

# American Jews and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?

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In recent years, scholars and policymakers have increasingly recognized the role, both positive and negative, that diaspora groups can play in violent conflicts in their “homelands.”<sup>1</sup> Although attention is often focused on the way in which members of diasporas can help fuel and prolong such conflicts by providing money, arms, and political support to hard-line nationalists in their homelands (as has been the case, for example, with the Tamil and Kurdish diasporas and the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Turkey, respectively),<sup>2</sup> diaspora groups can also help promote peace processes and peace-building efforts (as occurred in the early 1990s with the U.S.-based Irish diaspora and the Northern Ireland peace process).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Yossi Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution,” *SAIS Review* 22 (Summer/Fall 2002): 115–143. See also Yossi Shain and Tamara Cofman Wittes, “Peace as a Three-Level Game: The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Resolution,” in Thomas Ambrosio, ed., *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 169–197.

<sup>2</sup>Alyna J. Lyon and Emek M. Uçarer, “Mobilizing Ethnic Conflict: Kurdish Separatism in Germany and the PKK,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 (2001): 925–948; and Sarah Wayland, “Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities: The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora,” *Review of International Studies* 30 (July 2004): 405–426.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew J. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster Conflict: 1968–1995* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

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Given both the positive and negative roles that diaspora groups can play in homeland conflicts, scholars have focused their attention on identifying the conditions under which diaspora groups are likely to be “peace-makers or peace-wreckers.”<sup>4</sup> These roles, however, are not mutually exclusive. Contrary to popular impressions, which tend to regard diaspora groups as monolithic, in fact, they are generally quite heterogeneous, and they are rarely united in their political attitudes toward a conflict in their homeland. Diaspora groups are often internally divided between hard-liners and moderates, or hawks and doves. These internal divisions mean that “diasporas can be ‘peace-makers’ and ‘peace-wreckers’ at the same time.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, diaspora groups can both obstruct and promote efforts at conflict resolution.

In this article, I explore the role played by the American Jewish community—by far the largest,<sup>6</sup> wealthiest, and most important Diaspora Jewish community—in the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. It has long been claimed that American Jews help fuel the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The pro-Israel lobby in Washington, DC, for example, is often cited as the main reason why the United States has been unable or unwilling to act as an “honest broker” in the peace process.<sup>7</sup> According to this widespread view, the staunch support for Israel by American Jews, and their outsize influence in American politics, effectively prevents the United States from acting in a manner that some believe is the only way to finally end the long conflict between Israelis and Palestinians: apply pressure on Israel to stop building settlements, end its military occupation of Palestinian territories, and allow the Palestinians to exercise their self-determination and achieve statehood. Is this view correct? Does the pro-Israel lobby make it harder for U.S. policymakers to try to make peace between Israelis and Palestinians? Is the Israel lobby an obstacle in the way of Israeli-Palestinian peace? The first section of this article will try to answer this question.

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<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Hazel Smith and Paul Stares, eds., *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers?* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007); and Terrence Lyons, “Engaging Diasporas to Promote Conflict Resolution: Transforming Hawks into Doves” (working paper, Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>Svenja Gertheiss, *Diasporic Activism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

<sup>6</sup>The size of the American Jewish population ranges widely depending on who is counted as being Jewish. The most recent figure estimated the total Jewish population in the United States to be 6.7 million, including 4.2 million adults who are “Jewish by religion,” 1.2 million adults of no religion, and 1.3 million children being raised as Jews or partly as Jews. See Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews,” 1 October 2013, accessed at <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>, 14 March 2017.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Massing, “Deal Breakers,” *The American Prospect*, 11 March 2002; and John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

Whether or not the pro-Israel lobby is in any way responsible for the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, some now hope that American Jews can be influential advocates for Israeli-Palestinian peace. In a speech to the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in June 2013, for example, then-U.S. secretary of state John Kerry directly appealed to American Jews to help the Barack Obama administration in its efforts to restart the peace process, telling them,

No one has a stronger voice in this than the American Jewish community. You can play a critical part in ensuring Israel's long-term security. And as President Obama said in Jerusalem, leaders will take bold steps only if their people push them. You can help shape the future of this process. . . . Let your leaders and your neighbors alike know that you understand this will be a tough process with tough decisions, but that you're ready to back the leaders who make them. For your children, do this; for your grandchildren, do this; for Israeli children and Palestinian children and for Israel, let them know that you stand behind negotiations that will lead to two states for two peoples living side-by-side in peace and security, and that you are part of the great constituency for peace.

