



# **An Outward-Looking Israeli Foreign Policy**



Dr. Ehud Eiran and Mireille Surowicz

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***This article is part of a publication series that introduces guiding principles for a new Israeli foreign policy paradigm, based on recommendations by a Mitvim Institute task-team. To read the summary of this paradigm, [click here](#).***

**Israeli foreign policy should shift from contrarianism to integration, and work toward a more committed role in international institutions and increased share in foreign and humanitarian aid. The special relationship between Israel and the US is the most important strategic asset for Israel in the global arena. Israel should become a strategic asset for the US by promoting peace and cooperation. It should re-establish its position in the bi-partisan US consensus and foster relations with new audiences within the US, including minority communities. Additionally, Israel's foreign policy must adapt to changes in the global balance of power, and increase its presence in Asia and its cooperation with China, while protecting its relationship with the US. Finally, Israel must take into account the world Jewry when weighing the impact of its actions; it should strive to enable genuine Jewish pluralism, and identify new common ground on which to build Israel-Diaspora relations.**

## **A. Changes in the global balance of power**

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the changes that have occurred in the global balance of power are clearer and sharper to us than ever before. Hundreds of years of Euro-Atlantic hegemony, first headed by Europe and then by the US, are coming to an end with the strengthening of the economic powers of the Asian countries, especially China. In the coming years, the gross national product (GNP) of China is expected to reach or even exceed that of the US.

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Similar to the process that took place in the US between the end of nineteenth century and the end of the Second World War, when the US established its position as a global hegemonic power – we anticipate that, within a few decades, China's economic seniority will also be translated into military and political power. The following activities testify to this trend: China's territorial demands of its neighbors; its increasing involvement in far-off arenas including Africa and the Middle East; and even the opening of more than a hundred cultural centers (Confucius Institutes) throughout the world, in the recent decade. It should be noted that in spite of the current upward trend, the process is not deterministic. There is a series of issues, headed by the question of the stability of the regime in Beijing and the severe economic crisis affecting all of China, that may slow down the transformation of China into a world power, or weaken its position.

The great strategic questions of our generation are: How will the strengthening of China's position in the world affect the structure and values of the international system? Will a stronger China remain in the framework of the existing political and economic order, which is based on the UN, WTO trade agreements, and a financial system in which the dollar is the leading exchange currency? If so, what changes will take place in this order? Alternatively, will China's rise lead to the creation of a new world order, including new values and institutions, as had taken place following the two world wars in the twentieth century?

These questions become even more salient given the rise to power of Donald Trump in the US. According to initial indications, the new American administration is set to challenge basic components of the global order that the US itself put into place following World War II: free trade, a network of alliances in Europe and Asia, and the global liberal vision. The administration also signals its intention to confront China regarding trade, and possibly also regarding the islands in the South China Sea.

The rise of China as a global player constitutes a real challenge to Israel. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Zionist movement and then Israel wisely used alliances to link itself to the leading Euro-Atlantic players of the time. In 1917 Great Britain granted international legitimacy to the Zionist demand for a national home in *Eretz Israel* and, until the mid-1930s, it supported the development of the country in this spirit. Israel's strategic alliance with the US since the end of the 1960s, strengthened it. Then, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, this alliance even positioned Israel as one of the strongest players in the Middle East.

China's growing power raises several substantive questions. How will China affect Israel, and how will the relative weakening of the US affect China? Should there be a super-power competition between the US and China, will Israel be able to retain good relationships with both hubs of power? Are there chances of establishing an alliance between Israel and China in the near future? According to what principles, and with which regions, will Israeli widen its connections in the international arena, and on what will it base its new connections? How will it operate without harming its special relations with its main ally, the US? In general, we have to ask: to what extent should Israel

participate in the changing system of international relations, and how can Israel improve its international profile?

