsewhere. I must reiterate that question at this point. When was the last time the Left condemned the Chinese for its imperialism in Tibet, where thousands have died defending their nation, where Chinese "settlers" now outnumber native Tibetans? Where were the Leftist committees of support when the Tibetans rose up against the occupying Chinese last fall, a revolt against an occupying power which has annexed its occupied territories, subsidized its own citizens to settle in the territories, and refused to recognize the leadership accepted by the indigenous population? Of course the Tibetans haven't hijacked any planes, ships or buses. One may or may not consider terrorism relative or as a legitimate political tool, but has it come to the point where it's the minimal criterion for the Left to pay attention?

In India an ongoing struggle between the Sikhs and the Hindus has killed over a thousand people just this year, not to mention the attack on the occupied Golden Temple at Amritsar, the assassination of Prime Minister Gandhi and the subsequent riots. Not a peep from the Left in this country. If a group of Palestinian fundamentalists took over the Al-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem, if the Israeli army attacked and retook it, if Shamir were assassinated by a Palestinian and in the ensuing riots hundreds of Palestinians were killed by Israeli citizens, don't you think the Left in this country might have something to say?

Of course we don't have to look quite so far. What is Alaska if not a white, colonial settler state. I remember only one Leftist periodical even mentioning Inuit struggles, and that was five years ago.

Hawaii, anyone?!

Criticism of Israel for its ties with South Africa are, appropriately, plentiful. But where is the outrage for European support of the Apartheid regime? And what of the African nations which deal with South Africa?

The Kurds' struggle for existence is alternately exploited and ruthlessly put down in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, without so much as one wall of American graffiti in support. A Kuwaiti plane is seized by pro-Iranian Arabs, two Kuwaitis are murdered, the hijackers are allowed to escape in Algeria, and what does the Left have to say about it? Zilch! Are Kurdish and Kuwaiti lives less valuable than Palestinian lives?

In terms of human destruction the Iran-Iraq War dwarfs all else at present. Imagine what the response of the Left would be if Israel had killed a couple thousand in a gas attack. Now imagine what the response of the Left in fact was when a couple thousand were gassed on the Iran-Iraq border. Right, you have to imagine it because, for practical purposes, there was no response.

Just because Israel occupies the Golan Heights and runs a fief in Southern Lebanon does not mean the Syrians and Palestinians haven't caused as much misery to the people of Lebanon as have the Israelis, nor that Assad hasn't tried to do in Arafat's leadership in the P.L.O., nor that the Syrian government has not killed hundreds of its own people who rose in rebellion. And just because Hussein and Arafat presently smile at each other doesn't mean that the Black September group which staged the Munich Olympic massacre of Israeli athletes wasn't named after the violent Jordanian expulsion of the P.L.O.

Armenia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Biafra, Bangla Desh, East Timor, South Molucca: real places, real people, real oppression, real death. How many of these have been on the Leftist anti-imperialist, anti-racist agenda? Mexico, at least part of the scope of awareness of the Right (even if only because of their Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico commie domino theory) is essentially absent from criticism (let alone real analysis) by the Left. Brazil, fifth largest arms exporter after the U.S., Britain, France and the Soviet Union is a purveyor of oppression and death with no political strings attached. Are there articles in Leftist magazines analyzing and condemning this as there have been regarding Israeli arms sales?

And why is commentary concerning Eastern Europe and the Baltic "states" left to the Right?

The list could go on. My point is not, as this issue of SHMATE will make clear, to minimize Israeli actions. Rather, what I am concerned with is the selective morality and pontificating of the Left. If the words and deeds of the Left are to be taken as principle, not just as the expressions of a bunch of people working off their own individual grudges, hang-ups, frustrations, guilt, ignorance, and intellectual laziness, then those words and deeds must show a plausible amount of across-the-board consistency, of perspective, an ability to break with the conservative impulse of Leftist tradition, to go past the currently fashionable.

Because of the importance of Israel and the Palestinian uprising, this issue of SHMATE does not include the usual variety of politics and culture. Nor will it include my usual meanderings. As a result I will have a backlog of little scraps of paper with occasionally decipherable notes that will grow to unmanageable proportions before the next issue. When the pile gets over a foot and a half, I will just chuck the whole thing.
in the garbage and start a new one. Such always has the salutary effect of demonstrating to me how trivial all these items really are, tidbits which I thought of such passionate importance. However, before I dump the load in frustration later this summer, there are two things of sublime idiocy I want to mention. The first is a nationally syndicated article which appeared on the front page of a recent issue of the *Northern California Jewish Bulletin*. The article blatantly implied the Jews should not vote for Michael Dukakis. Now why is it that we shouldn't vote for the guy? Is he too Left? Too Right? Too soft on support for Israel? Because he's Greek Orthodox? Has bad breath, false teeth, triple bypass surgery, or has done a centerfold for *Playgirl*? Nope, the reason we shouldn't vote for Dukakis is because his wife is Jewish !!!!!! The 'reasoning' is that having Kitty Dukakis as the most prominent Jew in the country would be a bad example for Jewish children, because she married a non-Jew. God save us from the defenders of the faith!

Item #2 demonstrates that Blacks in this country have normalized their municipal relationships the way Israel has normalized international Jewish relationships. A student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago painted a picture of former mayor Harold Washington in bra and panties. It was exhibited at a private school showing intended for students. So Allan Streeter, several other Black Chicago Aldermen, and a police escort, demonstrating an acute awareness of how cultural fascism and the denial of free expression are of ineffable benefit to the Black community, walked into the school and ripped off the painting. Then, by stating that "... in allowing this picture to be displayed, the Art Institute was not being sensitive to Black people, just as it would be insensitive to white people if they were to depict Ronald Reagan the same way", Streeter demonstrated that the Black community really is on a career track for municipal political equality, producing a politician as acutely aware of the nature of democracy as was Richard Daley. Let it never again be said that Chicago prevents a person of any race, creed or national origin from becoming an officially sanctioned asshole. One footnote: the venerable School of Art, protector and generator of free expression, formally apologized for exhibiting the painting, stating that "All educational institutions encourage students' freedom of expression. Regrettably, in the use of his freedom, this student created a work that had the effect of insulting the memory of an important leader...." The President of the school, Anthony Jones, demonstrating his penetrating comprehension of constitutional law, stated that "It would be highly irresponsible of the Art Institute to reinstate the painting because it would be as inflammatory as shouting 'fire' in a crowded theater". Meanwhile, the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, not to be outdone by the City Council, which threatened to cancel all public funding of the Art Institute, expressed its "moral dismay" over the painting. As they say in the San Fernando Valley, gag me with a spoon!!

*STEVE FANKUCHEN*

**STATE OF THE RAG**

A word to subscribers. Because of the length of this issue of *SHMATE*, there is no room for my usual update on the magazine's state of affairs. However, there will be a letter sent to you shortly, catching you up. Please read the letter carefully and let me know what you think. Meanwhile, it would help a lot if you renewed your subscription before it expires, preferably for eight issues. If you look at the address label, the last two digits of the four digits after your name correspond to the issue with which your subscription expires.

To new readers, a word of explanation. *SHMATE* is beholden to no one except its readers. Neither writers, artists, nor "staff" is paid. There are no angels nor affiliated organizations. It exists solely on subscriptions, book store sales, and occasional donations from readers. If you think the magazine should exist, then it is necessary that you support it; there is no other way. I am committed to the maintenance of one truly independent progressive Jewish publication in this country. That can only be done if it sinks or swims on the support of its readers. In any case, your thoughts regarding the magazine are most welcome. Letters are the "pay" for all who work to bring *SHMATE* to you.
Just picked up SHMATE #19 and was impressed by the quality of the writing. I was particularly impressed by Burton Levine’s piece; articles like his “Guilt and the Jewish Right” are a breath of fresh air in times like these.

I enjoyed your writing as well. You are continuing that certain tradition of Jewish humor that Lenny Bruce got his balls busted for. Keep it up!

I think your magazine fills a real need and will continue to do so more and more in these days of Shamir, Farrakhan, Kahane, et. al.

My only criticism is a visual one. SHMATE could be looking much better than it does now! What’s the problem? Do you have some residual hangup about graven images or something? Strong graphics (with strong content) are just as important as the writing - and is extremely important in selling the damn thing.

Eric Drooker
New York, New York

When I read the title of the latest issue of SHMATE (#19) it sent shivers down my spine. Once I began reading the issue I realized the aptness of the title. Richard Grossman’s fatalistic “The Sights of Barbet Kasopthesky” is a well-written, modern day Mephisto-Faust tale that sustains the eeriness of “Tales From the Crypt”.

I never realized that Mormons are pro-armament. It explains Orrin Hatch’s stance a bit better. Thank you for printing this one.

“Guilt and the Jewish Right” by Burton Levine provides a good historical review of America’s stance during World War II, and conservative Revisionists in particular. I thank him for showing me where Mr. Wiesel stands.

Enclosed is my renewal.

Don’t remove the cover subtitle. With a name that is gibberish to most, and covers that have included a Hitler portrait, a backwards swastika, and most recently, a skull with “Guilt and the Jewish Right” printed above the right eye socket, the subtitle helps clarify the drift of the rag. In this day of Neo-Nazis and racial incidents, the potential for misunderstanding should be seriously considered.

If you change the subtitle, keep the phrase “Progressive Jewish”. “Progressive” has a positive connotation for most, and so, probably, will “Progressive Jewish”, as the media continue to cover the iron fist horrors. Of course, if the word “Progressive” gets co-opted by the far right, you should then reconsider.

If anything should be removed, it is the “continued next page” reminders, which wasted almost 6 column inches in Issue #19 alone. Enclosed is $30 for a renewal through Issue #28, 2 years or longer, hell or high water.

Allan Goldstein
Denver, Colorado

Your “Rag Talk” about your own history was fascinating...I am curious about what happened after you broke your back...perhaps one day you will continue your tale. Burton Levine’s article reflects stranger than fiction principle: the necessity of answering right-wing Jews about Holocaust guilt when the truly guilty have no guilt, and the politics/economics/arrogance of reactionaries no matter their religion gets all confused. I remember, when I first read Wiesel’s books, being incredibly moved, and my brother saying to me, after he had met and spent some time with Wiesel, that he had never encountered such monumental sadness in a living person. I wonder just how far we can get with political analysis when there are such wells of ignorance and despair which constitute the human condition even in the best of times...It must be wonderful for some people today to have the victims fighting among themselves to embrace and/or evade the blame. Anyway, in many ways the Levine article is provocative and germane, and I hope SHMATE gets it around and out.

I see in this morning’s Washington Post that somewhere in the South a gentleman purchased a painting done by Hitler. He said, against a background of picketing, that he was able to separate Hitler’s good side and bad side, or something like that.

I hope you get the labels printed and all your other mechanical challenges sorted out. I would be happy to pay a buck more if you printed union...that, too, makes for a complicated story, as I spent a number of years working on so-called
"environmental" issues within trade unions and have seen the best and the worst of unionism and "workers". In the end, a union bug is necessary, but not sufficient: we should all have some rating of the democratic process in the workplace, and in the local and its parent unions. But I understand that even though Reagan is passing from the scene, and the newspapers are allocating a bit more space these days for covering poverty and the detritus of 20th Century Civilization, troublesome democracy is still OUT for '88. We all, from Jews to Unions to General Motors to the National Football League, could use some more democracy in our soup.

"New York Street Games" was fun. It is hard, in print, to communicate the depths of "take a haircut", "jeet", etc., especially as some of us (I guess all of us) still have them ringing in our ears in particular pronunciations and sometimes from specific people at specific times and places. By the by, I would include one more, which ended up as typo/unauthorized change in Barnet: page 13, 5th left column: "Or maybe you want the Rosenbergs to be instead of the Kasophskys?" The correct phrase is "instead the K". This has a very different meaning from "instead of". I don't think I can explain it. I can see a typesetter and a proofreader not picking it up, unless he/she is following along the original.

Richard Grossman
Washington, D.C.

Please uncover the story behind Japan's emerging anti-Semitism and the connection that McDonald's Corporation of Japan has with it.

Rick Bankhead
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

I had a good laugh over your suggestion that the state of Israel really missed the opportunity of locating in the southern reaches of Utah. The articles and stories make stimulating reading, but most interesting was your "Rag Talk". Some of the things in SHMATE aren't exactly to my taste, but perhaps the enclosed will not discourage you from sending further issues.

Ed Weingart
Oakland, California

I really enjoy your editorials. Too bad you don't have a daily column in the Chronicle or the Tribune. Hey, how about a column in The Jewish Bulletin? Well, it was a thought.

Eileen Ostrow
Oakland, California

Keep up the good work. You still come up with topics I never even thought about.

E. Williger
Stanford, California

Enough, already with the Jewish guilt. You're as bad as my inlaws. I thought I wanted to let the subscription lapse, because your rag isn't exactly what I wanted, but #19 had enough in it to make me want to read more.

Name Withheld

I can't stand the guilt so here's the gelt. Issue #19 should be especially good for me. I've been through the underworld, hip surgery and lots of other crazies. I did have terrible money woes, but also avoided renewing my subscription because I didn't feel Jewish enough. Mishugas, right? With all this guilt, how could I be anything else? My best to you for doing a good job on the magazine.

Marriane Ware
Guerneville, California

Please do not renew my subscription.

Dorothy King
Evanston, Illinois

I think I'll have to stay in the void, at least for a while. I am painfully unable to keep up with just my "required" reading for two jobs, not to mention trying, each blue moon, to read a page or two of fiction. I'm likely to be heard from again. Good luck in the meanwhile.

Linn Shapiro
Washington, D.C.

I like the magazine, but don't read well and did not open the last several issues, so I am letting my subscription lapse.

Jim Harris
Milpitas, California

We loved the New York-San Francisco bilingual dictionary in #19, although we always thought "joisy" was a kind of "shoit."

Jeannie Kamins
Montreal, Canada

I wrote a letter to the rabbi of my childhood synagogue, and I thought it might help answer your "being Jewish in the country" question. Then, you know what? I don't think I ever sent the letter. The computer keeps records of what you write, but it takes a brain to keep track of what you SEND. I'll let it sit there and see if it moves.

We were evicted from our little synagogue room in Mendocino, along with the school that occupied the downstairs. The owners are selling the building as residential units.

We, the Czech Torah, a wonderful donation from the Ettinger family in southern California, who had visited our congregation once, rested...
in storage during the summer. While we looked for alternatives, we moved around to each other’s homes. They even came to our house! For High Holy Days, we rented space at the Fort Bragg Mormon Temple, as the Presbyterian Church we long used in Mendocino had raised its price. (I missed the view of ocean and cliffs out the big windows as we prayed.)

Now services are being held in a congregant’s studio in Mendocino. Eventually, everyone hopes to have a more permanent space.

Meanwhile, we keep the word out that we’d eventually like to have services in Ukiah, so we wouldn’t have to travel so far. That’s another dream I hope will be a reality someday. At least once a month, maybe. But everyone has different ideas.

Your writing makes good reading, and your outlook is refreshing. And I love reading everyone’s letters. Your idea of trading Israel for Utah is the best one yet. Shelly said, “But what would God think of that? It’s not the Holy Land.” I said, “I think God would understand.”

It has been fascinating watching our evolution through the political spectrum. Your experience with anti-Semitism on the Left and my experience with I’m-right-therefore-you’re-wrong rainbow hypocrisy up here moved us both. But I went much farther right than you. Sometimes I feel practically Republican. What I have is a fierce appreciation of our Constitution, and the conviction that the only way to peace in the world is that we all learn to CELEBRATE DIVERSITY. Economically, I want business to be good and everyone to have work, because you can’t have one without the other. Simplistic, eh?

Then there’s the big question: the existence of real evil in the world. I have nothing on that.

 Mostly, I’m just tired. And goofing off too much. To the post office, lunch, and back to work!!!