Are American Jews really “part of the great constituency for peace”? If so, can they play the same kind of role in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace as Irish Americans played in the successful peace process in Northern Ireland in the 1990s? The second section of this article and the conclusion will address these questions.

My overall argument in this article is that American Jews are not as influential in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as many believe. Their influence on the conflict, whether positive or negative, is often overestimated. Although American Jews provide Israel with a great deal of political and financial support, they have had little real influence on Israeli policymaking with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nor have they had as much influence on U.S. policymaking toward the conflict, as many believe. I also argue that although American Jews do largely support Israeli territorial compromise and a two-state solution, they are divided when it comes to the specific issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve this solution and the time frame for implementing it. Moreover, those American Jews who hold more hawkish and hard-line views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict tend to be the most strongly attached to Israel and the most actively engaged in Jewish communal organizations, so they have a disproportionate role in American Jewish politics when it comes to Israel and its conflict with the Palestinians. Finally, in the conclusion, I argue that despite growing criticism by American Jews, especially younger ones, of Israeli government policies toward the

Palestinians, this is unlikely to compel Israeli policymakers to become more conciliatory toward the Palestinians.

### DIASPORA JEWRY AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The Jewish Diaspora is the paradigmatic example of a diaspora group being involved in a “homeland conflict.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, other diaspora groups have looked at the Jewish Diaspora as an example to be emulated.<sup>9</sup> Since its origins roughly two millennia ago during the Greek and Roman empires, the Jewish Diaspora has always maintained a strong connection with the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael), but for most of its history, this connection was largely a religious and emotional one. It was not until the late nineteenth century, with the rise of the Zionist movement in Europe, that Jews in the Diaspora really began transforming this religious and emotional bond into practical action. The consequence was wave after wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine (initially mainly from Eastern Europe and later from Central Europe). This mass immigration, and the acquisition and settlement of land in Palestine that accompanied it, was the initial catalyst for the conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs that developed during the years of the British Mandate. In this respect, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself is a consequence of the actions of Diaspora Jews. After all, Zionism emerged in the Jewish Diaspora and was a response to the major problems facing Diaspora Jewry at the time: anti-Semitism and assimilation.

From the very beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, therefore, Jews in the Diaspora have been actively involved. Although the vast majority of Diaspora Jews were not Zionists before Israel’s establishment and only a tiny minority actually moved to Palestine, Diaspora Jewry played a crucial role in Israel’s creation. Their charitable donations provided the Zionist movement with funds to buy land, build agricultural settlements and towns, and purchase arms,<sup>10</sup> and their political lobbying and advocacy activities helped the Zionist movement gain international support and diplomatic backing.<sup>11</sup> It is surely no exaggeration to say that

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<sup>8</sup>Yossi Shain, “Jewish Kinship at the Crossroads: Lessons for Homelands and Diasporas,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117 (Summer 2002): 279–309.

<sup>9</sup>Neela Banerjee, “In Jews, Indian-Americans See a Role Model in Activism,” *New York Times*, 2 October 2007.

<sup>10</sup>Between 1945 and 1948, for example, American Jews donated around \$400 million to Israel. Steven T. Rosenthal, “Long-Distance Nationalism: American Jews, Zionism, and Israel,” in Dana Evan Kaplan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211.

<sup>11</sup>For example, American Jewish lobbying helped convince President Harry Truman to support the United Nations’ partition plan of 1947 and then to officially recognize the State of Israel, against the advice of his own State Department, when it declared independence in May 1948.

the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 would not have been possible without this economic and political support from Diaspora Jewry, especially American Jewry.

Since 1948, Jews in the Diaspora have continued to provide Israel with vital economic and political support. In fact, this support has increased tremendously over time as Diaspora Jewry has overwhelmingly come to embrace Zionism (albeit a highly watered-down version of Zionism) in the wake of the Holocaust and Israel's creation. The ideological shift within the Jewish Diaspora from anti-Zionism (dominant before World War II) to Zionism (especially after Israel's stunning victory in the 1967 Six-Day War) has had profound and far-reaching consequences for world Jewry and for the State of Israel. It has made support for Israel the single most important and common expression of Jewish identity around the world. In an age when the religious and cultural ties that once united Jews have steadily diminished, Israel has become a rallying point for Jews worldwide. Visiting Israel, donating to Israel, and lobbying for Israel have all become ways in which many Diaspora Jews express not only their solidarity with the country but also their own Jewish identity. Supporting Israel, in short, has become a way of *being* Jewish, especially for secular Jews in the Diaspora.