In addition to changes in the relative strength between West and East, the international system underwent a series of changes that are expected to affect the international space in which Israel operates. Among these changes is the rise in strategic importance of the oceans. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the future space for American-Chinese tensions is marine, not land-based. The oceans will also become more important to Israel for two reasons: its production of natural gas in the Mediterranean Sea, and the fleet of submarines it has acquired.

On the normative level, the current nature of the international system reflected – until recently – the continued erosion of the non-intervention principle and the sovereignty of the nation state. In most cases, countries have lost control over many elements that had been so crucial in the past, such as movements of capital. Countries also must deal with the challenge of a global human rights standard that places universal values and institutions above an individual country's sovereignty. Among these values is the "responsibility to protect" principle (R2P), which places the legal and conceptual foundation for international intervention in the sovereign territory of the countries. At the same time, the decline of the EU, as well as the rise of an American administration that seems less committed to these values, might slow down this trend and even reverse it.

Technological developments also contribute to the erosion of the position of nation states. One example is the increasing use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs or drones) by the US to eliminate its enemies throughout the world. This creates a precedent that will allow other actors in the global system to operate military power far from their borders, thus not endangering their soldiers. The social and internet media also contribute to the empowerment of the individual, to the detriment of the nation states. It is also a technological infrastructure that will allow illiberal regimes to monitor their opponents more strictly.

Until 2016, it seems as if the multi-state framework is getting empowered due to the concrete needs of the US, as well as expression of the creation of a new normative framework in the global system. This was evident, for example, in the desire of the Obama administration to rely on an international coalition in its struggle against Syria, Libya and Islamic State, and in the strengthening of UN peacekeeping forces. In contrast, the EU – an important export market for Israel and significant source of funding for its academic activities – is now given to heavy pressures due to the economic crisis, waves of refugees, and Great Britain's expected withdrawal from the union. Nevertheless, the continued weakening of the nation states is not a deterministic process, as evident in Britain's decision, the ascending trend of right-wing nationalistic parties in several European countries, and the assertive policies of Putin's regime in Russia. These developments show that an alignment of states is forming that wants to return to the "basic wisdoms" of the national order, versus the general phenomenon of the weakening of the nation states.

## **B. Israel-US relations: Maintaining and deepening the special relationship**

*Israel must preserve and nurture its special relationship with the US and adjust itself to the changing trends taking place in the US, and in the global arena.*

Ever since the establishment of Israel, all US presidents publically supported the existence and security of Israel. Starting from the end of the 1960s, the two countries have enjoyed a strategic alliance as well. US support for Israel is based on ideological, strategic, and domestic political considerations. The ideological level is based on a set of values held by both countries, including: a pioneering spirit; democratic values that have characterized Israel since its inception; and the fact that both countries are made of immigrant societies. On the strategic level, the bond with Israel, granting pro-American military and economic presence in the region, helped the US counter-balancing the Soviet Union's presence in the region, through its ties to Arab countries.<sup>1</sup> In the post-Cold War era, new dimensions were added to the strategic layer, such as the cooperative and clandestine efforts against the Iranian nuclear program. On the political level, support for Israel became a domestic American issue. One good example of this is the effective activities of the main pro-Israeli lobby (AIPAC) in the American Congress.

Of course, all three levels are intertwined, which serves to strengthen the relationship as a whole. For example, the strategic relationship between both countries was very much facilitated and nourished by the set of shared values. In the 1960s and 1970s, in light of Israel's promising development and mainly in light of its military achievements, the relations became gradually, but significantly, closer. The strengthening of the relationship manifested itself by the volume of the military equipment that the US sold Israel; the strategic coordination between both countries with regard to Arab states;<sup>2</sup> and the concept of the "special relationship between Israel and the US" that was coined by President Carter in a speech he delivered in 1977:<sup>3</sup>

"We have a special relationship with Israel. It's absolutely crucial that no one in our country or around the world ever doubt that our number one commitment in the Middle East is to protect the right of Israel to exist, to exist permanently, and to exist in peace. It's a special relationship."<sup>4</sup>

In order to maintain the relevance of this special relationship for the long term, Israel must address a number of issues when it consolidates its foreign policy. These issues are detailed below.