Elinor Lindheimer
Ukiah, California

I think you should produce SHMATE the cheapest way possible. Printing in a union shop will only raise the price and cut down on the already too low circulation. Union solidarity should work two ways. Consumers should support union products, but in return unions should give small sympathetic magazines and organizations like SHMATE a break to keep them going. If they won’t help you then the bargain is off.

I would also drop the subtitle from the cover. Progressive is such a wishy-washy word. It always seems to me to be a way for weaklings to hide and not come right out and call themselves socialists or communists or anarchists.

One reason I want you to print the magazine in the cheapest way possible is because you are already pretty expensive. For $2.50 a copy I would like to read original stuff. Why must you keep reprinting articles from earlier issues (“New York Street Games”). For those of us outside of New York, it was pretty silly the first time around.

Also how about a higher level of letter. B. Spiegel’s in the last issue was atrocious. First Spiegel denounces “the constant screeching and going over and over episodes of the Holocaust”. Then she compares the Holocaust to U.S. policy towards “Nicaragua, Cuba, the U.S.S.R., Indians, homosexuals, homeless, artists, crazy people, farmers, factory workers, trees, water, animals, plants and everything nonplastic”. That’s nonsense. U.S. policy might be repulsive on each of those items, but there is a difference between the German large scale industrialization of mass murder during WW II and the reactionary brutality of Ronald Reagan.

You might also tell Spiegel that German Jews did not believe they were “safe, accepted and assimilated”. That’s why so many left so quickly, more than half between 1933 and 1939.

Finally, I think Burton Levine in his article misses the point. American Jews might have done all that Levine says they did. The point is that they did not do enough.

A. Cattimarit
New Haven, Connecticut

I enjoyed reading SHMATE and look forward to getting the next issue in June. I found it very refreshing and I laughed a lot. This sort of culture, thought and humour doesn’t exist over here. When I saw your advertisement, the title immediately appealed to me, the whole title. So this is a way of keeping in touch with home. I don’t mind paying $1 more per copy for a union shop printer.

Gail Kaufman
Lutry, Switzerland
Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg is a frequent contributor and political polemicist in many Jewish, academic and general secular magazines and newspapers both in America and Israel. Recently he left his pulpit in Englewood, New Jersey to teach religion at Dartmouth College. This year he is spending time as an associate of the Middle East Institute and the School of International Studies at Columbia University.

I met him at his office at Columbia where in a hectic atmosphere he was often interrupted. Journalists called to arrange interviews for the Canadian Broadcasting Company to get his comments about articles in The New York Times and the New York Review of Books. Graduate students came in to discuss papers and his course on contemporary Israel. He advised one to compare coverage of the uprising by the Israeli paper Ha'aretz with that of The New York Times. "You will find that Ha'aretz is much more critical of Israel. The Times tends to soften its coverage of Israel. I get in trouble with American Jews and ladies like your mother, who are presidents of local Hadassah chapters," he told the student, "because I read Ha'aretz and report what it says to Americans."

On the day of our discussion he was annoyed by an article in The New York Times.

Hertzberg You know that I am leaked on in The New York Times this very morning [3/11/88]. I don't know whether you have seen Shipler's front page story. Read the continuation. I am leaked on as having tried to persuade some Jewish Congressmen to write a letter parallel to the letter of the Senators. As a matter of fact that's not true. What I actually did was to tell the Jewish Congressmen, and I was not alone in doing so, that when they saw Shamir, they should tell him in the strongest terms to be reasonable, that unreasonableness will eventually blow up in his face.

Levine You sound as doubtful as you were two months ago, when you described yourself in the New York Review as a "prophet of gloom", who "returns from each trip to the Middle East more pessimistic". Have any developments in the last two months given you more hope?

Hertzberg Absolutely no. Unfortunately. I wish I had a reason to change, but it seems to me that each of the parties is stuck in a position. The Palestinians are divided. The most anyone who stands up in favor of a moderate solution with the Israelis could possibly get from any Israeli government is something less than a Palestinian state - an autonomous region linked to Jordan. Palestinian independence without renouncing the P.L.O. Covenant, which is what they'd like, they can't get. Anyone who says, well all right, let's take something less than that, cannot deliver the Palestinians. That includes Arafat. And he will probably be assassinated.

What is more, the young people who are making the uprising are clearly not P.L.O. representatives. They are a different faction. They are bidding for a role in Palestinian politics independent of the P.L.O. leadership. I am just once removed from them, from the junta. I know people who know people in the uprising. Here at the Middle East Institute, we have at least one young person who is very well plugged into the people who are running the uprising. He tells me never mind what they say in public. They term the P.L.O. leadership the "Cadillac revolutionaries". Therefore there's nobody who can deliver the Palestinians.

There's also nobody who can deliver the Israelis. They are bitterly divided right down the middle. Let us imagine that the fondest dreams of all the liberals, myself included, is realized and the Maraach (Labor) wins the next election and there is a government of 63 to 55 in the Knesset. If that fond dream took place it would still be meaningless. Even if Peres wins the election, he cannot deliver. Because what he would have against him is civil war - the 55, led not merely by Shamir but also Sharon, would stop him. Therefore a bitterly divided Israel cannot summon up the will.

Levine Wouldn't there be problems even among the 63?

Hertzberg There would be lots of hawks among the 63. They are divided. Therefore Israel is too divided to produce a solution, and the Arabs are too divided to produce a solution. Which, therefore, really asks the question, is there the political will and the political power among the Americans alone or the Americans and the Russians together to produce a solution. I think that the greater likelihood is that, in the short run, the world will learn to live with Israel as with Belfast. In the long run it's going to start costing. It's going to start costing Israel heavily. But I am beginning to feel the movement
away from this issue. OK, so there’s another Belfast in the world. Therefore, I am profoundly pessimistic. I know that’s not what one is supposed to be, but I am a pessimist.

I have argued about the short run and long run dichotomy for several years. Everybody admits that in the long run the Israel-Arab conflict has to be solved, or it’s going to make lots of unimaginable trouble. But everybody says that in the short run we still have time and it’s to our short run advantage to do nothing. That’s happening now. They are beginning to imagine that they’ve got six months or a year or eighteen months, that they can push off the solution of the uprising. And I keep saying one of these days we are going to wake up with an atom bomb somewhere in an Israeli city.

LEVINE Who will use the bombs? From where will they come?

HERTZBERG It is well known that there are atom bombs in existence which have been miniaturized to the point that a person can carry them. It is even known that the American army, the Armed forces of the United States, possesses backpack atom bombs. They are insulated backpacks which one soldier, one human mule, can carry onto the battlefield and plant somewhere. With satchel atom bombs it is conceivable that, instead of holding a bus at ransom, an entire Israeli city will be held at ransom. Alas, that’s coming.

LEVINE And is there the possibility, on the other side, of Israeli retaliation?

HERTZBERG What happens, God forbid, if such a thing is done? The possibilities so boggle my mind that even I who think the unthinkable refuse to think about this.

LEVINE Doesn’t the threat of nuclear weapons distinguish Israel from Belfast?

HERTZBERG Well, in Belfast the populations are so intertwined that they probably wouldn’t try it.

LEVINE Well, couldn’t you imagine Irish nationalists putting a bomb in London?

HERTZBERG I don’t know Irish nationalists. I can’t imagine how deep the hatred is. But I certainly can imagine an angry Palestinian doing it. There are enough anger in the situation. If I were writing a spy novel, I would begin not with someone from a recognized Palestinian faction, not even Abu Nidal’s, but some very angry and technically adept Palestinian, let’s say a Ph.D. candidate in physics at Princeton, whose family happened to get killed accidentally in one of Israel’s surgical strikes at a P.L.O. headquarters in the middle of a refugee camp in Lebanon, in South Lebanon. And there were many such “surgical strikes”. Out of revenge he constructs from available materials a satchel atom bomb. It’s a conceivable plot.

LEVINE Isn’t that going to force the United States and the Soviet Union to do something?

HERTZBERG It hasn’t happened yet. Remember, politicians and statesmen have a habit of not dealing with what is going to happen. Churchill kept warning for years that the Nazis were getting worse, but the British kept believing that they could buy time or buy them off. I am in a comparable situation. I don’t in any sense compare myself to Churchill or compare the situations. But I have been telling them for fifteen to eighteen years that this thing is going to explode in their faces. And I say that it’s going to get worse, not better.

LEVINE Can’t a solution be negotiated?

HERTZBERG Cross table negotiations is a code word for non-negotiations. No deal between the Jews and the Arabs has ever been settled without a third party. The armistice agreements of 1949 required Bunche and the U.N. The disengagement after the Yom Kippur War required Kissinger. Even the Camp David Agreement required Carter to put the screws on. It wasn’t a Sadat-Begin deal. Israel and the Arabs are incapable of making peace across the table. They have to be shoved towards it.

LEVINE And the only people with the power to shove them towards it don’t have any reason to do it at this point.

HERTZBERG Exactly. The Russians have no reason to shove. They’re sitting in the catbird seat. Their stock is not falling in the Middle East. As Israel is wrestling with terrorism, they can simply sit and watch. And the Americans are between administrations. For the Americans their position in the Middle East is anchored in Jordan and Egypt, and neither is yet endangered by any of this.

LEVINE What about religious extremism? Didn’t you say in an article that it is becoming more and more important on both sides? Will that eventually affect Jordan and Egypt?

HERTZBERG I don’t think I said quite that. I said more frightening, more possible, as the conflict escalates, it tends to go to its religious roots. When you add religious extremism to nationalist extremism, you’ve got a rather potent brew. Again, this is something I’ve been saying...
over and over. It is to the interests of the moderate Arabs that they make a settlement, before they're swept out by their Khomeinis. The Shah would have been much better off settling with his opposition and paying off heavily rather than letting Khomeini take over.

Hussein is not going to be swept out by Sharon. He might be swept out by other Palestinians and those Palestinians who make a revolution are likely to be Islamic crazies. Remember the people who shot Sadat were army officers who were part of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic crazies.

LEVINE Is religious extremism actually happening within the Palestinian movement?

HERTZBERG I am afraid there is some of it. Remember, lots of the noises being made in Gaza center around the mosques. Some of the rioting in Jerusalem has been on Temple Mount. This tinder is lying around. How far has it gone? I know that there is more than there used to be. But exactly how much I don't know. Palestinian nationalism is no longer a totally secular movement as it used to be.

And certainly there is some more dangerous religious extremism within the Jewish camp, including crackpots who want to blow up the mosques and the Dome of the Rock, so that the Temple Mount may be freed. God forbid that should happen. Such an explosion could touch off all kinds of religious extremism. All it requires is five crazies with some dynamite to get through a police screen. Once they almost did.

LEVINE Weren't they trying to speed the coming of the Messiah?

HERTZBERG That's right.

LEVINE Any feelings as to why it's growing, at least on the Jewish side?

HERTZBERG I think it's an exaggeration to say that it is growing. It is not really growing numerically. The religious right remains stationary as a proportion of Israel. It is not growing in numbers. It is simply becoming more extreme.

The absence of peace means that the kinds of crazies who used to talk to each other in closed rooms are now out front, out in the street. The crazies who used to talk about freeing the Temple Mount were doing it forty years ago or sixty years ago. But now that the Temple Mount is in Jewish possession and there is no permanent political arrangement for it, they can carry on.

There is an old biblical proposition: When there is no king in Israel, every man does what is right in his own eyes. The problem of all extremism is that Israel is split down the middle between Likud and Labor. With the collapse of the previous political and foreign policy consensus, all kinds of weird movements can grow. The fragmentation of Israeli politics, secular and religious, the growing extremism is based on the fact that the moderate middle is weakened. When the center does not hold, things fall apart and extremists rise to the surface. Extremists become more powerful. There is no center that is powerful enough to discipline them.

LEVINE What is the relationship between American Jews and Israel? Recently, Robert Weingrad wrote a letter to The New York Times in which he criticized Anthony Lewis for saying that “American Jews should line up as a united force and denounce Israeli actions”. Weingrad said that it is a kind of anti-Semitism to assume that all Jews “should do anything. Mr. Lewis should address American Jews with the same respect with which he addresses other United States citizens, as both a common and diverse people, with that most basic right of independent political thought. To imply that all Jews should think and act a certain way simply because they are Jews is personally very offensive and, as history has proven, extremely dangerous”. Do you agree?

HERTZBERG He is absolutely right. His tone is angry. But, let's take a look at the uprising now. This whole question of American Jews and Israel has been loused up with so much rhetoric, that nobody understands it. American Jews are not monolithic and Israel is not monolithic. Israel is clearly not monolithic because it is divided straight down the middle. There are two Prime Ministers, so to speak. One of Schultz's shuttles was between them. He could never get Peres and Shamir in the same room at the same time. They represent two diverse opinions. That's a change from the past. You remember Ben Gurion's old policy, “We have a consensus in Israel without the Communists on the left and without the Revisionists, that's Begin, on the right.” Well, that's not true anymore. So long as it was true, the American Jewish community simply followed the consensus.

When there is no consensus there are three possible scenarios. One is to say that the American Jewish community should ignore the fact that there is no consensus and simply support Israel's hardest line, because that's the safe thing to do. It's the safe thing for both American Jews and Israel. The second scenario is to say, a la Tony Lewis in some of his more rhetorical flights, that American Jews should get together, have a meeting - that's a dream world - and in that meeting decide that Israel ought to be more reasonable. Then they should call the Israelis in and say to them like a Dutch uncle “Hey, behave yourselves!”

There is no more an American Jewish consensus
to tell the Israelis to behave themselves than there is an American Jewish consensus to follow Israeli orders or to follow Israel's hard line. In the past the American Jewish community made its choices between Israeli moderates and hardliners underneath the surface. Even as the American Jewish community which during the Begin and Shamir years said publicly it supported Israel, in every private poll it was two to one for the Maarach (Labor), and it was for moderate solutions. This is now aboveground.

We are now witnessing people who support moderation in Israel - the code word "territories for peace" is coming aboveground. They're vocal. I'm one of them.

Why should there be an American Jewish consensus. The majority of us tend to agree with the Maarach and not the Likud. But there is a vocal minority which agrees very hard with the Likud, or is to the right of them. Let them speak. Let the American Jewish community speak with many voices.

I was quoted very provocatively in the London Jewish Chronicle a few weeks ago as saying that the best thing the world Jewish community could do for Israel is to split. Let the differences of opinion appear in public. Then those non-Jewish people in America who are for a moderate Israel can at least say that the price of being for Israel is not that I support Shamir. That was the meaning of the letter of the thirty senators. They said we are strongly for Israel. We are its best friends, and they were. But they said, we want a moderate Israel. We think that that's better.

One last thing. Everybody keeps saying that criticizing Israel is bad for Jews. That's baloney. The best thing we can do for Israel is to try to suggest that there are several Israels, which thus allows the kinds of people who are repelled by headbashing and worse, who are repelled by hardline policies, to associate themselves with those forces in Israel which want a different Israel. And to continue to support it.

LEVINE On the issue of dissent, you said in Present Tense (Sept/Oct 1987) that if Jewish life were a parliamentary democracy, the leaders of the Soviet Jewry movement would long ago have been forced to resign for political incompetence. Is the same true for American Jewish leaders in general?

HERTZBERG Yes. American Jewish leaders are not accountable for their mistakes. They have never been made accountable for their mistakes. Soviet Jewry is a prime example. In 1974, the Soviet Union offered Nixon a promise of annual emigration of 38,500. These were the days of the Jackson Amendment and the heady feeling that the guys who were running with Jackson were going to make it all the way to the White House. Jackson was going to prove, from a Senate seat, who really had the measure of the Russians. They thought they could get more. That was their good reason. They also turned it down, because Nixon was on the run. They still might have made a deal in the early days of the Jackson Amendment, but they preferred to demonstrate. And so the result is the end of Soviet Jewish immigration. Put it in very simple terms. If we had bought that deal in 1974, today we would have about 500,000 Jews out of the Soviet Union.