For Israel, the financial, political, and moral support it receives from the Jewish Diaspora is an immensely valuable resource. Ironically, the success of Zionism—an ideology that harshly condemned Jewish life in the Diaspora and scorned Diaspora Jews—has partly been due to the Jewish Diaspora. Even Israeli leaders now recognize this fact, and they have gradually come to view the Jewish Diaspora as one of Israel's most important strategic assets. Rather than “negating the Diaspora”—expecting and hoping for its eventual demise—Israeli policymakers now want to sustain the Jewish Diaspora, and hence they regularly stress the importance of strengthening Jewish identity among Diaspora Jews.

The American Jewish community is by far the largest (constituting almost 70 percent of Diaspora Jewry), wealthiest, and most important Diaspora Jewish community. Since Israel's establishment in 1948, and even before then, American Jews have made an incalculable contribution to the country's development, if not its very survival.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, one scholar writes that “no citizens of one country have ever been so committed to the success of another as American Jews have been to Israel.”<sup>13</sup> Over the years,

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<sup>12</sup>Naomi W. Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897–1948* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup>Steven T. Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences? The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001), p. xv.

they have donated vast sums of money to Israeli governments<sup>14</sup> and to a multitude of Israeli charities, hospitals, universities, schools, and other Israeli institutions. Although American Jews give to a host of causes, to this day, more money from American Jewish donors goes to Israel than to any other cause.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is estimated that American Jews give more than \$1 billion every year to organizations and charities in Israel.<sup>16</sup> For many years, American Jews have also have channeled large sums of money to their own elected officials in order to encourage them to support Israel, and they have energetically lobbied American policymakers on Israel's behalf. In the public arena, American Jews have vigorously defended and justified Israel's policies and actions to the American public at large. They have also done this in the international community, as major American Jewish organizations frequently act as unofficial emissaries and interlocutors for Israel to foreign governments and groups.

Arguably no less important for Israel is the psychological reassurance that American Jewish support provides. The belief among Israeli Jews that American Jews are backing them, thereby helping ensure the support of the most powerful country in the world, is a source of great comfort and assurance. The Israeli-Jewish sense of isolation in the world is eased, if not alleviated entirely, by the feeling that American Jews are deeply committed to their security and well-being. If, as David Ben-Gurion, Israel's founder and first prime minister, once said, "Israel's only absolutely reliable ally is world Jewry,"<sup>17</sup> then American Jewry—"the world's most powerful Jewry in the world's most powerful nation" (in the words of scholar Daniel Elazar)<sup>18</sup>—is surely Israel's most important ally. Indeed, Ben-Gurion himself once described American Jewry as "a link and a bridge between Israel and America."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>From the 1950s to the late 1980s, most donations to Israel by American Jews were given to the Jewish Agency for Israel (an Israeli quasi-governmental body) for the resettlement of immigrants, social welfare provision, and economic development. Since then, American Jews have given more of their money to nongovernmental organizations in Israel.

<sup>15</sup>Josh Nathan-Kazis, "26 Billion Bucks: The Jewish Charity Industry Uncovered," *The Forward*, 28 March 2014.

<sup>16</sup>In 2010, the figure was estimated to be \$1.45 billion. In 2007, before the Great Recession, American Jews donated more than \$2 billion to Israel. Eric Fleisch and Theodore Sasson, *The New Philanthropy: American Jewish Giving to Israeli Organizations* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2012).

<sup>17</sup>Quoted in Charles S. Liebman, *Pressure without Sanctions: The Influence of World Jewry on Israeli Policy* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1977), 55.

<sup>18</sup>Daniel J. Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 24.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Liebman, *Pressure without Sanctions*, 225.