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Ben-Zvi, "[Israel studies: An anthology - The United States and Israel: 1948-2008](#)," *Jewish Virtual Library*, April 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Pipes and Mitchell Bard, "[How special is the U.S.-Israel relationship?](#)," *Middle East Quarterly* 4(2), June 1997, pp. 41-48.

<sup>3</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948: A 'Special relationship'?", *Diplomatic History* 22(2), Spring 1998, pp. 231-262.

<sup>4</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "[United States-Israeli relations: Special Relationship, what next?](#)," *Jerusalem Institute for Israel Research*.

## **1. Maintaining good working relationships with both parties in the US**

There is an overall consensus in the two main American parties, Democratic and Republican, regarding support for Israel and its security. However, the parties are at odds with regards to how best provide this support. At the same time, Israel's present government has exhibited a tendency of closer links to the Republican Party, while distancing itself from the Democratic Party. There have been incidents of Israeli interference in American domestic affairs, while it has also been claimed that American administrations interfered in Israel's internal politics. In light of the fact that the American government alternates from one party to the other on a fairly regular basis, the polarization of relations between Israel and US and the partiality for one party over the other, can cause damage to the special relationship between the two states.

## **2. Creating closer links with the diverse groups of American society**

The American society is changing. According to findings of the Pew Research Center, "Americans are more ethnically diverse than in the past [...] By 2055, the U.S. will not have a single racial or ethnic majority."<sup>5</sup> This trend will have an impact on American politics: "The 2016 electorate will be the most diverse in U.S. history due to strong growth among Hispanic eligible voters [...] There are also wide gaps opening up between the generations on many social and political issues."<sup>6</sup> Israel must address this shift by broadening its diplomatic outreach to the Afro-Americans, Hispanic-Latino, and Asian populations in the U.S.

## **3. Strengthening ties with Israelis living in the US and with the younger generation of the Jewish community in the US**

The younger generation of Jews in the US was born after the establishment of Israel. In fact, they have only known Israel as a sustainably developed country, which has attained military and economic might. This fact, coupled with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, influences the way many young Jews view the Israeli state. The traditional narrative of having to support the Jewish state, financially or politically, is increasingly getting eroded. A similar trend (of change in attitude toward Israel) is also discernible among Israelis living in the US; in 2015 they numbered almost 700,000. Surveys show that a growing number of US-born Jews and Israeli-born Jews in the US are distancing themselves from Israel.

Studies have shown that *Taglit-Birthright* trips – which provide free, first time, peer group trips to Israel for Jewish young adults – and public relations campaigns on university campuses do not have a positive influence on liberal Jews and Israelis, and that their identification with Israel is waning. Israel's policy toward the Palestinians; the advancement of anti-democratic legislation; and the monopoly of the Orthodox denomination over the religious establishment cause the alienation of the US' younger

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<sup>5</sup> D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, "[10 Demographic Trends that are Shaping the U.S. and the World](#)," *Pew Research Center*, March 2016.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



generation Jewry. It is doubtful whether the liberal Jewish community will change its attitude toward Israel so long as there is no diplomatic process with the Palestinians. It is in Israel's utmost interest to reach out and pro-actively engage with US Jewry, across the political spectrum, with the aim of broadening the common denominator.

#### **4. Positioning Israel as a “regional asset”**

The Middle East has undergone an unexpectedly stormy period. So far, Israel has adopted a wait-and-see, non-interventionist approach. The international community has also not determined a coordinated strategy regarding its role in each of the burning arenas. The conflicts in the region have already started to spill over from the borders of dying countries – Syrian refugees have broken into Europe's borders; the Islamic State is spreading throughout the Middle East; and the Iranian threat affects many countries in the region. The need is growing for policy shaping: for each super-power separately, as well as for the entire global community. These developments constitute an opportunity for Israel to join the global efforts in coping with these challenges. Israel can join ad-hoc efforts, including: providing international support and assistance in dealing with refugees in European countries and in Turkey (for example, medical care and reinforcement of humanitarian forces in the refugee camps), strategic support of the war against terror (Israel is a leading country in intelligence collection and fighting terror), and support of the international efforts to fight the Islamic State.