LEVINE Considerably more than are out now.

HERTZBERG We would have about 350,000 more than are out. And the whole shape of the Jewish world would look different. Now, those of us who were for making that deal were maligned and called traitors by this so-called leadership. And this so-called leadership has never been held accountable for a disastrous decision of the gravest historical consequences. We had a promise from the Soviet Union. We had Brezhnev personally signing on the dotted line with Nixon. A source for this is Kissinger's memoirs.

LEVINE In Present Tense (May/June 1987) you suggest that religious liberals (Reform and Conservative) must "cease their vain cry for recognition, which they are entitled to no more than the Orthodox establishment". How does this relate to your concern for the decline of the center and the rise of religious extremism? Won't a de­established Orthodoxy contribute to even more ideological instability in Israel?

HERTZBERG No. You see I do not understand what the Reform and the Conservative mean by recognition. And I say this as someone who is, in some formal sense, identified as a Conservative Jew, though I do not regard myself as one. I regard myself as an unlabeled Jew, who is a traditionalist. If forced to define myself, I would answer a kind of contradiction in terms, a nonfundamentalist Orthodox Jew. Thus I speak from outside all the categories on this.

What do they mean by recognition? Who is to recognize them? The Knesset? Does the recognition mean that the Orthodox rabbinate in Israel is going to be forced to recognize Conservative and Reform conversions and weddings? I don't recognize Reform weddings because many Reform rabbis have been performing intermarriages. Does recognition mean that the secular government of Israel will recognize that Reform and Conservative Judaism are valid Jewish sects? Then all that they need to do is to declare themselves a separate sect from the Orthodox and all is well. But that they don't want to do. The Orthodox have said to them, you announce yourselves to be a separate sect like the Karaites or the Samaritans and go your merry way and have your own separate marriage
So what does recognition mean? The only thing that it could possibly mean is that the secular state of Israel should inscribe in its registers as Jews those whom Conservative or Reform announce as Jews, and those whom Conservative and Reform announce as validly married. That means, essentially, the disestablishment of the rabbinate entirely in Israel. Because, so long as the Orthodox rabbinate is established, it cannot accept it. That, therefore, has to mean that the recognition of Conservative and Reform Judaism means the disestablishment of the Orthodox rabbinate and the creation of some kind of secular state definition of who is a Jew. Now if that's what they want, let them say so. But they don't say that.

There's another side of the coin. The battle over who is a Jew is an attempt by the Orthodox establishment to disestablish or to insult Conservative and Reform Jews and rabbis, even in the diaspora, by saying that someone whom they accept as a Jew cannot be accepted even in a Zionist aliya office. That's the reverse side of the coin. But I don't think that who is a Jew is a simplistic issue.

LEVINE But in your article you were calling for disestablishment.

HERTZBERG I said that that's the only solution. My reasons are that in the realistic situation in which the Jewish people finds itself, there are only two options. One is flexible accommodation with both sides in both countries willing to accommodate each other. But they are not willing to accommodate. The Orthodox insist on saying the Reform and Conservative are not legitimately Jewish, because we do not approve of what they do. The Reform and the Conservative insist on saying because we are powerful in the diaspora, we demand equality in Israel. Therefore, the logic of the situation leads to disestablishment. You don't have to be for it. The logic of it leads to it.

Arthur Hertzberg is very proud of his dissents from the American Jewish consensus. As I was about to leave he told me, "I am not looking for legitimacy. I have generations of rabbinc ancestors." He waved to the volumes of Hebrew and Yiddish books along one wall of his office. "I do my thinking for myself. I am inner directed. I am uninterested in the opinion or good wishes of most Israeli political leaders and American Yiddishe machers, since I consider them unacceptable."

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fter five months of Palestinian uprising in the Occupied Territories, with increasingly brutal Israeli repression after the assassination of Khalil Wazir (Abu Jihad) by an Israeli Defense Force hit team, with Peres and the Labor "doves" in the cabinet surrendering abjectly to the Likud-Rabin policy of escalating the conflict — the big question facing us, as American Jews who care for the survival and well-being of both the Jewish and the Palestinian people, is this: Is there anything we can do other than symbolic protest? Anything that will actually help to deter the current rush to Armageddon?

I believe the answer is a definite yes. We are actually in a key position to affect the course of events: There are two things we must do, simultaneous and interdependent, very simple to state, and difficult - but by no means impossible - to carry out:

(1) Build a strong and vocal Jewish opposition in the United States, with a clear program of negotiation with the P.L.O. and recognition of the right to self-determination and statehood for the Palestinians, as well as the Israeli Jews - a program not designed to "move and persuade" the Jewish community, but rather to split it.

(2) Urge and convince the general U.S. Peace Movement to take on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict with the same intensity and the same persistence as the Central American conflicts.

It is clear at this point that, though the internal Jewish opposition in Israel is growing, it lacks the strength, by itself, to reverse the Israeli government's murder-and-suicide policy toward the Palestinians. That will take strong U.S. pressure - including the threat or the reality of cutting American aid.

It is equally clear that our government will not apply this pressure on its own initiative. Only prolonged, concerted action by the Peace Movement in this country can make Washington abandon its carte blanche underwriting of Israeli policy.

In addition, a strong and clear Jewish opposition to the dominant Jewish establishment line in the U.S. is almost indispensable to overcome the mainstream peace movement's paralysis of guilt and uncertainty in relation to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

There, in a nutshell, is the work we've got cut out for us in the months and years ahead.

The Palestinian civil uprising which started in December has created unprecedented worldwide sympathy for the Palestinians in their cause and an unprecedented crisis of consciousness in the Jewish community. I can't attempt, from Seattle, to gauge the depth and thrust of this crisis among Israeli Jews. But the ferocity of Israel's response - both on the ground and with the terrorist assassination of Abu Jihad - speaks for a considerable degree of desperation, as well as for a calculated policy of sabotage of any possibilities for compromise.

The effect in the U.S. Jewish community is clearly profound. For the time being at least, the cherished myths and fantasies about the State of Israel have been brought into question. The basic Zionist assumptions, which have so long been sacred cows, are beginning to be re-examined. The inevitable split between the ultra-nationalist and the humanist strains in Jewish tradition, long warded off by massive denial of reality, now seems to be at hand.

Forty years after the founding of the State of Israel and the partition of Palestine, it is well to recall a few basic facts: For more than half of that time - as a result of the Six Day War — the partition has been nullified by Israel's conquest of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the Syrian Golan Heights. Since 1967 all of the former British Mandate west of the Jordan River has been under Israeli rule.

In 1948 some 800,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven from the territory of the new Jewish State. They formed the basis for much of the present population in the Occupied Territories, as well as a Palestinian Diaspora extending over the Arab World and as far as the Western Hemisphere. Hundreds of thousands of these displaced people and their descendants still live in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, the Occupied Territories, and elsewhere.

Over two million Palestinians now live under Israeli rule, some three quarters of a million as second-class citizens of the Jewish State within Israel's pre-1967 borders, and close to a million and a half without civil or political rights under military rule in the Territories. The diaspora accounts for another two and a half million.

There are widely differing ideological interpretations of the historical dynamics underlying these developments. But without entering into the hows and whys and wherefores, the bare facts alone would seem sufficient to account for:
(1) the emergence of a strong Palestinian national liberation leadership and infrastructure - the Palestine Liberation Organization - with both “radical” and “moderate” factions.

(2) the transformation of Israel into a militarized oppressor state, increasingly focused on the Occupation and the conflict with the Palestinian people - a state that has used laws originally imposed against the Zionist underground by the British colonial administration to “legitimize” collective punishment of the civilian population, to torture political prisoners, and for the deportation of “agitators” from their homeland, a state whose distance from humane Jewish ethical values has grown so great as to become unrecognizable.

Just before the outbreak of the uprising I wrote (Canadian Jewish Outlook, Jan-Feb '88) "Israel’s military power, buttressed by the United States, is undoubtedly sufficient to maintain control in the foreseeable future. But the continuing oppression of the Palestinian population and the continuing conflict are nevertheless intolerable not only for the Palestinians, but for Israelis also. It is destroying any remaining chance for building a decent, democratic Israeli society capable of solving its severe social and economic problems: ‘A people that oppresses another cannot itself be free’. The only chance for either people is to make peace.”

I am no longer so certain about Israel’s ability to maintain control. The security cost of the Occupation, the cost in internal morale and worldwide loss of support may soon become intolerable. But the rest of what I wrote goes double: The only chance for either people is to make peace! The alternative, in Meir Pa'il's words, is "the worst of all possible outcomes: A combination of South Africa on top and Northern Ireland below".

I believe it is clearer than ever that peace can only be based on the right of both Palestinians and Israelis to self-determination and statehood, through the creation of an independent Palestinian state in what are now the Occupied Territories, existing alongside “smaller” Israel within its pre-1967 borders.

Any attempt to impose continued foreign rule on the Palestinians or, on the other hand, to throw Palestinians and Israeli Jews together into some form of “secular democratic” state, can only result in continued escalation of the bloody conflict.

It is equally clear that peace can only be negotiated with the P.L.O., the chosen representative of all the Palestinians (including the people in Gaza and the West Bank who initially started the uprising independently), the minority within the P.L.O. that opposes the policies of its mainstream leadership, and even the Moslem fundamentalists, who have emerged as an important component of the movement in Gaza. The P.L.O. is de facto both government and infrastructure for the nascent Palestinian state, much as the Jewish Agency was for Israel.

The mainstream leadership of the P.L.O., speaking through Yasser Arafat and others, has been advocating a two-state solution with increasing clarity over the years, ever since 1974. But the Israeli government, as well as the controlling groups in the mainstream Jewish organizations worldwide, are as far as ever from recognizing the Palestinians’ right to self-determination or accepting the necessity of negotiating with the P.L.O. And so the brutal repression continues, the conflict escalates, and the chance for negotiations recedes.

Those Israeli Jews who reject their country's oppressor role are an embattled minority, who desperately need our help. What is at stake, first of all, is the survival of both the Palestinian and the Israeli people. But also at stake is the soul and honor of the Jewish people everywhere: Is the meaning of the Holocaust that it taught us to do unto the Palestinians what others have done to the Jews? To become “a people like any other” in spades? Or may it just be possible to break the cycle of oppression and violence from generation to generation? May it just be possible that the battered children of yesterday don't have to become today's child batters?

"It is the duty of the Jewish diaspora to speak out, first of all for the sake of its own morals and only then for the sake of physical or economic safety. A Jewish diaspora leadership guilty of complicity with war criminals can no longer expect non-Jews to consider them victims, or heirs of victims, of the European genocide.

"It is now clear that Israel's present rulers are leading their people to the collapse of Israel as a state, after having failed to prevent the partial collapse of Israel as a sane society.

"If Israel actually collapses, those Jews who supported the present rulers to the bitter end will find themselves at the end of the huge wave of anti-Semitic backlash which must surely follow. Those Jews, ‘outside’ or ‘inside’, who do not fight now for the sake of human decency, may have no credit left to fight later on for the sake of Jewish survival." [Maxim Ghilan, Israel & Palestine, Feb.-Mar. '88].

The role of American Jews is crucial. Any serious U.S. threat to cut off carte blanche support and to make American aid contingent on Israel's negotiating with the P.L.O. would be highly effective.

But as long as A.I.P.A.C. (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee - the powerful pro-Israel and, in effect, pro-Likud lobby in Washington) and the other Israel-can-do-no-wrong organizations can claim to speak for a united Jewish community, there is very little chance for any real change in U.S. policy.

This is not to say that American "pro-Israel"
Middle East policy is determined by the Israel lobby. Rather, it is in accord, or at least consistent, with America's perceived interests in the area. But what is remarkable is the absence of any significant opposition to U.S. government policy by the general Peace Movement, a movement which has shown a great deal of clout in other foreign policy areas. Why is there nothing like the anti-apartheid movement, or the Central America peace movement to put pressure on our government to modify its Middle East policy? The answer is, I think, quite clear:

(1) the apparently united stand of the Jewish community, whose liberal wing forms a strong component of the peace movement on other issues.

(2) the huge reservoir of good will and sympathy toward the Jews and Israel among liberal and progressive Americans - though this shows signs of approaching exhaustion.

(3) their fear of being or appearing to be anti-Semitic.

A strong and public Jewish voice in opposition to Israel's oppression of the Palestinians can make a tremendous difference in putting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the agenda of the Peace Movement, on a par with Central America or South Africa. The relatively minor efforts made up to now have already had considerable impact. We are finding audiences in church groups, general peace groups, and even some synagogues which, before, would not have listened to anything that could be labelled as "anti-Zionist" and, therefore, as "anti-Semitic".

In conclusion, what can we, as American Jews, do? Organize individually or collectively as Jews, (perhaps by joining the International Jewish Peace Union) to speak out:

- Against the occupation and the repression of Palestinians.
- In support of the Israeli peace movement.
- For cutting aid to Israel to stop the occupation.
- For the international peace conference proposed by the United Nations: to include Israel, the P.L.O., the Arab states involved, and the permanent members of the Security Council.
- For an independent Palestinian State on the West Bank and in Gaza alongside Israel in its pre-1967 borders.

Organize, as Jews, to put the Middle East on the Peace Movement agenda.

But the detailed positions are less important than the general principle: break the hegemony of the A.I.P.A.C./Israeli Lobby crowd as the voice of American Jewry. Challenge the spokesmen for Israel the Conqueror, Israel the Great Empire, the Israel of Shamir and Sharon and Rabin, wherever they appear. Challenge their right to speak for the Jewish community. Don't let them destroy the spirit and the honor of the Jewish people. Uphold the Israel of Peace and Coexistence, the Israel of Buber and Flappan and Leibowitz. Uphold the humanist, the prophetic tradition in Judaism. No to death! Yes to life!

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14

SUMMER 1988
It is tempting to see the uprising in Gaza and the West Bank as a new beginning, an opportunity to reconcile competing Jewish and Palestinian Arab nationalisms. Like similar chances in the past, this one probably will be squandered. Short-sighted politicians, extremists, and thugs on both sides are likely, as usual, to triumph. The superpowers, short of the incentive of the immediate likelihood of a general war, will continue to pursue only their own narrowly defined interests.

When the uprising in Gaza and the West Bank began, the Israeli government at first claimed that the Palestine Liberation Organization planned and organized it. Israel's ambassadors to the United States and the U.N. announced that 'hard evidence' that the violence was instigated from outside the occupied lands. Israeli officials told the same story to American Jewish leaders and claimed to have intercepted PLO instructions to the demonstrators. Morris Abram, the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, used this information in an article for The New York Times defending Israel's policies.

But Israel has now backed off. Challenged by the United States to produce the hard evidence and intercepts, Israel has refused and has stopped referring to them. Defense Minister Rabin has even admitted that the demonstrations were spontaneous and not controlled from outside. According to the Times, the demonstrations began without planning on December 9 and continued growing spontaneously. Only after several weeks did various Palestinian religious and political groups organize a clandestine coordinating committee to coordinate further actions. The committee does not take orders from the PLO leadership outside of Palestine. Indeed, the Times reports that it is disdainful of the exile leadership.

The PLO leadership may be as tired and out-of-touch as the demonstrators claim. But at least that leadership, even with all its factions and rivalries, has political objectives and demands. The demonstrators are short on both. Aside from general demands for an end to the Israeli occupation and repression, their goals are unclear. Will they settle for a state in the West Bank and Gaza? Will they even negotiate with Israel? Will they accept some Jordanian control of their state, or are their memories of the last Jordanian occupation still too bitter? Will they only accept a Palestinian state that includes all of pre-Israel Palestine? Who knows? They do not say.

The clandestine coordinating committee cannot announce political objectives, because it does not control the demonstrations. Its members admitted to the Times that their decisions are dictated by the will of the crowds. Those crowds are made up mainly of teenagers and young adults. They are a generation raised under the occupation, who scorn the older leaders of Palestinian nationalism as weak and wavering. With their youthful audacity, they hope to fight Israeli tanks and rifles with rocks and makeshift weapons. They are united by a few maximalist slogans about the end to Israeli repression and the liberation of Palestine.