Despite the major contributions that Diaspora Jews, especially American Jews, have made to Israel, when it comes to Israeli policymaking, they have surprisingly little influence.<sup>20</sup> Although Jews in the Diaspora, especially a few very wealthy individuals,<sup>21</sup> have become much more involved in domestic Israeli politics in recent years, the input of Diaspora Jews into Israeli policymaking remains minimal. Part of the reason for this is simply that there is no formal channel or mechanism through which Jews in the Diaspora can participate in Israeli politics and decision making.<sup>22</sup> Only Israeli citizens are entitled to a formal role in Israeli politics, and even they cannot vote in Israeli elections from abroad. Another reason is the unwillingness of Israeli policymakers to allow Diaspora Jews to exercise even an informal role or say in Israeli policymaking, on the grounds that they are not entitled to this because they choose not to live in Israel. For this reason, Israeli policymakers do not regard the influence of Diaspora Jews in Israeli policymaking as legitimate. Instead, they have always insisted, in accordance with their Zionist beliefs, that if Diaspora Jews want a say in what Israel does, then they should make aliyah (meaning “to ascend” in Hebrew), that is, move to Israel (which all Diaspora Jews are entitled to do under the state’s Law of Return).

It is not only Israeli policymakers who are resistant to Diaspora Jewish influence. Diaspora Jews themselves have historically been quite wary about trying to influence Israeli policies, except on matters that directly affect them (most notably, the status of non-Orthodox streams of Judaism in Israel, the definition of Jewish identity in Israeli law, and which Jewish conversions are officially recognized in Israel). When it comes to the life-and-death issues of Israeli national security and foreign policy, Diaspora Jews are, understandably, much more reluctant to intervene or speak out, let alone apply pressure.<sup>23</sup> They know that it is not their lives on the line, or their children who are serving in the Israeli army.<sup>24</sup> They recognize

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<sup>20</sup>Liebman, *Pressure without Sanctions*. See also Gabriel Sheffer, “Israel Diaspora Relations in Comparative Perspective,” in Michael Barnett, ed., *Israel in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 53–84; and Zohar Segev, “American Zionists’ Place in Israel after Statehood: From Involved Partners to Outside Supporters,” *American Jewish History* 93 (September 2007): 277–302.

<sup>21</sup>For example, individuals such as Sheldon Adelson, Ronald Lauder, Haim Saban, and S. Daniel Abraham.

<sup>22</sup>There have been some imaginative proposals in recent years for a mechanism for Diaspora Jews to voice their opinions and even have an influence in Israeli decision making. For instance, there have been various proposals for a world Jewish parliament, first by Yossi Beilin and later by Israeli president Moshe Katsav.

<sup>23</sup>When American Jews are asked in annual surveys conducted by the AJC, a majority consistently say that American Jews should support the policies of Israeli governments regardless of their own personal views.

<sup>24</sup>Israeli leaders have also frequently reminded Diaspora Jews of this fact. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, for example, bluntly stated during the First Intifada, “When Israel decides, the Jews of America must support it. We are on the front line.” Quoted in Albert Vorspan, “Soul Searching,” *New York Times Magazine*, 8 May 1988.

that they are not the ones who must live with the risks that Israel will have to take to achieve peace with the Palestinians. As much as they want peace for Israel, most Diaspora Jews are reticent about telling Israelis what they must do to achieve it, especially when Israelis might disagree with them. This reticence has been reinforced by a prevailing norm within Diaspora Jewish communities that holds that being a “good Jew” entails “uncritically supporting, promoting, and defending the Israeli government.”<sup>25</sup> Publicly questioning or criticizing the actions and policies of Israeli governments has traditionally been frowned on, and Jews who violated this norm could find themselves ostracized and stigmatized.<sup>26</sup> Most Diaspora Jews, therefore, have generally adopted—with the encouragement of their communal leadership—a deferential attitude toward Israeli governments, accepting and endorsing whatever they did instead of challenging or trying to change Israeli government policies and actions. As Abraham Foxman, the longtime head of the Anti-Defamation League, succinctly put it, “Israeli democracy should decide; American Jews should support.”<sup>27</sup> The deferential attitude to Israel held by most Diaspora Jews has allowed Israeli governments to take Diaspora Jewish support for granted, confident in the knowledge that Diaspora Jews would overwhelmingly give their backing to whatever they did.