Israel shares many interests with the moderate Arab states regarding regional occurrences. Israel should cooperate with these countries in addressing the Iranian threat, the changing balance of power in the region, the fight against terror, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This could position Israel as a strategic asset to the US when the latter is required to intervene to achieve stability and promote solutions to conflicts in the region.

#### **5. Addressing American interests when widening international contacts**

As aforesaid, the global balance of power is shifting. We are witnessing the formation of a multi-polarized world, in which no one power is tasked with “maintaining world peace.” Currently, a large number of powers are competing against one another, aiming to become globally influential actors. In recent years, both China and Russia have gained prominence in the international arena, and they have been promoting different approaches to countries that are hostile both to the US and to Israel, such as Iran and Syria.

“Emerging countries” also play a role in the shifting global balance of power, mainly in Asia and in Latin America. The accelerated economic development in these countries has been increasing their importance in the international arena, including in the political realm. Israel's foreign policy should prepare for the unfolding new reality by expanding the breadth of its diplomatic, military, economic and commercial ties, to include the emerging countries on all continents. While planning its next steps, Israel should weigh them against the background of its “special relationship” with the US: mapping the

shared interests and potential conflicts of interests that may arise between the two countries on the global arena. This could serve as a tool to inform Israel's policy planning in the short-, mid- and long-term.

Attentiveness to US preferences, especially to those that are on par with Israel's interests, will contribute to maintaining US international status – which is also an Israeli interest. This would strengthen Israel's position as a strategic asset for the US and even contribute to the strengthening of Israel's position on the global stage.<sup>7</sup> Based on this framework, Israel should consider prioritizing fostering ties with countries that are US allies, such as India and South Korea.

At the same time, Israel must define its own red lines when it adapts its own policies to those preferred by the US. It has to take into account the rising power of China and Russia. These countries want to widen their spheres of influence in the Middle East; they maintain relations with countries that are hostile to Israel; they compete against US' world power and possess considerable economic power of their own. China is interested in developing contacts with Israel, mainly because of Israel's technological and scientific research and development. Israel should leverage this opportunity and bring China closer to its side with regards to Iran and the struggle against radical Islam and terror.

The special relationship between Israel and the US was, and remains, a strategic asset for both countries. Over the years, it has developed extensively, including cooperation on different levels: military, intelligence, economic, technological, research, and commercial. Due to the special relationship, the US supports Israel in the UN, mainly in the Security Council, and even mediates between Israel and the Palestinians. Maintaining this relationship is of vital interest to Israel, thus it would be recommendable to shape its domestic and foreign policies so as to support and strengthen the Israel-US relationship. Nevertheless, signs of changing trends are present in the American domestic arena as well as in the global arena. Israel must prepare itself for these changes. The government needs to re-examine and update its outlook and its policies in order to ensure that the relationship between Israel and the US will continue to serve the needs of both sides, while understanding the depth and the historic role of that relationship.

### **C. Israel as a Player on the Global Arena: From Contrariety to Integration**

*Israel must transition from an oppositional/contrarian paradigm to one of integration. It should assume an active part on the global agenda, contribute towards resolving humanitarian crises and dealing with global challenges including climate change, energy and water consumption, and food shortages. It must foster multilateral ties and adopt pro-active and constructive policies in international bodies such as the UN.*

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<sup>7</sup> Herzliya Conference, "Israel's foreign policy in an era of global change," working paper, Special Team Report, *Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya*, 2011 [Hebrew].