The demonstrators are like amphetamine users. Now they are high and feeling indestructible. But without better weapons and a political program that accepts some level of compromise, they will inevitably be crushed by Israeli power. Their all or nothing strategy ensures their defeat. All Israel has to do is be willing to stand up before international criticism and maintain its current level of repression or, perhaps, raise it slightly. If Israel hangs on, the demonstrators will feel the other side of the amphetamine rush - the low when the drug wears off. Then, overcome by their own depression and despair, they will either settle down to embittered acceptance of continued Israeli repression or move out of occupied Palestine. Israel and its maximalists will be able to keep the occupied territories until another generation of Palestinian Arabs matures.

Ironically the demonstrations are helping Israel by depriving the PLO leadership of what little political capital it had left. Arafat and the other Palestinian exile leaders have opportunities for dramatic action - they could announce a new willingness to deal with Israel, they could ship arms to the youth on the West Bank and Gaza, or they could suddenly appear on the West Bank or Gaza and try to lead the demonstrations; if arrested their trials would be spectacular, if killed they would give the movement great martyrs. But they do nothing. Every day they show themselves to be hollow men, more concerned with empty postures and bravado than leading their people. The PLO will not be a significant force again until it is rejuvenated by new leaders, perhaps from among the current demonstrators, after the uprising is crushed.

Israel will hold on to the land it conquered in 1967, but only at the cost of continued brutalization of
Arabs and Jews. In the face of demonstrations by teenagers and young adults armed only with rocks and other primitive street weapons, the Israeli army and police have so far killed about 200 people and wounded many more. Although the soldiers say they are acting in self-defense, their casualties have been minuscule in comparison to those of the demonstrators.

The Israelis have randomly beaten demonstrators. They have expelled Palestinian leaders from their own country and denied the Palestinian demonstrators the chance to develop the indigenous leadership that the Israeli government claims it wants to negotiate with. They have intensified their use of martial law under which parents and other relatives are punished for acts of their children.

Few governments are able to isolate themselves and their people from the repression they unleash against others. Israelis are only beginning to learn this lesson. One question will be whether they believe the West Bank and Gaza are worth the cost of continued infringement on their own civil liberties. In the last two years Israeli citizens have been the targets of Shin Bet deception and brutality that used to be reserved for Palestinian Arabs. Accused of beating Palestinian prisoners to death, the Shin Bet tried to frame an Israeli army general for the charge. It also framed and sent to prison an Israeli lieutenant for a crime he did not commit. During the investigation of the Jewish terrorist cells, the Israeli police held the prisoners for days without letting them see their lawyers.

So far Israelis have accepted their government's actions against the demonstrations. In 1982, several hundred thousand Israelis protested the war in Lebanon. In contrast, today, in the only large organized demonstration against government policy, only 30 to 50 thousand Israelis participated. According to The New York Times, Hannoch Smith, the leading Israel opinion pollster reports that the government policies "enjoyed wide support". The Jerusalem Post reports polls showing increased support for conservative and hard-line positions.

One sign of the change in Israeli opinion since 1982 is that the commander of the West Bank occupation forces is Major General Amram Mitzna. Mitzna was a hero among many Israelis in 1982, because he resigned his command rather than continue to take part in the invasion of Lebanon. Today he has no similar scruples. In interviews he freely justifies the violent repression on the West Bank.

Comparing protests in 1982 and 1988, Palestinian Arabs may draw the lesson that Israelis were more opposed to the war in Lebanon because Israelis were dying. In the current crisis Israelis are not dying; Palestinians are. After the 1967 war Palestinians, who felt they had no avenues of negotiation or protest, resorted to relatively small scale terror against Israel. This generation, feeling even more thwarted after its uprising is crushed, and seeing that Israelis only respond if a lot of them die, may become desperate enough to inflict large scale, long term violence upon Israel. The terror will probably be conducted by those demonstrators who choose to leave Israel after the uprising. Before such terror forces Israel out of the occupied territories, it will lead to even more Israeli repression of Palestinians. It may even give a truculent Israeli government an excuse to invade Jordan, Syria, or Lebanon again.

Unfortunately, the Israeli government will only back away from its current policy of repression if some other force pressures it. So far, none has. American Jews have said little. Protest has been relatively muted. The crisis is occurring simultaneously with the height of the fundraising season among Jewish and pro-Israel organizations. U.J.A. admits to no decline in contributions in protest. One group, the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, claims that contributions are up between 15% and 18% since the beginning of the crisis. Rabbi Jacob Neusner has proposed the interesting dialectical theory that American Jews's silence and inaction are really a kind of action. "The vast silence that has settled over most American Jews should be understood as an eloquent statement of responsible concern, not acquiescence, certainly not approval, or even disapproval." Neusner is correct that the silence is significant. He is wrong to think it shows any kind of concern, at least for the Palestinians. It is a sign that American Jews are determined to pretend that nothing new is happening in Israel/Palestine. The American Jewish will to fantasize might explain the wave of letters to local newspapers that protests even the most objective reports of Israeli army anti-demonstrator tactics as anti-Semitic or biased.

The intellectual response of American Jewish groups has also been dismaying. American Jewish leaders have become the last believers in Pan-Arabism. At one time Arabs dreamed of a united Arab nation. Today they are broken down into twenty competing nations, often bitterly at odds with one another. American Jewish leaders, however, continue to talk as if all Arabs were united. They blame the demonstrations on the Arabs and their governments, as if those governments can agree on any plan of action. They say things like "Israel absorbed several hundred thousand Jews from the Arab lands. Why can't the Arabs absorb an equivalent number of Palestinian Arabs?" They fail to realize that neither Morocco nor Iraq are interested in replacing their Jews with Palestinian Arabs, whom they consider foreigners. They do not see their people as sharing a common nationality with the Palestinians.
America will not pressure Israel to change. American policy has little to do with the wishes or power of American Jews. Perhaps American Jews have some independent influence in Congress. Jewish organizations and pro-Israel lobbyists sometimes succeed in changing budget requests and laws aimed at Israel. But they are less successful with the President and the executive departments that develop and implement foreign policy. As Ronald Reagan has shown, Presidents often carry on their foreign policies in spite of Congress. Today the Congress, the President, and American Jews are all united in supporting Israel. However, in the extremely unlikely event that American Jews turn against Israeli policy, the President would still support Israeli repression of Palestinian nationalism as being in the American national interest.

America is a conservative power generally committed to the status quo. The Palestinians are challenging that status quo and a Palestinian state would disrupt the status quo even more. A successful Palestinian state would be an example for other national liberation movements. It might not be good for American business interests. It might weaken Israel as a proxy policeman or as a base for direct American intervention in the region. Also, many of America’s conservative Arab allies, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, are not eager for radical change among the powers in the region or in favor of an independent Palestinian state.

Thus, on policy grounds the United States is uninterested in helping the Palestinians. But as long as American Jews continue both to support any Israeli government in power and to lobby for aid to Israel, the American government can camouflage its foreign policy intentions as a response to its Jewish citizens. And the implications of that is something the American Jewish community should be extremely concerned about.

The Arab states that so fascinate American Jews have not performed well during the crisis either. Much like the P.L.O., the Arab states were surprised by the uprisings in Gaza and the West Bank. Aside from sponsoring some resolutions in the United Nations, they have done little to help the Palestinians. They are too divided to use their oil weapon. They are too ambivalent toward a Palestinian state to offer to help negotiate for one. Indeed, one stimulus for the December demonstrations was the Arab summit meeting in November in Amman, Jordan. The Arab states set aside discussion of Palestine to work at uniting to solve the Gulf War. The Palestinians felt abandoned.

The Soviet government, despite its occasional rhetoric in favor of Palestinian nationalism, has also failed the Palestinians since the uprising began. Although it voted against Israel in the U.N. Security Council, it did not slow its drive to renew relations with Israel. On January 30, while Israeli troops were shooting at unarmed demonstrators, the Soviets agreed to allow a four-person Israeli delegation to visit the Soviet Union for two months to check on the state of Israel’s interests in Russia. Israelis applauded the mission as a significant step toward better relations between the Soviet Union and Israel.

The prospects for the next generation are not good. Israel is likely, at great physical and spiritual cost to the Palestinian Arabs and to itself, to succeed in repressing the current demonstrations. American Jews will continue to support Israel as their cultural fantasy land. Young Arabs with little future in Israel/Palestine will either fall into sullen despair or leave. Those who leave may turn to large scale random violence and trigger even more repression and, perhaps, another war. After the demonstrations subside, the Israeli government will continue to colonize the West Bank, no matter which party wins the Israeli elections this year. The leaders of other Arab countries will continue to make speeches and to sponsor resolutions in the United Nations. As long as Israel does not force a large number of Palestinian refugees upon them at once but, rather, emits a controlled trickle, they will not feel threatened. Israel will continue to serve as a distant external threat and means of internal cohesion for them.

In short, the prospects for the future are not good.

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American Jews should not allow the Israeli or American Jewish establishments to turn them into ‘Jews of Silence’ when it comes to important political issues affecting Israel. This silence can be seen as support for the status quo, and the status quo is dangerous. This was the message Israeli Knesset Member Abba Eban delivered to Jewish audiences last March while on tour in the United States. Eban encouraged Jews to participate in the ongoing debate in Israel concerning the future of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. He urged them to speak out — both as Jews and as Americans — against the occupation which is threatening Israel’s Jewish and democratic character.

Over the last year, but especially since the Palestinian uprising began in early December, this is exactly what a growing number of U.S. Jews have been doing — at public forums, at synagogues and Jewish federations, in paid advertisements, on the Op-Ed pages of major newspapers and to Members of Congress. Not since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the Sabra and Shatila massacres in September 1982 has the Jewish community been so divided on the question of support for Israeli policies.

Leaders from liberal Jewish groups such as the American Jewish Congress and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), both members of the establishment Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, have criticized Israel’s handling of the Palestinian uprising, including its use of live ammunition against teenage stonethrowers. And two Jewish senators — Carl Levin from Michigan and Rudy Boschwitz from Minnesota - circulated a letter to Secretary of State George Schultz criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir for refusing to exchange land in the West Bank and Gaza for peace with the Arabs.

The dissension within the mainstream Jewish community over Israeli policy has already been reported extensively in both the Jewish and the mainstream media. The focus of this article, therefore, will be on smaller Jewish peace groups whose activities have not received as much coverage and which do not belong to the Presidents’ Conference. Like the American Jewish Congress and the U.A.H.C., these peace groups support the principle of territorial compromise enshrined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 242. But they have gone one step beyond the liberal Jewish establishment by arguing that Israeli security and Palestinian self-determination are not mutually exclusive, and by trying to directly influence U.S. policy by lobbying Members of Congress.

One of Friends of Peace Now’s two main objectives is to raise money for the peace movement in Israel — the $110,000 it just sent has enabled the Israeli organization to hire two full-time organizers. Friends of Peace Now’s second major task is internal education among U.S. Jews. Since December, it has participated in or sponsored events in at least 30 cities, attracting approximately 800 people in both Washington, D.C. and Chicago. The group has organized visits to the U.S. by prominent Israeli peace activists such as retired Colonel Mordechai Bar-On, a former Knesset Member from the Citizens’ Rights Party, Yael Dayan, daughter of the late Israeli Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, and Brigadier General Giora Furman, an economist who thinks the United States could help promote Mideast peace by promising more aid to both Israel and a new state of Palestine, if the two sides negotiate a settlement.

The organization endorsed Secretary Shultz’s
Over the past five months, an unprecedented number of American Jews have participated in demonstrations, held vigils and taken other actions to express their opposition to Israel's hardline policy towards Palestinian protestors. Chapters of New Jewish Agenda, a 4,000 member organization which supports both Israeli and Palestinian national rights and an international peace conference with P.L.O. participation, have organized at least 15 demonstrations and sponsored about 20 different newspaper ads. In Columbus, Ohio, for instance, Agenda members demonstrated outside the Israeli Bonds office and carried signs saying "Peace Now" and "Recognize the P.L.O." In New York City, Agenda activists fasted for five days to express their "deep concern over what is happening to Israel's soul" and met with Zehdi Terzi, head of the P.L.O. observer delegation to the United Nations.

A delegation from the International Jewish Peace Union (I.J.P.U.), which has three chapters in the U.S. and several in Europe, met with the director of the Jewish Federation in Seattle and presented him with several demands. One demand was that the Federation disassociate itself from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (A.I.P.A.C.), the major lobbying group for Israeli policies in Washington. After the meeting, seven I.J.P.U. members refused to leave the Federation building, declaring they were holding an "anti-occupation occupation". The seven were arrested for trespassing and later faced charges in court.

Agenda and I.J.P.U. joined with 18 other Jewish groups, including Americans for a Progressive Israel, the Labor Zionist Alliance (L.Z.A.), and Friends of Labor Israel, in organizing the largest Jewish peace demonstration that has ever taken place in this country. The demonstration was held on April 24 outside the B'nai Jeshurun temple in New York City's Upper West Side. Over 4,500 Jews came together to call for "mutual recognition by Israelis and Palestinians of each other's right to self-determination", to "deplor the violence that has plagued the West Bank and Gaza" and to renounce terrorism. Both the L.Z.A. and Friends of Labor Israel have ties to the Israeli Labor Party, which has not come out in favor of Palestinian self-determination. This may mark the first time that an American Jewish organization is actually ahead of its Israeli counterpart in terms of recognizing Palestinian national rights.

Menachem Rosensaft, President of the L.Z.A. and also the founder of the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, says the demonstration was a way for American Jews to "raise their voices in protest of what they believe on the question of Mideast peace — to tell Shimon Peres and Abba Eban that they enjoy our support and to let hardliners like Yitzhak Shamir and Ariel Sharon know that they do not".

LOBBING FOR MIDEAST PEACE IN WASHINGTON

About 40 Jews from New Jewish Agenda, the Jewish Committee for Israeli-Palestinian peace, the Jewish Peace Fellowship and the International Jewish Peace Union gathered in Washington on February 20 and March 1 to lobby for Mideast peace. With around 30 other peace activists,
they urged Congress to pass a resolution calling on Israel to allow municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to support P.L.O. participation in the Middle East peace process.

The lobbying campaign was coordinated by the America-Israel Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (A.I.C.I.P.P.), a sister group to an Israeli organization founded by prominent Israeli Zionists who support national self-determination for both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Among the other groups which joined the campaign were Churches for Mideast Peace, the U.S. Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East, the American Friends Service Committee and members of Jewish-Arab dialogue groups from seven different cities.

Most of the meetings were held with congressional aides, but A.I.C.I.P.P. Washington representative Corinna Whitlach also arranged meetings with 11 Members of Congress, including Senators Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH) and Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) and Representatives Barney Frank (D-Mass), Nick Joe Rahall (D-WV), Ben Gilman (R-NY), Jim Bates (D-CA) and George Crockett (D-MI).

Jerry Segal, a research scholar at the University of Maryland, briefed the peace activists before they visited the offices. He said it was "tremendously important to involve Congress in the Mideast peace process, since Congress - more than the executive branch - is the direct voice of the American people. If Congress passes this resolution on municipal elections, we'd be crossing a line in terms of the symbolic recognition of the Palestinian people. For the first time, Congress would be calling on Israel to respect the Palestinians' basic political rights".

Municipal elections were last conducted in the West Bank in 1976. Israeli authorities subsequently removed many of the victorious mayors, accusing them of being "pro-P.L.O.", and have not permitted elections since. (Neither the Egyptians, who controlled the Gaza Strip between 1948 and 1967, nor the Israelis, who have occupied it since 1967, have held elections in Gaza.) A.I.C.I.P.P. chairwoman Mary Appelman stressed that support for elections was not an attempt to provide substitutes for the P.L.O. She pointed out that a demand for municipal elections conducted under the supervision of a neutral authority was one of the 14 points presented to Secretary of State Shultz on January 27 by the Palestinian newspaper editor Hanna Siniora and the Gazan lawyer Fayez Abu Rahme.