When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, therefore, Diaspora Jewry has had little influence on the policies Israel has pursued or the actions it has taken. Instead of influencing Israeli policies, the main way in which Jews in the Diaspora have been actively involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through the influence they have tried to exert on the foreign policies of the countries in which they live. That is, the biggest role that Diaspora Jews play in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through their political advocacy in support of Israel in their host countries. A large part of global Jewish political activism is aimed at bolstering international support for Israel. This primarily involves lobbying policymakers and trying to influence public opinion. To do this, Diaspora Jews have established a host of “pro-Israel” organizations in different countries around the world whose primary purpose is to shape their government’s policy toward Israel and

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<sup>25</sup>Marla Brettschneider, *Cornerstones of Peace: Jewish Identity Politics and Democratic Theory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>26</sup>In recent years, the question of whether Jews should publicly criticize Israel has been a major subject of debate within a number of Diaspora Jewish communities, especially in the United States. See Gabriel Sheffer, “Loyalty and Criticism in the Relations between World Jewry and Israel,” *Israel Studies* 17 (Summer 2012): 77–85. See also Dov Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict over Israel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 68–74.

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Glen Frankel, *Beyond the Promised Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1994), 222.

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way that is believed to be in Israel's interests. By far the most important of these pro-Israel organizations are those based in the United States. Although a significant proportion of the so-called pro-Israel lobby in the United States is now made up of non-Jews, especially evangelical Christians who ardently support Israel,<sup>28</sup> American Jews (albeit only a small percentage of highly engaged American Jews) have historically taken the lead role in forming the pro-Israel lobby, and to this day, they continue to play a prominent, if not leading, part in it.<sup>29</sup>

### THE PRO-ISRAEL LOBBY

The pro-Israel lobby in the United States has attracted a lot of critical attention and controversy.<sup>30</sup> Its many critics see it as a major obstacle in the way of a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has long been blamed by supporters of the Palestinians in the United States and elsewhere for what they perceive as the United States' pro-Israel "bias," and for its consequent failure to hold Israel to account for its aggressive military actions and human rights violations, and unwillingness to pressure it to make the necessary concessions to the Palestinians for the sake of peace. Some critics, most notably, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt,<sup>31</sup> go even further, blaming the pro-Israel lobby not only for preventing the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also for promoting conflict elsewhere, most notoriously in Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

This damning critique of the pro-Israel lobby exaggerates its importance in U.S. policymaking. The pro-Israel lobby neither determines nor controls the United States' foreign policy toward the Middle East, or even its policy toward Israel. The claim that the U.S. government's long-standing support for Israel is driven by the domestic power of the

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<sup>28</sup>By far the largest pro-Israel organization in the United States today is Christians United For Israel, founded by Texas-based pastor John Hagee in 2006. It now claims to have 3.3 million members, most of whom are evangelical Christians. Eli Lake, "Pro-Israel Evangelicals Escape Aipac's Shadow," Bloomberg-View, 10 January 2017, accessed at <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-01-10/pro-israel-evangelicals-escape-aipac-s-shadow>, 14 March 2017.

<sup>29</sup>In the 2013 Pew survey, less than one in five Jews (18 percent) reported belonging to a Jewish organization other than a synagogue. Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," 60.

<sup>30</sup>See, for example, Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*; Paul Findley, *They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1985); Edward Tivan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987); and Richard Curtiss, *Stealth PACs: How Israel's American Lobby Took Control of U.S. Middle East Policy* (Washington, DC: American Educational Trust, 1990).

<sup>31</sup>Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*.

<sup>32</sup>For a rebuttal of this claim, see Dov Waxman, "From Jerusalem to Baghdad? Israel and the War in Iraq," *International Studies Perspectives* 10 (February 2009): 1-17.

pro-Israel lobby ignores other important factors, most notably, the belief among key policymakers that Israel can help serve U.S. strategic interests in the Middle East and beyond; the popular perception of Israel as the only democratic state in the region; Christian religious devotion to the Jewish state and homeland; and a widespread public sympathy for Jewish suffering during the Holocaust and, more recently, Israeli suffering from Palestinian terrorist attacks. All of these factors (rightly or wrongly) drive American support for Israel, and thus to single out the pro-Israel lobby is to underestimate the depth and breadth of this support.