The present era is characterized by the process of globalization. Thomas Friedman calls it “the flat world”, in which more and more players appear on the political and economic map, mainly from Asia, the former Soviet Union, and Latin America. The following factors are among those that are changing the global agenda: immigration between countries, urbanization and the neglect of rural areas, technological progress, and growing accessibility to advanced technology even in developing countries. On the one hand, developing countries should be viewed as markets of the future, thus other countries should aim to develop trade relations with them in accordance with the needs of their populations. On the other hand, rapid growth is associated with weighty humanitarian and environmental concerns. These include: accelerated urbanization; sharp increases in the consumption of water, energy and food; and climate change.

In light of these heavy implications brought about by globalization, the global agenda increasingly focuses around the issues that emerge in this context. Innovative technological solutions must be found as soon as possible, in order to avert global crises and to resolve existing crises. Israel possesses unique knowledge and expertise in fields relevant to these developments. These spheres include: desertification, agriculture, increased food production, and emergency medicine. Therefore, Israel is able to lead substantive changes and promote solutions to world-wide problems on various issues that stem from the globalization process.<sup>8</sup>

Israel is now faced with an opportunity to change its public strategic action plan from that of defensive public relations to a strategy of integration, contribution and actual assistance. Israel can be assisted by various agents such as the UN; international initiatives such as the Global Clinton Initiatives; and foreign aid and infrastructure missions of *MASHAV* - Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation. In this way, Israel can become an active player in the global system.

### **1. Developing multilateral ties in the UN**

In December 2013 Israel was granted full membership in a regional group in the UN: The Western European and Others Group (WEOG). Some of the leading countries of the world are members of this group. The membership process that began in 2000 marked a significant change in the history of the relations between Israel and the UN. For a long time, Israel was not a member of a regional group even though it belonged to the UN. This relegated Israel to an inferior position in the organization, limited its ability to create cooperative frameworks and become part of humanitarian programs run jointly by member countries of the various regional groups. It even curbed its ability to have influence in the UN. As a result, Israel's attitude to the UN was largely reactionary to the condemnations issued by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) or to votes in the UN Security Council.

However, a noticeable change has occurred in the last few years in Israel's approach to the UN. Israel has intensified its activities in the organization and its involvement in the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Millennium Development Goals, including: the struggle against poverty and disease epidemics, as well as promoting gender equality and environmental sustainability; thus deepening Israel's contribution within multilateral frameworks for development. In most of these realms, Israel has a unique added value and expertise to offer, allowing it to contribute to the advancement of these domains. Simultaneously, once Israel became a member of the regional group, the UN also began to absorb more Israeli workers within its ranks.

An approach of integration, participation, and the creation of frameworks for multilateral cooperation will strengthen Israel's web of international contacts. It will give Israel the opportunity to stand out in the global arena, by virtue of its strengths in developing technological solutions to global challenges. The efficacy of this opportunity was proven in December 2012, when Israel initiated the Entrepreneurship for Development resolution to the UN General Assembly, which voted in its favor. The resolution is designed to advance entrepreneurship as a catalyst for development, and calls for the creation of conditions favorable to entrepreneurs, education, and removing bureaucratic impediments to the establishment of businesses.<sup>9</sup>

Two years later, in December 2014, this same resolution was taken a step further, with the UN adopting it and encouraging all UN agencies around the world to promote it.<sup>10</sup> That year was marked by a conflict between Israel and Gaza, also known as Operation Protective Edge. This had intensified the international community's antagonism toward Israel, and a number of Arab countries proactively opposed, and sought to obstruct the passing of Israel's resolution at the UN. Yet, the resolution was accepted by an overwhelming majority of 134 countries.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. MASHAV and Israel's foreign aid**

Ten years after the establishment of Israel, the government formed *MASHAV*, under the name of Israeli Agency for International Development Cooperation, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>12</sup> In the 1960s, *MASHAV* already turned into the largest department of the Ministry, and Israel became one of the main contributing countries in the world.

One of Israel's incentives to promote international aid programs on such a large scale stemmed from its expectation that its contributions would encourage the aid-receiving countries to support Israel in UN votes. Unfortunately, history shows us that receiving aid from Israel does not ensure political loyalty from the aid-receiving countries. Nevertheless, Israel did derive benefits from its international efforts: it gained positive

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<sup>9</sup> ["Amb Prozor on UN Resolution 'Entrepreneurship for Development',"](#) *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 21 December 2012.