Although the lobbyists were not able to secure a sponsor for the resolution, they said several members had agreed to sign on to it if a Jewish member were to introduce it. They also were told that sympathy on Capitol Hill for the Palestinians had increased since the uprising began. Members of Congress and their aides appeared particularly impressed that Jews - especially rabbis - were lobbying for Palestinian as well as Israeli national rights. Congressman Jim Bates, for instance, said that "just meeting Jews with these views gives me hope that we can make progress towards peace in the Middle East".

Brian Walt from Philadelphia was one of two rabbis who joined the lobbying effort. In a keynote luncheon address he said that "the Jewish state was established on the ashes of the Holocaust but was created at the expense of the dispossession of another people. The Palestinian uprising has made it clear that the Israeli occupation is not benign. For the first time, American Jews may have to choose between rejecting Judaism, which is a compassionate religion, and rejecting the occupation."

Susan Weissman, a 46-year-old lawyer/housewife from Los Angeles and Lucile Wolff, a 61-year-old Greenwich Village musician, had never lobbied before they participated in the A.I.C.I.P.P. event. Wolff said she was shocked at how ignorant some of the congressional aides were about the Middle East - one aide thought the West Bank was still under Jordanian control. Weissman said lobbying was not as difficult as she had expected. "I thought you needed some kind of magic to talk to these 'holy' people in Washington. We had talked about lobbying in my Jewish-Arab dialogue group but didn't know how to go about it. Now an Arab group member and I are ready to start making appointments with our representatives here in California."

Al Stern, a Cleveland businessman and Chair of New Jewish Agenda's National Advisory Board, had a "one-on-one" meeting with Senator Howard Metzenbaum. Stern, who is very active in Metzenbaum's senatorial campaign, said the senator is "an ardent supporter of present Israeli policies. But he was very interested in what I had to say about Palestinian self-determination and the need for Israel to talk to the P.L.O. That was because I'm a personal friend of his and I'm working to get him re-elected. Getting involved in political campaigns is one of the most effective ways of influencing Congress. It gives you an open door. You're part of their lifeblood and they need you."

Do Jewish peace groups in the United States have the potential to exert any real influence over U.S. or Israeli policy on the Arab-Israeli dispute? Israeli doves such as Abba Eban may be encouraged by the fact that 4,500 New York Jews took to the streets to declare their support for the principle of "mutual recognition". And Peace Now may be able to bring many more Israelis into its camp thanks to the financial assistance of its North American sister organization. But the greatest impact these groups can have is here in the United States.
Mention Israel or Zionism and many people only see images of so-called Orthodox Jews in Israel with yarmulkes on their heads and automatic weapons in their hands, of religious politicians grabbing their constituents’ share of Israel’s pork barrel, while demanding that everyone obey their version of Judaism, and of prosperous American Jews raising money and cheering their Israeli surrogates into battle against anti-Semitism. It was not always so. Zionism was originally part of the Enlightenment revolt against religion, tradition, and superstition. The early Zionists were rationalists looking for a Jewish identity in nationalism and in a newly crystalizing secular Jewish movement.

Even after the Balfour declaration, Zionists were still concerned with consolidating a common Jewish culture that was separate from religion. A Jewish state, or even a homeland, was a secondary goal. The official Zionist movement only adopted the demand for a Jewish state in 1942. Until then, the liberal followers of Ahad Ha’am were devoted to cultural nationalism. They wanted a Jewish renaissance centered in Palestine, but they were indifferent or hostile to the idea of a Jewish political entity. Socialists, especially in the kibbutzim, hoped for a binational Arab-Jewish state and the triumph of social justice. Even labor union leaders and conservative socialists like Ben Gurion did not aim for an exclusively Jewish state or, at first, any state at all. Judah Magnes, a cultural Zionist who was the first head of Hebrew University and a leader of the American Zionist movement, opposed the Balfour Declaration as an act of British imperialism, favored reconciliation between Jews and Arabs, opposed the Israeli Declaration of Independence, favored a bi-national United States of Palestine, and viewed World War II as the imperialist British and Americans fighting the evil Germans.

In America today nobody with those views would be considered a Zionist. Look at Noam Chomsky. His views are close to Magnes’s. Chomsky is one of the last, perhaps the last, American representative of the early spirit of Zionism. But instead of being honored for his commitment to principle, he is denounced as a self-hating Jew, an anti-Semite, and a traitor.

Jewish organizations use Chomsky’s unfortunate defense of Robert Faurisson as an excuse to dismiss everything he says or writes. Chomsky, who does not agree with Faurisson’s the-Holocaust-never-happened theories, defended his right to publish them. This defense was part of the liberal and Enlightenment traditions of a free market of ideas and of free expression of ideas, no matter how abhorrent they may be. Nevertheless, Jewish organizations like the A.D.L. and pro-Israel magazines like The New Republic use this brief event in Chomsky’s long career to dismiss all of his political opinions and, occasionally, even ones in linguistics, his academic specialty.

Chomsky’s critics are not always so fastidious about quarantining people with even the vaguest contact with killing Jews or with fascism. Ze’ev Jabotinsky, the founder of the Revisionist Zionist movement, admired Mussolini in the 1920’s. He also negotiated an agreement with Semon Petlyura, whose Ukrainian government in 1919 killed up to 100,000 Jews. Jabotinsky wanted the Zionist movement to help Petlyura return to power. His Revisionist followers like Begin and Shamir do not condemn him for working with mass murderers of Jews. Instead they put his picture on Israeli currency and each year honor somebody with a Jabotinsky medal. Since 1977, when Begin came to power, dinners in New York honoring the Jabotinsky medal winner have been important events in the Jewish calendar. Many of Chomsky’s critics attend.

Chomsky is against mass murder. He never worked with or even expressed approval of fascists or their ideas. As a dedicated civil libertarian, he just defended one from intellectual suppression. Chomsky made the mistake of telling Faurisson’s publisher that he could use a letter he wrote in Faurisson’s defense in any way he wanted. He assumed that the publisher would use the letter as part of Faurisson’s battle to keep his job. Instead the publisher used it as the introduction to Faurisson’s Holocaust-denying book. Chomsky’s detractors and Jabotinsky’s followers do not say, as they do with Chomsky, that one mistake on Chomsky’s part permanently disqualifies him and all his opinions from consideration.

Ironically, Chomsky’s defense of such an obnoxious opinion shows that he, more than his critics, still clings to the rationalist, secular Jewish Enlightenment. One of his new books, Pirates and Emperors, is an exquisite expression of this spirit. Pirates and Emperors has two aspects: First, a rejection of political superstition and religious thinking in favor of logic; second, the demand for equality for all people, including Jews.
The book's title comes from a story by St. Augustine about Alexander the Great. Alexander confronted a captured pirate with the question "How dare you molest the whole world?" The pirate replied, "Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an emperor."

Chomsky believes that the pirates and emperor dichotomy characterizes the relationship between the United States and many smaller countries. The word terrorism was first used at the end of the 18th century to describe violent acts by governments against their own people. But big powerful governments like the United States control what Chomsky calls "the system of thought and expression" and use it to redefine terms to their liking. They label as terrorism only small scale acts by groups or individuals.

As long as the United States controls the system of expression, nobody calls the United States' campaign against Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Viet Nam terrorism. In each case the United States has used massive force against minimally armed civilians in an attempt to extort changes from unwilling countries. Another example is the decade-long collaboration by Israel and Syria in the destruction and dismemberment of Lebanon, by supporting and arming gangs of thugs. Although Syria gets less coverage in the American press, when it does get mentioned it is accused of terrorism. As a U.S. imperial protectorate, Israel is shielded from the same charges.

For the last 20 years the United States and Israel have regularly condemned airplane hijacking and labelled it terrorism. Yet in the 1950's, before Arabs or the P.L.O. used hijacking, the United States repeatedly refused to return people who hijacked planes, trains and ships from Eastern Europe. The hijackers were even subjects of popular admiration. Ronald Reagan's "G.E. Theater" dramatized several of these hijackings and portrayed the hijackers as heroes. The Russian Jews who bungled a hijacking in the 1970's are today praised as heroes by many Israeli and American Jews, rather than condemned as hijackers.

The first recorded case of air piracy in the Middle East was ordered by Moshe Dayan. In 1954 he had military planes force down a Syrian civilian airliner. Israel held the passengers as hostages to trade for Israeli soldiers captured inside Syria. In his private diary Prime Minister Moshe Sharrett admitted that Israel "had no justification whatsoever to seize the plane" and that he could not dispute the United States State Department charge "that our action was without precedent in the history of international practice."

Besides being secular rationalists the early Zionists wanted Jews to be recognized as a nation and to be treated as the equal of other nations. One of the great retreats from the early goals of Zionism is the demand by Jews for special treatment and consideration of Israel. The reaction to David Shipler's Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land is typical. Shipler, a New York Times correspondent, wrote about the daily lives of people in Israel and the occupied territories. Necessarily some, but not a large part, of the book was about Arabs and Jews with outlandish, hate-filled, and violent opinions. Defenders of Israel - Hillel Halkin in The New Republic and Shlomo Avineri in The London Review of Books, for example - criticized Shipler, because he did not explain the Jews' remarks by putting them in context. But equally obnoxious Arab opinions apparently didn't merit a special context.

Both Avineri and Halkin, who claim to be Zionists, were asking for special consideration for Jews. They felt that Israel needed a kind of moral affirmative action program by the rest of the world. They do not want to be judged by the standards used for the rest of the world. Instead, like black proponents of affirmative action in America, they say we need special consideration because of our history. We are not ready to be a nation like all other nations.

Chomsky, good Zionist that he is, rejects the arguments for special consideration. He wants Israel judged by exactly the same standards as every other country. Israel fares no better than most other countries. Chomsky has written about. He lists and condemns countless cases of Israeli violence against civilians in either the occupied territories or in one of Israel's neighbors. In 1985 Israel shelled the Lebanese village of Zraiyha for several hours, killed between 20 and 35 villagers, and arrested the entire adult male population. Later in the year Israel and its puppet, the South Lebanese Army, temporarily expelled the entire village of Kunin, destroyed houses, and arrested 32 young men. After increasing world-wide publicity, Israel closed its prison camp at Ansar, but encouraged the S.L.A. to open similar, but much more secret, camps. According to Israeli reports, the S.L.A. regularly uses torture and beats the prisoners, who are imprisoned without even a semblance of due process.

Chomsky is a favorite target for American Jewish organizations like the A.D.L. They abhor his continued adherence to the Zionist demand that Jews and Israel be a nation like every other nation. His Enlightenment rationalism, egalitarianism, and leftist secularism are a challenge to their continuing campaign to tie Israel to the United States.

One of Chomsky's themes is that most American Jewish organizations and writers, who call themselves supporters or defenders of Israel, are neither. Rather they and other members of the Israel lobby have a hawkish interpretation of Israel's position because it is easier to raise money and get support for Israel talking about an international threat than by talking about such things as internal economic or moral decay. Support for Israel always means support for Israeli
supporters of Israel argue that people who do not live under the threats Israelis do should not criticize Israel's policies. Critics in America will not have to suffer the consequences of the policies they advocate. At the same time the supporters of Israel demand support for stupid and often criminal Israeli acts from the same people who are not supposed to criticize. They never acknowledge that the policies that they advocate also have consequences. They also refuse to acknowledge that actions by Israel might have consequences for Jews throughout the world and, as Israel becomes more entangled with America, upon the citizens of the United States. They also try to prohibit criticism by Palestinian Arabs and Lebanese, who often do suffer the consequences of Israeli actions.

Old-fashioned Zionist Chomsky understands that supporting Israel means criticizing its alliance with the U.S. The more entangled Israel is with the United States, the more it loses its independence, antagonizes non-aligned nations, and increases the risk of a Middle East war that involves the super-powers and nuclear weapons. Supporting Israel means criticizing its military aggression, costly occupation of parts of Palestine that could be an independent Arab state (since a bi-national state is not now likely), and the use of terror against civilians. Supporting Israel means criticizing its increasing capitulation to the forces of religious obscuratism and rabbinical control of people's lives.

The paradox of modern Jewish life is that a Noam Chomsky who is steeped in the tradition of the Jewish Enlightenment and who speaks out for a Jewish nationalism independent of any imperial power is considered a traitor to Jews and Judaism. At the same time, so-called supporters of Israel, who are terrified by the idea of an Israel independent of the United States, are considered the leaders of the Jewish people.

Burton Levine is a writer who lives in Hamden, Conn.

BARRON: continued

In this country they can urge the Jewish community, the American public, U.S. policymakers and the presidential candidates to openly discuss all the options open to Israel to resolve the Mideast conflict, including the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. As a result of the Palestinian uprising, more Americans than ever before have become aware of the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. The peace groups know the key to a Mideast peace settlement is satisfying these aspirations within the context of a peace treaty with Israel — now they just need to convince these newly aware Americans and their political leaders.

Andrea Barron is a Ph.D. candidate in International Relations at the American University in Washington, D.C. and a member of several Jewish peace groups. She may be contacted through SHMATE, if you would like more information about these groups or about how to begin lobbying for Mideast peace in your congressional district.
INTERVIEW

NOAM CHOMSKY

by BURTON LEVINE

For Noam Chomsky, most American critics of the Viet Nam War too easily accepted the idea that American benevolence led us into a quagmire. Cutting beneath the rationalizations, he sees the U.S. invading a small country - South Viet Nam - to help the cream of American business. That elite is, for Chomsky, a constantly rapacious and violent group that gulls the rest of us while it despoils the world. Currently it is active in Nicaragua and El Salvador, countries that he has written three books about in recent years.

For exposing the unspeakable secrets of the American foreign policy elite, Chomsky has been a constant target of attacks. Although he has criticized the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he is called a Soviet apologist. Like Freud before him, Chomsky upsets nice people because, in his devotion to a rational search for truth, he does not stop at the boundaries of social propriety. The genius of both is to follow their thoughts beyond the point where the internal censors in most of us say "Don't think this. This is not a nice thought."

I spoke with Chomsky in early May in his office at M.I.T. Although his work in linguistics, his academic specialty, is recognized throughout the world as having permanently changed the field, he carries his authority lightly. He has the manners of the egalitarian anarchists he admires. His soft, gentle voice is in sometimes jarring contrast to his tough, pointed phrases.

LEVINE: You just returned from the Middle East?

CHOMSKY: From Israel and the Occupied Territories.

LEVINE: Are we getting an accurate account of events in the American press. How, for instance, does The New York Times compare with Ha'aretz?

CHOMSKY: It has typically been the case that you get much better coverage in the Hebrew press in Israel. That is no longer true. Ha'aretz is one of the worst. Ha'aretz has caved in completely. It does not give honest reporting. It has a tremendous amount of self-censorship. There are other journals like Hadashot that are much more honest. I do not know exactly what happened internally in Ha'aretz. I don't want to say that there is nothing good in Ha'aretz, but the general character of its reporting has deteriorated radically during the uprising. I read the Hebrew press pretty carefully and for the first time in my experience the coverage in the American press has been as good, if not better. Israeli television has been particularly bad. They are even complaining about it there because of the censorship, self-censorship and denial. What's remarkable about Israel is how much they are able to avoid attention to what's going on.

Neither the American press nor the Israeli press adequately cover the background. It is covered better in the Hebrew press. So, for example, in Ha'aretz they did report in mid-April that Arafat once again called for a partition. He said that we have to accept the basic concept of partition, and by that he did not mean the lines of the U.N. recommendation but, rather, the current lines. That would never be reported in the United States. The New York Times has a principle of never reporting conciliatory statements from Arab sources. They usually don't even print any letters referring to it. Interestingly, they broke that rule just a few weeks ago with a letter by Norman Finkelstein reviewing some of the documentary evidence they have been suppressing for years, and I mean suppressing. I don't mean failing to report. They won't permit letters to appear referring to it. There are even letters by New York Times editors saying they will not permit the material to appear.