Although the pro-Israel lobby is certainly not solely responsible for American support for Israel, it does exercise significant influence in maintaining and increasing U.S. foreign aid to Israel. The United States has provided more foreign aid to Israel (most of it in the form of military aid) than to any other country in the world—approximately \$120 billion in total. In recent years, it has spent at least \$3.1 billion per year on military aid to Israel, a figure that is set to increase, starting in 2018, to \$3.8 billion per year for the next 10 years.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), for decades the leading pro-Israel lobby group in Washington, DC, has long played a critical role in securing this aid because of its influence in Congress.<sup>33</sup> AIPAC was recently described as “a \$128 million organization that can fill an arena and reach nearly any member of Congress within 24 hours.”<sup>34</sup> Its influence in Congress is such that one Capitol Hill staff member stated, “We can count on well over half the House—250 to 300 members—to do reflexively whatever AIPAC wants.”<sup>35</sup> AIPAC’s influence in Congress helps ensure that Israel not only receives generous amounts of U.S. foreign aid but also that this aid cannot easily be used as a means of leverage over Israel. Whereas threats to suspend or reduce U.S. foreign aid have regularly been used by American presidents to pressure foreign governments, such threats have very rarely been used against Israel.<sup>36</sup> Undoubtedly, a major reason for this is the strong bipartisan congressional support that Israel enjoys, due in no small part to AIPAC’s influence.

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<sup>33</sup>On the rise of AIPAC, see J.J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), 197–226; and Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*, 151–158. On AIPAC’s influence in Congress, see Dan Fleshler, *Transforming America’s Israel Lobby* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009), 29–56.

<sup>34</sup>Armin Rosen, “No One Is Afraid of AIPAC,” *Tablet Magazine*, 3 January 2017.

<sup>35</sup>Michael Massing, “The Storm over the Israel Lobby,” *New York Review of Books*, 8 June 2006.

<sup>36</sup>The only time when a U.S. administration threatened an Israeli government with a cutoff of U.S. aid occurred in 1975, when the Gerald Ford administration briefly froze arms deliveries to Israel and called for a “reassessment” of U.S. relations with Israel over the latter’s intransigent stance in American-brokered disengagement talks between Israel and Egypt following the 1973 war.

In addition to preventing U.S. aid to Israel from being used to pressure Israeli governments, AIPAC also helps ensure congressional backing for Israeli government policies and actions. The bills supporting Israel that it drafts or promotes often receive almost unanimous support in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Indeed, AIPAC's influence means that, in the words of one congressman, "Congress would never pass a resolution that was in any way critical of anything Israel has done."<sup>37</sup> Although AIPAC has much less influence within the White House, it can still effectively limit the room for maneuver of any U.S. administration on issues concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because American presidents are generally reluctant to carry out a particular policy or launch a foreign policy initiative without congressional backing. They are particularly wary of trying to exert strong pressure on Israeli governments in the face of congressional opposition. This helps explain, for instance, why President Obama backed down from his early confrontation with the Benjamin Netanyahu government in 2009 over his demand for a total Israeli settlement freeze as he tried to restart the stalled peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. Thus, the pro-Israel lobby, and AIPAC in particular, has helped forestall pressure, threats, or even sanctions that American administrations, frustrated in particular by the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, might otherwise have applied on Israeli governments. By raising the political costs of pressuring Israel, pro-Israel lobby groups effectively constrain U.S. policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, potentially making a resolution of the conflict harder to achieve.

It would be wrong, however, to blame AIPAC or any other pro-Israel lobby group in the United States for the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At most, such groups might inhibit the willingness of American policymakers to forcefully push for peace and cajole Israel into making concessions, but they are not an insurmountable obstacle in the way of Israeli-Palestinian peace.<sup>38</sup> While AIPAC may sometimes be able to prevent or stall certain U.S. actions against Israel, it cannot always get its way. This is clear from the historical record. It was unable, for instance, to prevent President Ronald Reagan from officially recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1988, to prevent President George H.W. Bush from blocking billions of dollars in loan guarantees to Israel over its settlement building in 1991, or to prevent President Bill Clinton from

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<sup>37</sup>Massing, "The Storm over the Israel Lobby."

<sup>38</sup>Jonathan Rynhold, "Is the Pro-Israel Lobby a Block on Reaching a Comprehensive Peace Settlement in the Middle East?" *Israel Studies Forum* 25 (Summer 2010): 30-36.

offering the Palestinians sovereignty over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (the holiest of Jewish sites) in 2000. More recently, AIPAC failed in 2014 to prevent President Obama from making and implementing an agreement with Iran regarding its nuclear program (an issue which has been more important to AIPAC than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict),<sup>39</sup> and in December 2016, it failed to prevent the Obama administration from allowing a United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 2334) to pass that was highly critical of Israel's settlements (the administration abstained in the vote). As longtime U.S. peace envoy Dennis Ross writes,