<sup>10</sup> ["Israel's Entrepreneurship for Development Resolution Adopted at UN,"](#) *Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 19 December 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Ron Dagoni, "Scoring a goal: Resounding victory for Israel in the UN," *Globes*, 19 December 2014 [Hebrew].

<sup>12</sup> Eventually the Center changed its name, and is now called the Israeli Agency for International Development Cooperation.

public relations around the world and quickly became an international point of reference on various issues, thanks to its expertise and knowledge. Israel was seen as a central partner, among all the leading countries, for their foreign aid programs. Israel even received substantial funding for its international activities. The UN Development Program (UNDP) report published in the 1980s, cited Israel as the largest contributing country (per capita) in expertise.

As time went by, the Israeli government sharply slashed the *MASHAV* budget; its activities were cut accordingly. Today, Israel invests the minimal sum required to be accepted into the OECD.

Via *MASHAV* activities and other projects devoted to humanitarian support, Israel can strengthen its ties with African, Asian, and Latin American countries, i.e. the rising economies, while simultaneously improving and reinforcing its relations with the developed countries that bear most of the burden of developing solutions to urgent global challenges, and implementing them on the ground.

Currently, the sphere of International Development is shaping up as a field with economic potential. Therefore, Israel should focus on projects which showcase its unique strengths and value so that its efforts can later be translated into economic gains. For example, private entities in the countries receiving aid, or even in the developed countries, may later want to adopt Israeli methods and purchase Israeli equipment.

It is in the best interest of Israel to initiate the following activities: to build multilateral relationships, secure membership in multinational forums, and take part in dealing with issues on the global agenda. Moreover, Israel has a great relative advantage regarding many of the issues that need attention. Therefore, Israeli foreign policy must be designed in ways that will harness governmental and non-governmental agents in Israel to join the process and make it more efficient. For example, Israel should advance research and development in spheres relevant to the global agenda; create incentives for cooperation between the public, private, and third (not-for-profit) sectors. Finally, it should encourage the creation of cooperative frameworks between private Israeli companies and local companies in countries receiving aid.

### **3. Natural gas as a tool for advancing foreign policy**

Israel's recently discovered sources of natural gas constitute a significant opportunity for improving its relations with its neighbors and the countries of the world. The developing natural gas industry in Israel provides a unique opportunity for imparting added value to sustainable growth and regional integration. The industry will have great impact on a broad range of geopolitical issues. Gas production is undergoing rapid growth in many other countries of the world. One reason is the development of various technologies that facilitate new drillings from the ocean, from oil shale and more. The global gas economy is now undergoing deep changes, which generate broad discussions regarding its potential influence on the energy economy as we know it today. This is in addition to the

efforts of a number of countries, headed by the US, to attain energy self-sufficiency while lowering their reliance on sources of crude oil.

Israel's discovery of gas reserves in the Mediterranean Sea creates a new reality. Israel now stands on the cusp of a new era in developing and supplying energy; this is likely to have a considerable impact on the economy, technology, the environment, society and the job market. At the same time, the drop in global energy prices, as well as the domestic Israeli controversy around the development of gas resources, require the government and the companies involved to exercise extreme caution. On the assumptions that the gas program will serve as the framework for the process, and that the relevant companies will develop the Leviathan gas field – Israel ought to maximize the regional potential of exporting gas to Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, and perhaps Turkey.