LEVINE: Is there a reason why American reporting has improved? Does it reflect a change in attitudes either among the American public or elite?

CHOMSKY: I think it's a mixture. For one thing there are a couple of good reporters there. I was very pleased to see that The New York Times withdrew Thomas Friedman. That made it possible for some good reporting. They sent John Kifner, who is a very good professional journalist. When they send John Kifner somewhere it's because they want the story to come out, not because they want it to be covered up. Friedman's job is to cover it up. Similarly in the Post there was good reporting. The Boston Globe had, perhaps, the best reporting of all.

In part there is, I expect, a reaction to the way journalists themselves are being treated. The foreign press corps in Israel has already reported somewhere between 100 and 150 attacks on journalists, some including physical violence. In the West Bank whenever I was stopped by soldiers, the first question was, are you a journalist. That's what they are really worried about.
They want the journalists out of there.

On the other hand the newspapers continue to suppress the background. The background facts are that for years the Arab states and the P.L.O. have been calling for a political settlement, and for years Israel, both political parties in the United States, and the American media have been opposing them. And that truth is still unexpressible.

I expect Jewish leaders will also complain that the American media are not giving the background. Well that is true, but the background is the opposite of Adorn. I don't know what appeal they have in the which is largely there in order to convince American liberals that they should continue to support Israel. In part this is around Yesh Gvul which has been around for a couple of years. But there are a couple of new groups: Dy L’Kvush, Shomrei Esrim v’Echad, Kav Adom. I don’t know what appeal they have in the population. Polls would indicate maybe 10% or 15%. I went on a demonstration with some of them, down to Dhahriehe, a prison camp, one of the worst by reputation. The demonstration had not a lot, maybe 70 or 80 people. Of course that's a long trek. It's way down in the Negev.

LEVINE: Is there protest in Israel against the current policies?

CHOMSKY: One good thing that has happened in Israel is that for the first time, a significant, authentic peace movement has developed. I don't mean Peace Now, which is largely there in order to convince American liberals that they should continue to support Israel. In part this is around Yesh Gvul which has been around for a couple of years. But there are a couple of new groups: Dy L’Kvush, Shomrei Esrim v’Echad, Kav Adom. I don't know what appeal they have in the population. Polls would indicate maybe 10% or 15%. I went on a demonstration with some of them, down to Dhahriehe, a prison camp, one of the worst by reputation. The demonstration had not a lot, maybe 70 or 80 people. Of course that's a long trek. It's way down in the Negev.

LEVINE: Does the Peace Movement grow out of an older tradition?

CHOMSKY: Partly. Yesh Gvul has been around since 1982. A lot of the people have been involved in things for years. For example, one of the activists of Kav Adom is Dov Yirmiah, who is an old activist. In fact he was thrown out of the army in 1982. He goes way back in Haganah. He was the oldest soldier in the Israeli army during the 1982 war. He volunteered for the war and was put in charge of dealing with the civilian population, but was so appalled by the sadistic treatment of the civilian population in Lebanon, that he wrote an article in the Hebrew press denouncing it. I don't remember the exact timing. He was then removed from his military position. He then published a war diary in Hebrew violating censorship. The book was actually translated into English, but I don't think anybody ever heard of it or referred to it. It's a definite nono in the United States. For several years he has been active. He went to Dheisheh refugee camp a couple of years ago and wrote a very bitter article about treatment of people there. He is a guy with a long record going back many years, of honest committed dissidence. But I met with a number of activists in Tel Aviv from Dy L’Kvush, Shomrei Esrim v’Echad, End the Occupation and Yesh Gvul. They were mostly young, very committed and very serious. There are some who are older - Peretz Kidron, who reports here for National Public Radio. But most of them are younger people, some of them were students of mine.

LEVINE: What do they want?

CHOMSKY: They are calling for an end to the occupation, a real end to the occupation. They don't have any far-reaching positions. I pressed them on that for a long time. Each group has its own political position but, as organizations, they are basically concerned with an end to the occupation. They have a kind of New Leftish flair to them. They are concerned with taking actions to show regularly and constantly that they are not accepting the occupation policies. They want it to become a part of Israeli culture to recognize that ending the occupation is an option.

Now that is extremely important in Israel, because there has been no political group in Israel, including Peace Now, that has called for an end to the occupation. There's a lot of deceit about that in the U.S. Here in the U.S., Shimon Peres and others are called doves and the claim is that they differ materially from the Likud in calling for an end to the occupation. That's absolutely not true. They just have a different tactical approach. Yitzhak Rabin just had an interview in England a few days ago. He said that the Labor proposal is that they will keep the Gaza Strip and 40% of the West Bank, meaning that is what they want on the West Bank. That's been their position since the 1960’s. That's in many ways worse than the Likud position as far as the Arabs are concerned.

As far as Peace Now goes, I met with their activists while I was there. And I read their literature. They refuse to take a position. They are extremely evasive. They say things vaguely like "Palestinians have rights." But I have been pressing them for years to show me something on paper where they have taken a position that begins to approach the P.L.O. and their proposal for a political settlement. They have never come out with anything like the degree of commitment to a diplomatic settlement and mutual recognition that the P.L.O. mainstream has. In fact the P.L.O. is more of a peace movement than Peace Now. Peace Now condemns the P.L.O. and rightly, I think, for its evasiveness. They say something, and then they retract it. But Peace Now does much worse. Their statements are much more evasive.

Even the new peace groups do not come out with very clear political statements. Part of the reason is that in Israel the idea of a political settlement is so remote
from consciousness that, if a group does come out with it, they think they will lose political credibility.

LEVINE: They are not exactly popular now. How much credibility can they lose?

CHOMSKY: I agree with you. We had discussions on that and we disagreed. My feeling is that they should come out with a clear, forthright political statement. At times they do. In Peace Now you never find it. Peace Now is a very establishment group. They say in private that they see their role as ensuring that American liberals and liberals in the American Jewish community don't give up on Israel. I consider them very damaging. They are very harmful for the cause of peace. I have told them that many times.

LEVINE: How are they harmful?

CHOMSKY: I don't know what their impact is in Israel. But in the United States people like Amos Oz come here presenting himself as the beautiful Israeli - a kibbutznik, good-looking, honest and an honest toiler. Then he deplors all the bad things that are happening. But the bottom line is, if only there was an Arab as beautiful as me, then everything would be all right. Unfortunately, we are the only beautiful ones. They are all monsters terrorists and gangsters, so what can you do. There is a phrase in Hebrew, “yirim v’bochim” you cry and you shoot. If you are a beautiful Israeli you cry when you shoot. If you are not a beautiful Israeli you just shoot. Now that's extremely deceitful. It is essentially a way of ensuring that the confrontation continues and that the occupation continues. The truth of the matter is that Amos Oz is no more an advocate for peace than the mainstream of the P.L.O., maybe less so.

There is a whole cult in Israel of deception of the West. There are people who specialize in it. Abba Eban has made an entire career out of presenting undemocratic, harsh, and often rather brutal policies in a framework in which they appear to be peaceloving and democratic. You have to read his work carefully to see what he is really saying. He is widely regarded as a dove. He signs Peace Now statements. On the other hand if you look at what he actually says, it's straight Labor Party rejectionism. His position is that Israel should give up the heavily occupied population centers in the West Bank, but take everything it wants on the West Bank. It should take all of the resources, the land that it needs, water, the Jordan valley. And it should just leave the population stateless in little Bantustans in which they can continue to be a cheap labor force for the Israeli government. Now it's only when you get to the small print that you see that that's what he is saying. But he has learned over the years to put those things in a way that makes it seem that it's the beautiful Israel speaking.

There are people in Israel whom I almost believe have been invented by the hasbarah system, the propaganda system, for the purpose of talking to American journalists. No article by a serious reporter in an American journal is complete if it does not quote the “philosopher” David Hartman. Now as far as I know the “philosopher” David Hartman is some marginal character who runs a weird religious school on private money and has never had an idea in his head. But he is there in order for Thomas Friedman to quote “the philosopher” David Hartman, saying some statements of mock profundity, which make it clear that there is a beautiful Israel. If he has any other role in the world I don't know what it is.

Israel is an embattled country. They rely very heavily on U.S. support. So they have developed a very sophisticated system of propaganda. They don't call it propaganda. They call it hasbarah. It is the only country I know of in the world that refers to propaganda as explanation. The Ministry of Propaganda is the Ministry of Explanation. The idea being that our position on everything is so obviously correct that if we only explain it to people, they will see that it is right. And they do it well. People like Abba Eban, Amos Oz, David Hartman and others know how to do the job. American reporters, either out of naivete or, in the case of Thomas Friedman, just cynicism, play the game for them.

Thomas Friedman, I should say, has by now revealed himself, in the Israeli press, as the astonishing racist and megalomaniac that he is.

LEVINE: Which is why he won the Pulitzer prize?

CHOMSKY: He won two Pulitzer prizes. He won for balanced and informed coverage. You may have noticed that it was announced on April Fools' Day, which was not by accident. For years the guy has been covering up for Israel, falsifying facts. When the Israeli press comes out with headlines saying “Arafat Calls for Negotiations, Peres Refuses” as they did in December of 1986, Tom Friedman will choose that occasion to write one of his many articles saying that Peace Now is losing credibility because there is no counterpart in the Arab World. Now he has left The New York Times and, while I was in Israel, he had a couple of long interviews in the Hebrew press, which are very revealing. First of all, they are revealing about his megalomania. The headline of one was “The Man Who Predicted the Uprising” and then it goes on with his self-adulation for having been the one reporter who predicted the uprising. Well you read his columns and you won't find a hint that the uprising was coming.

LEVINE: I don't remember anything.
CHOMSKY: Nothing. But now he is the man who predicted the uprising. Then he goes on to say that he is the only journalist who really understands anything, because he is a really deep thinker. It's all nonsense. But what's particularly interesting is that they asked him in one interview, now that you are leaving after four years, what is your recommendation about the West Bank? And he says you should treat the West Bank like Southern Lebanon - meaning put it under the control of a terrorist mercenary army, set up torture chambers if you need them and so forth. That is his recommendation. He knows what Southern Lebanon is. And then he says, don't ask too much, if Achmed gets his seat in the bus, he will lower his demands. Well, you know you can imagine a racist Southern sheriff 30 years ago saying if you give Sambo a seat in the bus maybe he will shut up. I don't think anybody in the United States would say that today. But Thomas Friedman says it without batting an eyelash and, in fact, Israel is so racist that nobody even notices it. That's Thomas Friedman the great journalist.

LEVINE: And that kind of statement is not criticized in Israel?

CHOMSKY: Well I talked about it with friends of mine. But as far as I know, nobody even noticed it. The country is extremely racist. You sort of know it from reading. But when you see it, it's pretty traumatic. What's happening there is absolutely standard historically in systems of colonial oppression. The oppressors, whether they are slave owners or foreign military occupiers or elites, in order to defend themselves psychologically from understanding what they're doing, have to become racists. They have to assume that these are not real people. Because if you regard them as people, you cannot accept what you are doing. One consequence of oppression is racism. It depends on what the nature of the conflict is. It can be color of skin or religion or something else. One or another form of racism, in the generic sense, is an automatic consequence of oppressive relationship. I am sure you find it in bureaucrats dealing with slums.

But the consequence of racism is ignorance. Since these people are just donkeys, they're not real people; you don't have to pay attention to what they are doing or thinking. Then you don't know what's going on. And the result of that is that there will be an uprising and you won't understand it. And you have to react with more violence, because that is the only thing you understand.

This is a typical phenomenon. It has been going on for years. And it is also typical of many other situations. Take a recent case, the United States in Honduras. The United States must have Honduras penetrated with every C.I.A. agent imaginable. But they did not know that there was so much hatred of America that the Hondurans were going to burn up the American embassy, while the Honduran army sat by applauding. They are all shocked in the intelligence apparatus. Part of the reason is either they don't read the newspapers, where it was perfectly obvious, or they don't notice because, after all, these are just spics. Who cares what they say? We give them some money, so they shut up.

This happens over and over again. In fact in Israel it is the third time it has happened with a major event. In the early 1970's, when Israel was in a really triumphalist mood, the generals were talking about conquering everything from Baghdad to Khartoum in a week or a month. During this period, when Sadat's army mobilized in the Sinai, they didn't pay any attention. How can these gooks do anything to us. In fact military intelligence was saying things like war is not the Arabs' game. Well, they paid for that attitude. They were practically destroyed. It was a very big psychological blow to Israel when it happened. The second major time it happened was in 1982 and '83 when they went into Lebanon. They had big plans. First of all, they were going to kick the Syrians out. Well, it turned out that they couldn't. Although they won the technological war with the Syrians, the war on the ground they did not win. They did not displace the Syrians from fixed defensive positions, and there is plenty of internal critique in the Israeli technical military press. Unfortunately the Arabs know which end of the gun to hold and that is dangerous.

They were going to conquer Lebanon and put their puppet in charge, take the waters of the Litani River probably, and everything was going to be beautiful. The only trouble is that they were kicked out of Lebanon, driven out by the Lebanese resistance. And that was another shock. Well, they sort of accounted for that on the assumption that we are just civilized and won't accept the level of casualties and they are a bunch of Shiite crazies who think they are going to heaven and we cannot deal with them like a civilized people. But on the West Bank, we can control everything. They are just peasants and businessmen and not serious.

Well, now comes another explosion. Each time they are suffering the consequences of the racism that results from their oppressiveness, and it will continue. It will continue until there is a political settlement. One of the remarkable things about this current uprising is how nonviolent it is. The Arabs have not responded with lethal force. And that's astonishing.

LEVINE: Is that a disappointment to the Israelis?

CHOMSKY: I think so.

LEVINE: Were the expulsions from the West Bank
and the assassination in Tunisia an attempt to goad the Palestinians into violence?

CHOMSKY: I would assume so. They would much rather have real violent resistance. You could see it when the girl Tirza Porat was killed in Beita. The country went insane. They were ready to kill every Arab. You know the army was upset about that, because they knew right away that she had been killed by a Jewish settler. They were worried about the settlers’ reaction. They don’t want to have to control a gang of lunatics inside their own country. They tried to calm it down. But you could see what was happening inside the country - mass hysteria.

The response to the attack actually illustrates the extraordinary racism in the society. Here was a case which was a clear provocation by settlers. They came into a closed military area and village lands. A madman, who was technically not allowed to carry a gun, killed an Arab in the fields. They were then brought into the village. Another Arab was killed. The mother of one of the Arabs who was killed threw a stone at this lunatic, who then started firing around wildly, killing a Jewish girl. The net effect of all this is thirty houses either totally demolished or virtually destroyed. I was there with a few Arab lawyers. I got in through back roads and climbed over hills avoiding military curfew. They really wrecked the place pretty badly. They say 14 houses destroyed, but that’s a joke. You have to look at the houses 50 feet away which are half smashed. So about 30 houses either destroyed or unlivable, which is serious business. This means old people cooking in the rain in the rubble. It’s not pretty. Six people deported. The police just announced two days ago in Israel that they are planning to carry out criminal prosecutions against the mother of the murdered Arab man who threw the stones. They are going to charge her with complicity in the murder of the Jewish girl.

Meanwhile what about any punishment for the settlers? Has anybody blown up houses in Eilon Moreh? The head of the military command was asked by The New York Times. He said, no there would be no punishment of this Romam Aldubi, the guy who did all of the killing, because the tragic incidents were already penalty enough. The Arabs, in contrast to the Jews, you have to smash in the face. Nobody reacts to this. The only reaction even in the liberal Israeli press is, well they overdid it because they blew up the houses of some people who may not have been involved in the confrontation.