[E]very president since Truman has been prepared to adopt positions that the Israeli government—and its friends in Congress—opposed, if they felt our interests dictated such postures. Eisenhower, Carter, Bush 41, and Obama took positions critical of Israel. Similarly, whether on arms sales to the Arabs or on approaches to Iran, when administrations felt it was in our interests to take a decision regardless of Israel's attitudes and the position of AIPAC, they would prevail. Carter succeeded on selling F-15s; Reagan did the same with AWACS. Bush blocked loan guarantees to Israel; and Obama prevented new congressional sanctions against Iran.<sup>40</sup>

In short, for all its fearsome reputation, AIPAC is ultimately no match for a determined administration.

It is also wrong to claim that the pro-Israel lobby is a major obstacle to peace between Israel and the Palestinians because some of the groups within the lobby are actually strong advocates for Israeli-Palestinian peace and for the U.S.-sponsored peace process. The pro-Israel lobby is often depicted as a highly organized, cohesive political actor, when in reality it is neither monolithic nor a unitary actor.<sup>41</sup> AIPAC is only one of a number of pro-Israel lobby groups, albeit the largest, wealthiest, and most powerful among them. There are dozens of other pro-Israel lobby groups in the United States, and while they are all fundamentally committed to Israel's security and survival, they have widely different views about what is best for Israel and for the U.S. relationship with Israel. They also have very different views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are groups on the left such as J Street and Americans for Peace Now that vociferously oppose Israel's occupation of the West Bank; frequently condemn the construction

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<sup>39</sup>On AIPAC's failure to scuttle the nuclear agreement with Iran—perhaps the biggest defeat in its history—see Rosen, "No One Is Afraid of AIPAC."

<sup>40</sup>Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 405.

<sup>41</sup>Dov Waxman, "The Israel Lobbies: A Survey of the Pro-Israel Community in the United States," *Israel Studies Forum* 25 (Summer 2010): 1-28.

and expansion of Israeli settlements there; and strongly support the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. By contrast, there are groups on the right such as the Zionist Organization of America and the Emergency Committee for Israel that support Israel's continued control over the West Bank (for security, historical, or religious reasons, or a combination of them), back Israeli settlement building, and are staunchly opposed to Palestinian statehood. And there are groups in the center such as AIPAC, the Anti-Defamation League, and the American Jewish Committee that endorse a two-state solution to the conflict, neither condemn nor condone settlement building, and adamantly oppose any kind of American pressure on Israel.

The diversity of views within the pro-Israel lobby concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict means that when lobbying the U.S. government, it rarely acts in unison or speaks with a single voice. More often than not, U.S. policymakers hear from many different voices, each of which claims to be "pro-Israel."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, nowadays there is a cacophony of voices coming from the pro-Israel lobby, although some obviously command more attention from politicians than others. But for all the noise they generate and the attention they attract, pro-Israel groups have had minimal impact on the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. Right-wing pro-Israel groups such as the Zionist Organization of America were staunchly opposed to the Oslo peace process, and in the early and mid-1990s, they actively lobbied against the peace process and tried to torpedo it (for instance, they successfully lobbied Congress to pass a bill requiring the United States to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and to pass an amendment that linked U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority to State Department certification that it was complying with the Oslo Accords).<sup>43</sup> Their efforts created complications for American and Israeli leaders,<sup>44</sup> but they did not succeed in derailing the peace process. Similarly, left-wing pro-Israel groups that

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<sup>42</sup>See, for example, Ron Kampeas, "Rebuke of UN Shows a House Divided over Meaning of 'Pro-Israel,'" Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 10 January 2017, accessed at <http://www.jta.org/2017/01/10/news-opinion/politics/rebuke-of-un-shows-a-house-divided-over-meaning-of-pro-israel>, 15 March 2017.

<sup>43</sup>Ofira Seliktar, "The Changing Identity of American Jews, Israel and the Peace Process," in Danny Ben Moshe and Zohar Segev, eds., *Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish Identity* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 126. According to one scholar, Benjamin Netanyahu, then the leader of the opposition Likud party in Israel, personally encouraged American Jews to lobby Congress to pass legislation that would undermine the Rabin government's effort at peacemaking with the Palestinians. See Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences?*, 128–129.