#### **D. Israel and world Jewry:**

##### **From the “crisis narrative” to a discourse of “Jewish Peoplehood”**

*Israel should adopt a new paradigm with regards to its relationship with world Jewry. It must found a more egalitarian and reciprocal relationship based on common values and, mainly, a joint vision for the future of the Jewish people and its role in the world.*

Originally, after the establishment of Israel, the relationship of world Jewry to Israel was based on a “crisis narrative.” In Daniel Hartman’s words, this was based on the joint collective memory of Jewish persecution and, mainly, the trauma of the Holocaust. As a young state aspiring to be a true homeland and safe haven for the Jewish people, Israel continued to cope with existential threats and economic hardships. This reality tied world Jewry to Israel, bound by a sense of sharing the same fate. The central goal was to ensure the survival of Israel as a refuge for Jews around the world.

However, numerous surveys show that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the relevancy of the “crisis discourse” had weakened, perhaps even started to vanish. Israel is no longer perceived as undergoing palpable existential threats: not from the security aspect, nor from the economic one. In addition, most of the Jewish communities around the world do not feel their personal security to be threatened in the countries in which they live. With the rise of a new generation, the memory of the Holocaust has lost its centrality. Meanwhile, Israel’s policies on several issues, such as its treatment of the Palestinians, the status of minority groups in Israel, and religion-state issues – arouse controversy. Thus, the liberal streams within Judaism identify less and less with Israel.

“Jewish peoplehood” is the suggested paradigm for the relationship of Israel with world Judaism. Jewish peoplehood is the collective consciousness of the Jewish people. This is the consciousness that establishes our intrinsic collectivism, our developing civilization, our desire to improve the world (*Tikkun Olam*) and our sense of solidarity

and mutual responsibility.”<sup>13</sup> The conception of Jewish peoplehood views the Jewish people as the sum total of Jewish communities around the world. In this context, Israel is only one community out of many, though it is the largest and the most central one. The Jewish communities around the world are connected through an “ethno-national” identification<sup>14</sup> as expressed in a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility, to a consensus regarding a public agenda, common interests and a sense of belonging to the nation state.

In order to anchor the collective consciousness in an official voice, a consortium should be established composed of representatives of world Jewry and of Israel. This consortium should then discuss all issues relevant to the Jewish people, which interface with Israel as the state of the Jewish people. To accomplish this, existing organizations can be revived; for example, the World Jewish Congress. These organizations, established for this purpose, lost their relevancy over the years. The consortium will shape and define an agenda for the Jewish people, world Jewry would be able to express its opinions and concerns regarding Israel’s policies, and explain how these policies affect them. World Jewry representatives would report negative trends and challenges faced by the Jewish communities. They would compose position papers and proposals for consolidating policies to deal with the shared challenges.<sup>15</sup>

Currently, various bodies already exist that promote similar goals, but each of them works toward a specific political agenda. Some examples are: AIPAC, J Street and private contributors who support specific camps. By contrast, the consortium would be a body representing all the various factions, like a parliament. The consortium would also allow Israel to consult with representatives of world Jewry on the issues below.

### **1. Security of the Jewish people: The spillover-effect of Israel’s policy to world Jewry and dealing with anti-Semitism**

While Israel’s first priority is the security of its own citizens, it must also take into consideration the effects and consequences its decisions have on world Jewry, and prepare itself accordingly. Such a preparedness would entail addressing these risks in war scenarios; collecting the relevant intelligence; supporting the security forces of the Jewish communities; and raising the issues in diplomatic talks with the countries in which danger prevails.

The rise of anti-Semitism in the world endangers numerous Jewish communities. Israel should examine how it can help maintain the security of these Jews, either through the Law of Return, or by taking action to ensure their rights and personal security in the countries they live.

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<sup>13</sup> Shlomi Ravid (ed.), “[Jewish Peoplehood: What does it mean? Why is it important? How do we nurture it?](#),” *The Peoplehood Papers*, volume 13, The Center for Jewish Peoplehood Education, February 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Dov Waxman and Scott Lasensky, “Jewish foreign policy: Israel, world Jewry and the defence of ‘Jewish interests’,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12(2), 2013, pp. 232-252.

<sup>15</sup> The consortium will submit its conclusions to the Foreign Ministry so that the relevant officials could take these into consideration when shaping Israel’s foreign policy.