One way in which the peace groups in Israel could respond is just go to Beita and rebuild the damn houses. Why wait? In fact while I was in Beita we asked how would you feel if Israelis came to rebuild? These are peasants, very stolid, very quiet, very dispassionate. It is amazing when you see peasants throughout the world. They just assume that the world is a place of violence and terrorism, that the guys on the outside are going to smash them in the face; that’s their role.

They thought about it. They said they would have to be a political decision. Their conclusion was that if the Jews came out of a real sense of political solidarity, because they want to help them, they would be happy to work with them to rebuild the village. But if they were just coming to make Israel look good or to save their conscience, then they don’t want them.

LEVINE: That’s a pretty sophisticated reaction.

CHOMSKY: I thought it was a very sophisticated reaction. In fact, I must say I was extremely impressed by the people on the ground, whether it was in villages under curfew or refugee camps under curfew - those we could get into - or towns that had just been swept through by the army or in the hospitals in the old city of Nablus. The people are just extremely dedicated and determined. There is even a sense of exaltation, as if they had stars in their eyes, but in a quiet way.

I was at the hospital in Ramallah right after the demonstrations, with people smashed up. There were no doctors, because the doctors all flew after the demonstrations. They are afraid they are going to be picked up. There were a few nurses. We talked to a 13 year old kid with a bullet wound in his leg. According to his story, he was just running away from a demonstration and he was shot. Anyway the Arab friend of ours, who was taking us around, asked him at the end how do you feel about it all and you could see his face light up and he said “My spirit is higher than the wind”. Or a guy lying in a bed with tubes coming out of him, paralyzed from the waist down, describes how he got his bullet wounds, but then he ends up saying, if this is what you have to do for a homeland, then we are going to pay the price.

Others have seen this too. The Israeli reporter Joel Greenberg who writes for the Jerusalem Post - he is quite good, incidentally - went into Kabatiya. It is a town that was under... well it was a concentration camp for about 40 days. No one was allowed in or out. Water was cut off. Electricity was cut off. Telephones were cut off. Everything. He said when they finally went in there he found the people were exhilarated. They said if they had to go back to eating grass they would. And that’s the same sense I got.

The moods in Israel and in the occupied territories were quite different. In Israel most people probably do not know what is happening, they know about as much as we do. But the more thoughtful people have a sense of foreboding. They are asking “Are we going to be here in 20 years?” Whereas, on the other side, where people are getting smashed up, beaten and
tortured, put in prison, deported, they feel that they are going to win. It's very dramatic when you see it.

LEVINE: What is their relationship to the P.L.O.? Some reports here, even in *The New York Times*, give the impression that they are unhappy with the P.L.O. Some say their devotion to the P.L.O. is partly lip service.

CHOMSKY: Well, it is more than lip service. It is partly true, but not quite. I pressed this very hard. I had good Arab contacts, so I was able to meet people in the old village of Nablus, who were among the local organizers of the popular committees. These are not particularly educated people. One is a taxi driver. Another is a municipal clerk. They are very sensible people. No rhetoric. It is not like talking to the P.L.O. I have talked to top P.L.O. people, who are full of revolutionary rhetoric. There is none of that stuff. These are very down-to-earth people, very serious about what they hope and plan to do. I asked them what they thought about the P.L.O. They give the same kind of responses that I would give and do give and that irritated the Arab intellectuals when I said it to them in East Jerusalem. They spoke about the corruption, the incompetence, the failure to send money and the crazy things like playing for the international press gallery with ships, and living in Five Star hotels. They had no illusions about the P.L.O.

But they have their own organizational structure. At the level of this unified leadership, the party structures emerge. So you get the Communist Party, which is much more influential in my opinion than people make it out to be; it is illegal of course. Also the Popular Front, Fatah which is the largest group, and the Democratic Front. In the Gaza Strip, but not so much on the West Bank, there is Islamic Jihad. That is the grouping at the level of leadership. The leadership send directives, but the directives are rather vague, like they will say, today should be subsistence day. That was the day I happened to be in Nablus, and people were clearing fields of rocks and planting subsistence crops. They were supposed to carry out the vague directive themselves.

On the other hand, if you ask questions about politics and what they want, they will say, well, independence of the West Bank and Gaza, but if you want to talk about that go to the P.L.O. So with all the reservations about the P.L.O. and their lack of illusion about it, they still see the P.L.O. as the symbol of Palestinian nationality. I asked them why go to the P.L.O., if they are so incompetent. They said look it's a realistic assessment of the facts and a plausible response to them.

LEVINE: It sounds a little like labor union members who support leaders who they know are corrupt.

CHOMSKY: Exactly. Those guys are crooks, but that's what we are stuck with. We would like a different world, but this is the world. If you want to bargain, go bargain with them. But it's worse here because they recognize it as a general national problem. My own guess, frankly, is that if Israel ever does agree to a political settlement, there could be a very sharp conflict between the local people on the ground and the P.L.O. bureaucrats and mucky-mucks from outside.

LEVINE: What about the Palestinian intellectuals we hear so much about, people like Hanna Siniora and Mubarak Awad?

CHOMSKY: I asked about them. They are the people the press and Peace Now go to. The people I talked to were contemptuous of them. That includes Mubarak Awad, who does not have any relation to what is going on, who is just splitting things. One of them said about Siniora that he is the one the P.L.O. sends to try to undercut local leadership. These are the people the Israelis go to find out what is going on. I don't think they know what's going on. Now some of these people they do have respect for - for example Feisal Husseini a Fatah person who has been in administrative detention off and on and is now back in again. Him, I noted, they respected.

LEVINE: The section of your book, *The Fateful Triangle*, that really struck me was on the secret agreement between King Abdullah and Ben Gurion to partition the Palestinian lands between them.

CHOMSKY: More material has come out on that since. Simha Flappan's interesting book has more on it. Nobody yet has a document which says it. But the evidence is accumulating pretty strongly. And Flappan has more evidence. The evidence is circumstantial, but pretty strong. If you look at the actual military history you will see that both sides essentially kept to the positions in that bargain. At the end of the war Israel sent all of its forces down to the south to surround the Egyptian forces in the one place where the Egyptian army reached to Israeli territory. Israel had a very narrow waist. The Arab Legion was the only serious military force, but they did not do a thing in reaction. They could have cut Israel in half and saved the Egyptian army. In fact they never moved into Israeli controlled territory. People say they went into Jerusalem, and that's true, but Jerusalem was to be international territory.

On the Israeli side Yigal Allon, who was
commanding the southern front, knew that they had the force to conquer the West Bank. But apparently Ben Gurion held him back. The only plausible reason is that they had an arrangement.

Flappan takes a much stronger position. He claims that the Arab armies intervened on May 15 primarily to frustrate Abdullah. In his new book he gives more evidence. It is a very strong possibility that Flappan is right. Remember Egypt was under British occupation. Their main problem was England. Abdullah was just a British stooge. If Abdullah conquered, say, the Negev, that would have been just a big British base in the Middle East. That was the last thing the Egyptians wanted. They were trying to expell Britain. That was their struggle. We look at it from our point of view. That's just racist and colonialist.

Also, it is a fact that Abdullah did have a plan to attack Syria. He thought he had a deal with Haganah. Haganah was going to attack Syria and Abdullah was going to go in and save Syria and then keep it. It did not work out, but it was an actual plan.

LEVINE: Was this post 1948?

CHOMSKY: It was either 1948 or 1949. Right in that period. This is discussed with some documentation in Flappan's book. In general, I think the idea is extremely plausible. Syria in 1949 offered a full peace treaty to Israel, which Israel rejected. There are good indications that the Arab states did not want to go to war in May 1948. Nahum Goldmann was opposed to declaring the state, and his reason was not that he was against a Jewish state. You see the state was actually declared prior to the time when the Partition Recommendation proposed it. It was advanced. Goldmann's proposal was that they should hold off, and he always held throughout his entire life that had they done that, they would have avoided war. Flappan tries to explore that in his book. His own conception is that Goldmann knew that the Arab states would accept a proposal if it was worked out properly and he thought they should have explored that path. But Ben Gurion and other leaders were pretty confident. They thought they would be able to grab some land. There was a period of about 10 days from about May 14 to May 24 when it was touch and go; it wasn't at all clear how it was going to work out. But aside from that ten day period, there was no doubt who was going to win.

LEVINE: Syria was willing to settle in 1949. How about Egypt?

CHOMSKY: By the time Nasser consolidated power in 1953, he was already moving toward a peace settlement with Israel. In fact that is almost certainly one major reason for the Israeli terrorist acts in Egypt in 1954, when they blew up American installations. Part of the reason was, probably, to exacerbate relations between the United States and Egypt. Part, probably, was to undermine the negotiations then going on between Moshe Sharett and Nasser, which it succeeded in doing. Also, when Ben Gurion got back into power in early 1955, pushing out Sharett, the first thing he did was carry out a major military attack in Gaza, killing lots of Egyptians, which killed any possibility of negotiations. In fact you know there is very interesting documentation in Hebrew, Pentagon Papers style. Years ago they published, in Hebrew, the captured Egyptian documents from the 1956 War. As far as I know, no scholars in America have touched them. What they tell is that Egypt was trying very hard to keep their word by arresting Palestinians and keeping Palestinians out of the army. They really wanted to keep the border quiet, because they knew that the Israelis wanted to attack. Israel was sending in letter bombs to try to kill the Egyptian commanders who were trying to quiet down the Palestinians. There is every indication that they were trying to inspire Palestinian terrorism.

LEVINE: Did Sharett represent a real difference from Ben Gurion?

CHOMSKY: You can find hawkish statements in his stuff. But he did think that they were following the wrong course, that they ought to follow the course of diplomacy. He was a contrast to Ben Gurion. People always quote Ben Gurion in the 1960's as saying that we should give back the occupied territories, but that was long after he had been eliminated from the political system in the early 1960's. But as long as he was in, he was very forthright. He said no foreign factor can set Zionist aspirations, they will be set by the Jewish people alone. As far as borders are concerned, there are no limits. We should never settle on borders. We should always go on. Every political agreement we make is a temporary expedient, and we will go on to get more.

LEVINE: He had the same position that people criticize the P.L.O. for in its Covenant.

CHOMSKY: Exactly. I've pointed that out before. I do not think that was reason not to negotiate with Ben Gurion. A substantial part of the Zionist movement never accepted the partition. Just three or four weeks ago the Herut program committee - Herut is the main group in Likud - which writes the platform, once again stated that they have not yet given up on their aims in Jordan, though they said they are not going to march on Amman. About two years ago the head of the Likud parliamentary delegation, Ronnie Milo, stated in parliament that they have not abandoned their claims.
They do not exist any longer, but as long as they existed in East Jordan. They have been closing newspapers for years. The 1947 partition. These are major components of the Israeli system. Even today they have never stated what borders they accept, and they never will.

LEVINE: What about Lebanon? There has been a lot of reaction in America to the uprising in Gaza and the West Bank. Yet Israeli air and ground raids in Lebanon have killed many more civilians than the repression on the West Bank.

CHOMSKY: Take the last few days. They invaded, but nobody knows what they really did, because they do not allow any reporters. But they obviously totally destroyed one village and they were shelling very heavily. But nobody cares. Even when it’s reported here, nobody cares. Some of the things that are reported are mind boggling. For example, in January 1984, Israel carried out bombings in the Bekaa Valley. There were 400 casualties, including 150 children. Some of the bombings are front page news, but nobody cared. Part of the reason is just normal anti-Arab racism, which is extreme in the United States. But partly the point is that Israel is a U.S. client state. It inherits the right of terrorism and aggression from us.

You remember the big furor over the alleged Nicaraguan invasion of Honduras. The Nicaraguan troops swept maybe a couple of kilometers across the border in hot pursuit, driving a terrorist force out of the country. That same week Israel carried out several bombings in Lebanon, north of the area of occupation, for a military action. The ability to maintain control over the cognitive dissonance is astonishing. All of this was on the same page. All of these liberal Senators were screaming about Communist totalitarians who dare to drive terrorists out of their country. On the other hand this other stuff is going on and nobody bats an eyelash. It’s a real double standard. It is extreme.

Take the treatment of the press. If Nicaragua were to treat the press the way Israel does, we would have blown the place away. Israel has 18 journalists in jail. They have been closing newspapers for years. The weekly La Prensa was suspended, they permanently closed two newspapers. When La Prensa was opened, they closed another newspaper. For the first time a week later they closed a Hebrew newspaper. The editor, Michal Schwartz, is in jail. She is not permitted to see her lawyer, because the lawyer might reveal what the investigation is about. I don’t even know if it’s been reported in the United States. Suppose Nicaragua were to do something like that?


CHOMSKY: Oh my god! We would be bombing. All of these pretended advocates of free speech are just frauds. Maybe there are half a dozen people in the U.S. who believe in freedom of the press, if that many.

LEVINE: Speaking of censorship, what about your relations to American Jews? Your Fateful Triangle was an important book about the Middle East. American Jewish journals consciously avoided it. They would not even print negative reviews, hatchet jobs.

CHOMSKY: It is interesting. Take a look at England. In England that book was reviewed in the Jewish Quarterly by Noah Lucas, who is a well-known historian. It was a very favorable review. He later picked it as one of the most important books of the last decade. That is England.

Here you must have total censorship. The Jewish community here is deeply totalitarian. They do not want democracy, they do not want freedom. Israeli doves like Meir Pail and Matti Peled have been saying for years that the American Jewish community is their worst enemy, that it is a totalitarian community, that it does not want democracy in Israel, that it does not believe in democracy here. These guys say things I would never say. Pail is no big dove, but his critique of the American Jewish community is that what they want is for Israel to be a war god similar to Mars. But they certainly do not want discussion. In fact they have a whole vilification apparatus which is pretty impressive. The Anti-Defamation League office in Boston is a pretty leaky place. Many of the people who work there are appalled, so I have received stuff from them. For example I got my file, a 150-page file.

LEVINE: They keep a file on you?

CHOMSKY: It reads kind of like an F.B.I. file - half truth, half lies. People go to talks and send in what they claim I said, often an inversion of what they heard. Also clippings, inter-office memos, correspondence that they picked up. I got it because I was going to have a debate with Alan Dershowitz. This stuff was being sent to Dershowitz, so that he could cull defamatory material from it- as he did - for the debate. Somebody in the office who was appalled sent me a copy. People like Dershowitz, who is just an Israeli hack, a strict party liner, go to the A.D.L. to get defamatory material. People like me, I don’t care. But if you are in politics or journalism you cannot live with this.

A temporary secretary at the A.D.L. office told me that after the 1982 war there had been...
correspondence between the A.D.L. and the Partisan Review in which the editors, William Phillips and Edith Kurzweil, offered the Review to the A.D.L. as a way of defaming critics of Israel, me in particular. I believe that story is true. At the same time these people were inviting me to their cocktail parties. But that is typical of the intellectual community. It's basically Communist Party style.

This vilification apparatus is really effective in shutting people up. It scares a lot of people off, especially people in exposed positions. There is just no way to respond. If you are denounced as being an anti-Semite, what are you going to say, I'm not an anti-Semite? Or if you are denounced as being in favor of the Holocaust, what are you going to say, I'm not in favor of the Holocaust? I mean you cannot win. Stalinist types of the A.D.L. understand the beauty of throwing mud is that nobody can follow the details. You write it. Somebody else quotes it. Then somebody else says something.

Some people are really extreme. Dershowitz has actually written articles in the A.D.L. journals in which he says I told him that I was "an agnostic about the Holocaust". First of all, I would not have a conversation with Alan Dershowitz if I met him in the street. But this is pure fabrication.

LEVINE: It is actually a quote that comes up a lot attached to your name now.