## 2. The continuity of the Jewish people and the Jewish connection to Israel

Numerous polls<sup>16</sup> show that assimilation rates are rising among world Jewry, mainly within the non-Orthodox denominations. Assimilation rates are measured according to the following indexes: the percentage of intermarriages, the registration of children in Jewish schools or Jewish communal institutions, as well as self-determination in terms of one's religious or national identity, and the centrality of Judaism in their lives.<sup>17</sup> Surveys conducted in the US, which contains the second-largest Jewish community in the world, show that assimilation rates reach nearly fifty percent.<sup>18</sup> These facts represent a challenge for the Jewish people in general, and should be addressed by Israel's policy-makers.

In parallel with the rising assimilation rates, the younger Jewish generation is distancing itself from Israel. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. Some of the reasons are that members of the younger generation suffer less from persecution trauma; they were born to a developed and thriving Jewish state, and never experienced the fear that the Jewish people would never have a nation-state of their own. This younger generation is less religious, does not identify with the national-religious establishment, and even feels politically alienated by it.

Frequently, Jews living abroad are expected to defend Israel and its policies. Under these circumstances, they find themselves identified with a country that they do not live in, and a democracy that does not represent them. Similarly, as the liberal camp is growing, so is the number of Jews feeling uncomfortable with Israel's occupation policy and the violation of the Palestinians' rights. Studies have shown that at the onset, *Taglit-Birthright* trips had a positive impact on the connection of the participants to Israel. However, the influence of these trips has ceased to rise, and it seems that they have not been able to change the opinions of Jews belonging to the liberal camp, who refuse to accept the narrative suggested to them on these trips.

Israel should formulate a policy allowing Jewish communities in the Diaspora to express their criticism and concerns regarding Israeli policy. It must create a communication channel that will allow these communities to create a connection with Israel that is not based on collective memory of persecution but on shared visions, values, and goals.

## 3. Welfare of the Jewish people

Israel has become a first world country – developed, thriving and even leading in a number of spheres – it must bear responsibility for assisting Jewish communities

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<sup>16</sup> The data is mainly based on polls conducted by the Pew Research Center in the US.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the Pew surveys only relate to US Jewry. Similar surveys need to be conducted within additional Jewish communities, such as European Jewry and South American Jewry, in order to examine their changing trends. Yet, the Jewish community in the US is the second-largest in the world. Therefore, the salience of the trends revealed in the Pew survey constitute warning signs that must be addressed, by the Jewish world in general and Israel in specific.

<sup>18</sup> The survey shows that assimilation among non-Orthodox denominations are higher than fifty percent.



throughout the world that are poverty-stricken, harmed by economic crisis or natural disasters, and in need of help. The political and economic support of world Jewry for Israel was an important pillar in the building and development of the state. However, Israel today is one of the strongest links in the chain of Jewish communities. Therefore, it has to switch its philanthropic paradigm and support the weaker links in the Jewish peoplehood.

#### **4. *Tikkun Olam* (“repairing the world”): A shared vision for the Jewish people in Israel and in world-wide Jewish communities**

*Tikkun Olam* is a central value in Judaism. As such, it offers opportunities to connect Israel to Jewish communities throughout the world in joint action, based on universal values. In addition, leveraging Jewish values for the benefit of society at large can improve Israel’s image, as well as bringing it closer to world Jewry. But mainly, it provides a meaningful and modern significance to Jewish concepts and to Jewish identity at the collective and the individual levels.

Maintaining and strengthening the relationship between world Judaism and Israel requires a shared vision, defining the future of the state, based on positive aspirations. Commemorating the past plays an important role in creating the sense of a common fate. However, a forward-looking vision is necessary to harness the younger generation and provide them with meaningful concepts that are relevant to the current day and age. Such a vision will encourage the Jewish people to take on responsibility and action, while embracing its diversity from within. As the world’s largest and strongest Jewish community, Israel should anchor the consciousness of Jewish peoplehood and define its role in advancing this vision.

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