CHOMSKY: Sure. Why not. Why not say I am in favor of the Holocaust. I think all Jews should be killed. That is the next thing to say. The point is that they can say anything they want. It is a kind of status that the Communist Party had aspired to but never achieved. And they have achieved it. They are totalitarians. They are party-liners. They are deeply committed to state service. There are plenty of others like them. Take, say, Elie Wiesel. His position is that one must maintain silence in the face of atrocities carried out by one's favorite state. That is his position, reiterated over and over again in the clearest possible terms. At the time of the last big uprising on the West Bank - there were real atrocities, 15 people were killed in early 1982. It was even making the papers at that time. He was asked to comment on it in the Jewish press, not even the public press, and he responded that only people in power are in a position to know, and I am not in a position of power, and therefore I cannot comment. He finally wrote an article in the Hebrew press in which he simply reiterated his position that you must maintain silence. That is your job. I must say that he is hated in Israel. When he won the Nobel prize, the vituperation in the Israeli press was just explosive. They absolutely despise him. What is an interesting fact about American culture is that a man who puts forth this position can be regarded as a moral hero.

"Palestine Lives!" Eric Drooker '88
North American activists for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine have been jockeying for some time over the hot issue of U.S. aid to Israel. The debate is shaped around two general positions. On one side is the argument that such aid is directly responsible for maintaining both the occupation and Israeli militarism, and therefore should be either cut back or terminated completely. The other side posits that cutting aid to Israel would be perceived as a threat to that country's security, and such a move would only feed right-wing reaction in Israel and in the American Jewish community, reinforcing militarism and the Israeli occupation. As with most issues related to the Middle East, the debate is a loaded one, with strong feelings on both sides. But there are some underlying issues which are being neglected in the emotional stalemate; specifically, what is American aid doing for Israel, and what should or could it be doing, and why are progressive American Jews so reticent to bring the aid issue onto the agenda?

Just a few points about U.S. aid for background. In January, The New York Times reported in an article headlined "U.S. Cuts Military Aid; Most Latin Grants End" (1/30/88) that

figures released by the State Department showed that only Israel and Egypt will receive the same amount in the fiscal year 1988 as they did last year...In the military credit sales program [alone], Congress allocated $1.8 billion for Israel and $1.3 billion for Egypt, leaving $648 million for all other countries.

Compare this to $85 million in the grant military aid program for El Salvador and $40 million for Honduras. The only major aid recipient to receive an increase this year was the Philippines - from $100 million in 1987 to $125 million in 1988.

The Foreign Assistance Act confirms the commitment of the United States to promote human rights under the United Nations Charter, links human rights and foreign assistance, and prohibits the executive branch from providing foreign assistance to any country "the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violation of internationally recognized human rights".

It should be clear to most readers that U.S. aid serves to reinforce those policies and stabilize governments around the world which Washington deems important to protect; it is not a simple humanitarian gesture. Nevertheless, the justification for that aid has always been humanitarian and, to underscore that, Congress requires the State Department to account for human rights records within recipient countries.

Even without raising questions of the status of human rights in Israel and in the occupied territories, one can't help but ask what such levels of aid communicate about Reagan administration attitudes towards Israeli policies? The answer is hypocrisy.

In his first term, President Reagan spoke of the need to end Israeli settlement policies, and attempted to negotiate an end to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Yet American aid to Israel has nearly doubled since the early 1980s (as well as changed in form from loans at favorable rates to direct grants). Most recently, while George Shultz has been attempting to convince Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to change his hardline position of "no land for peace", Reagan succeeded in reinforcing it. The Christian Science Monitor editorialized (3/24/88):

"Washington hardly shamed Prime Minister Shamir during his visit this past week. Mr. Shamir went home with what he wanted - an accelerated F-16 fighter program, a signed memorandum on U.S.-Israel military cooperation. Shamir got away with thumbing his nose at the Reagan-Shultz peace initiative (an initiative 6 years late in launching, by the way) and with telling American Jews not to protest his government's official line - an attempt to suppress American Jewish dissent."

These contradictions, however typical of the Reagan administration, are unacceptable. Still more unacceptable is Washington's attitude toward Israeli human rights violations. In a Middle East International article ("Human Rights Violations No Bar to Aid", 4/2/88), Shaw J. Dallal wrote, "In its now routine justification for the annual aid Congress grants to Israel, the Department of State in February again certified to Congress that 'Israel...guarantees by law and respects in practice, the civil, political and religious rights of its citizens'". This certification is "fraudulent", Dallal claims, because in the very same report submitted to Congress, the State Department acknowledges that, for example, emergency regulations have continued in effect against Palestinian Israeli
citizens since 1948; the special Israeli judicial Landau Commission found that the Shin Bet has routinely been using physical and psychological torture to obtain confessions from Palestinian Israeli citizens (e.g. in the highly publicized case of Iyat Nafzu); administrative detention of Palestinian Israeli citizens is still allowed; incoming and outgoing mail of Palestinian Israeli citizens is often delayed or confiscated; the Law of Return of 1950, which abolished all British Mandate restrictions on Jewish immigration and the Citizenship Law of 1952, which granted every Jew the right to citizenship upon arrival in Israel, continue to confer upon Israeli Jews denied to the Israeli Palestinians (e.g. the use of land which is held by the state or by quasi-governmental organizations in ‘inalienable trust for the Jewish people’).

This list doesn’t even make mention of the situation for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, before or since the uprising, although the State Department report did make reference to them. Dallal explains, ‘The scenes which have become routine on TV news all over the world during the past few months...cannot be considered other than ‘torture’ and ‘inhuman treatment’. They should be graphic documentation of what the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act defines as ‘flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty or the security of persons’.

Those who are particularly concerned for the welfare, security and, indeed, the viability of the state of Israel, must ask themselves what such unprecedented sponsorship (in terms both of amounts and uncritical certification) must mean for that nation. If American aid is considered Israel’s lifeline, what does that tell us about its stability?

The pressures of Israeli policies and economic and military dependencies are increasingly being felt within that society. At a forum sponsored by the International Center for Peace in the Middle East last year, former president of the Israeli Industrialists Association, Eli Hurwitz, addressed the economic implications of a continued state of no-peace.

“We do not have a level of savings or investment that will give us a degree of growth to satisfy our development needs....I am weary of comparing ourselves to America and the countries of Europe. I am ashamed of our progress in comparison with Singapore and Ireland ($8000 in exports per person in Singapore; $3000 in Ireland; and $1500 in Israel). The reasons for this are many - incorrect government policy, an incorrect approach by the Histadrut, and incorrect handling by the industrialists - but in the end is it not the defense budget that wields the decisive influence?”

A recent Letter to the Editor from four prominent Israeli writers, “Silence of American Jews Supports Wrong Side” (The New York Times, 2/21/88), appealed to Israel’s friends abroad to “join the debate taking place in Israel”, and “not to [merely] support the policies of whatever Israeli government happens to be in power”. The huge impact of this letter is evidence of an evolution in attitude within the U.S. in general and the American Jewish community in particular over the appropriateness - even the responsibility - of criticizing Israeli policy. But such appeals have been made and, even more directly to the issue at hand, for some time. The question is why were they effectively ignored before, and what will be the long-term impact now?


“In several ‘not for attribution’ interviews with [New York Times editorial writer Max Frankel], high Labor Party officials had argued that Begin’s ‘enormous strength’ depended in large measure on ‘his capacity to evoke support - if not affection - at the White House, and above all his use of American aid to fatten the Israeli consumer in an overstretched economy’. According to these Israeli leaders, Frankel reported, ‘Mr. Begin will go on bribing the electorate until his West Bank ambition - underwritten by American taxpayers - is finally achieved’.

In this context, Frankel said that several Israeli opposition leaders counselled ‘sharp cuts in America’s non-military aid of $800 million a year’ as a way of undermining support for the Likud government and forcing Israelis to take a harder look at the Reagan initiative as a basis for negotiated peace.” (p. 103)

After the ‘storm of controversy’ created by Frankel’s column began to cool down, David Twerisky, editor of the Israeli labor movement monthly, Spectrum, addressed “what he saw as the most fundamental question raised by the controversy, i.e. ‘what are the vital interests of Israel?’

“The ideological minority which remains committed to the annexationist dogma, notwithstanding the political logic of compromise and compassion, is selling the nation a bill of goods. They equate Israeli security with the incorporation of all the territories into Israel...They have a right to believe in this article of faith...but we cannot allow them to pass that equation off as sound moral mathematics...Why should America
pay for paving over the West Bank when Washington perceives this as running contrary to the very possibility of achieving peace?...Israel has a right to choose its own direction. But we cannot assume that Washington will underwrite it if it - and a large group of Israelis - believes the direction to be heading for moral and political disaster.” (p.104)

Young concludes that “many of these Israelis [speaking out] believed that a majority of the Israeli people would respond positively to American pressure if they became convinced that there was a real chance for peace”.

These are appeals to differentiate and isolate Likud policy, and they are coming from the Labor Party, hardly radical in Israel. To be fair, there are also liberal Israeli opponents of any change in the Sacred Cow status quo. Rabbi Gerry Serotta, one of the founding members of New Jewish Agenda (N.J.A.), wrote an argument for that organization against taking a position on U.S. aid. He had spoken with Lova Eliav, a well-known Labor dove, about this issue. Eliav compared the tactic to the self-immolation of Buddhist monks protesting the war in Viet Nam. He thought it would be an interesting moral gesture which would show how deeply we cared, but would destroy our credibility. Ratz (Citizens’ Rights) Party leader Yossi Sarid was far more unequivocal. Serotta pointed out that Sarid wrote an op-ed piece in The New York Times, some time after the war in Lebanon, in which he opposed cutting the aid budget as a lever against Israeli policy. His argument was that such pressure would backfire in Israel, feeding Israeli paranoia and militarism.

Those who argue against the strategy of pressuring Israel through cutting aid (even against taking a public stand highlighting Israeli violations of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act), generally are concerned with this backlash reaction. For a group like N.J.A., trying hard to bridge the mainstream Jewish community and the so-called left, there has been a great deal of anxiety over strategies which might offend the former, or give neo-conservatives more ammunition to attack advocates of mutual recognition. Still, there is little to indicate that groups like N.J.A. and the International Jewish Peace Union will easily shake their scapegoating. The U.S. branch of I.J.P.U., incidentally, effectively came into existence in 1983 in response to a Berkeley city initiative calling for a reduction in Israeli aid relative to its investment in illegal West Bank settlement (Measure E). Discovering themselves "beyond the pale" of the N.J.A. platform, Jewish supporters of Measure E organized another vehicle for their political positions.

Those who fear risking political alliances with more conservative elements should consider another issue progressives appear to have won. There was a time when the most heated debate within left Jewish circles was acknowledging the legitimacy of the P.L.O., and the right and necessity to include them in negotiations. The pro and con arguments were strikingly similar, and likewise emotional, concerning the potential damage to "our" credibility with the more reticent Jewish community.

Ironically, in its February 17th editorial, the National Jewish Post and Opinion wrote, “There will always be those in the Jewish community to whom the words of the prophets were direct messages and who refused to kowtow to the bigwigs in Jewish life.... The New Jewish Agenda has been rebuffed time after time when it sought admission to the federation empire.... If you support N.J.A. then you invite the hostility of the Jewish establishment. Yet N.J.A. has been proven right on Israel and her treatment of the Arabs". (Emphasis added.)

In an argument in favor of addressing the aid question, N.J.A. Steering Committee member Jon Weisberger pointed out that “through history, circumstance and opportunity, Israel has come to be perceived by most of the world as a violator of human rights and international law. Were some other country to engage in the kinds of practices that the Israeli authorities have carried out for the last 20 years, there is little doubt that we, as progressives, would be working to restrict U.S. military aid....Consistency demands that the question of aid be put on the agenda".

It is clear that Israel's government has been a stalemated if shaky coalition. The question becomes, does the U.S. support or differ with Likud policy? For other countries, aid fluctuates based on the Congressional interpretation of a particular government's policies (e.g. increasing to Duarte's Salvador, Aquino's Philippines, decreasing to Sandinista Nicaragua). Why doesn't the same differentiation occur with Israel? There is simply no way to support the peace process and Likud policies. They are irreconcilably opposed. Aid to Israel is fungible - it is without restriction, and is therefore used by that country for any programs it chooses, including in the Occupied Territories.

There are also no comfortable ways to call Israel to be accountable for its treatment of the human rights of its Arab citizens or of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. What is the point of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, if it is selectively applied? Are human rights violations permissible in some countries but not in others? Changes in Israel and movement in the American Jewish community suggest that there is an important role for progressive Jews to play in identifying and representing a progressive perspective,
particular with respect to the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Weisberger further proposes that,

"there is a great deal of flexibility that can be used to ensure that a reduction in aid would neither harm Israeli security, nor completely isolate [advocates of such cutbacks] from the Jewish community.

One approach would be to target specific amounts of aid, either for specific weapons systems or for amounts linked to specific practices, as with the Measure E campaign. A similar approach would be to bar the use of funds for anti-personnel weapons, such as cluster bombs.

Still another approach might be to link a cutoff in U.S. military aid to Israel to an embargo on military aid throughout the region. The U.S. is the main supplier of weapons and military credits to the Middle East. A unilateral cessation of military aid to that region would include not only Israel, but Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Such a move would help to allay concern over Israeli security, and might also take place in the framework of an agreement with the U.S.S.R., the main source of military assistance to Syria. Another possibility would be to link military aid reductions to the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East."

In April, a Los Angeles Times poll found that 20% of Jews and 8% of non-Jews thought that the U.S. should step up its military aid to Israel. In comparison, 6% of Jews and 34% of non-Jews thought the United States should cut its military aid to Israel; not as wide a gap as one might think. The majority of those polled - 65% of Jews and 47% of non-Jews - thought the U.S. government should maintain aid to Israel at its current level. If more Americans understood the contradictions and obstacles to peace in this U.S.-Israeli relationship, perhaps opinion would change.

Middle East International (3/5/88) quoted an Egyptian radio commentary that, "The Israelis would never have had the courage to reject every peace effort if they did not enjoy consistently privileged relations with the U.S." Increasing numbers of Americans are coming to share this point of view and are expressing the concern that, as one ad in the New York Review of Books put it ("Time to Dissociate from Israel", 3/31/88), "unless the U.S. takes serious steps to distance itself from Israel, the Israelis will mistakenly continue to think that the course they are on is one acceptable to the American public. In this election year we urge an open debate about the serious problems and dangers which have resulted from the current structure of U.S.-Israeli relations."

In a response to this ad in The Nation (4/16/88), Rabbi Michael A. Robinson wrote,

"In looking at Israel's relationship to the U.S., we must recognize that, especially under the present Administration, the U.S. has used Israel. All of us need to dissociate ourselves from the U.S. policies in the Middle East and in Central America, in which Israel has been used as a pawn of those policies, selling arms where Congress would not permit it, etc. Contragate and Iranagate make it clear that Israel has been an instrument of U.S. policy. The United States' effort to have its policies followed all over the world has made strange bedfellows in many places and perverted the cause of justice over and over again. I would like to see the U.S. stop arming Israel and the other nations of the Middle East, and stop arming the "wrong side" all over the world.

"It would, of course, be great if the U.S. could make a constructive effort to stabilize the Middle East, to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and use whatever influence and power we have to begin to end the hostilities between Middle Eastern states."

The aid question is a little like war-tax resistance. It's a symbolic action that involves some personal risk, but which is done to make a point that is otherwise not being adequately addressed. It thus requires dramatic action: the actual or threatened withdrawal of complicity. Perhaps, as Lova Eliav believes, such a campaign will provoke a right-wing reaction. But surely the conservative status quo is no better - and its stranglehold in the U.S., as in Israel, requires a shaking up.

Deena Hurwitz is Middle East Program staff with the Resource Center for Nonviolence in Santa Cruz. She has served for four years as co-chair of New Jewish Agenda's Middle East Task Force and is a member of the International Jewish Peace Union.
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- Jerusalem Poems
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ISSUE Number

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ISSUE #1 NOT AVAILABLE

BACK ISSUES AT $3/COPY
ISSUE #11-12 AT $5/COPY
INSTITUTIONS $6.50/BACK ISSUE