<sup>44</sup>Israel's Labor-led government under Prime Minister Rabin opposed both of these bills at the time and privately complained that right-wing pro-Israel organizations in the United States were acting against its policies and attempting to undermine the Oslo peace process.

have lobbied for American pressure to be applied on right-wing Israeli governments reluctant to move forward on the peace process have achieved only limited and short-term success at best. Although J Street has had some successes in Congress (for example, in December 2012, when its lobbying helped prevent an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would have reduced U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority and shut down the PLO's office in Washington, DC, to punish the Palestinians for seeking non-member state status in the United Nations),<sup>45</sup> J Street was not able to push the Obama administration or Congress to apply any sustained pressure on Israel's right-wing government led by Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Thus, whether for or against the peace process, pro-Israel lobby groups have been of marginal significance in influencing U.S. policy toward it. This policy, like every aspect of American foreign policy, is ultimately determined by what the U.S. administration believes is in the American national interest. It is the administration's definition or interpretation of the national interest in the context of its broader foreign policy beliefs and perceptions that determines its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When an administration believes that the U.S. national interest requires active American engagement in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, then it becomes actively engaged, whether pro-Israel lobby groups like it or not. After all, even the George W. Bush administration, hailed by much of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States as Israel's best-ever friend in the White House, eventually, albeit belatedly, pushed for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that included a division of Jerusalem, thereby provoking the ire of right-wing pro-Israel groups.

### AMERICAN JEWISH PUBLIC OPINION

If, as I argued in the preceding section, the American Jewish pro-Israel lobby is not a major impediment to Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, then what about the wider American Jewish community? Do American Jews support or oppose peacemaking efforts? Are they "doves" or "hawks" in their attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Most American Jews support the formula of "land for peace" that has long been the basis for peacemaking between Arabs and Israelis, and they

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<sup>45</sup>J Street activists sent out 15,000 letters and made more than 1,000 phone calls to senators urging them to oppose the amendment, and none of the House members and senators who had been endorsed by J Street's PAC supported the amendment. "J Street Wins as Senate Omits Statehood Slap," *The Forward*, 5 December 2012.

are in favor of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict involving the creation of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel.<sup>46</sup> In the largest national survey of the American Jewish population in recent years carried out by the Pew Research Center in 2013, a solid majority of American Jews (61 percent) thought that Israel and an independent Palestinian state could peacefully coexist.<sup>47</sup> In this respect, American Jews are quite dovish, certainly in comparison with Americans in general (in a 2016 Pew survey, only half of the American public believed that a peaceful two-state solution is possible), and even more so when compared with Israeli Jews, just 43 percent of whom (in another Pew survey taken in 2015) thought that Israel and a Palestinian state could coexist peacefully (this was down from 46 percent in 2013).<sup>48</sup> In a more recent, and much smaller, national survey of 731 American Jewish voters conducted on Election Day in November 2016, an even larger percentage (72 percent) supported a two-state solution involving the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with its capital in East Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> Sixty-nine percent of the respondents were also in favor of the United States “exerting pressure on both the Israelis and Arabs to make the compromises necessary to achieve peace,” a finding that suggests that American Jews are, in fact, “a constituency for peace,” as then Secretary of State Kerry put it.

However, despite their strong support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most American Jews, like most Americans and most Israelis, are pessimistic about the chances of achieving a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. They are also persistently distrustful of the Palestinians (just like Israeli Jews). In the 2013 Pew survey, three-quarters of American Jews did not believe that the current Palestinian leadership (led by Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas) was making a sincere effort to reach a peace agreement with

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<sup>46</sup>Relatively few American Jews have a strong ideological commitment to Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank. Theodore Sasson, *The New Realism: American Jewish Views about Israel* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2009), 38–39.

<sup>47</sup>Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” 87. The Pew survey is based on interviews with 3,475 Jews in all 50 U.S. states, making it the largest survey of American Jews in more than a decade.

<sup>48</sup>Pew Research Center, “Israel’s Religiously Divided Society,” 8 March 2016, 176, accessed at <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/>, 15 March 2017. Unlike Israeli Jews, American Jews in general are less likely to have a zero-sum view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. See Ella Ben Hagai, Eileen L. Zurbriggen, Phillip L. Hammack, and Megan Ziman, “Beliefs Predicting Peace, Beliefs Predicting War: Jewish-Americans and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 13 (December 2013): 286–309.

<sup>49</sup>This survey was commissioned by J Street and carried out by the polling company Gerstein Bocian Agne Strategies. Full results of the survey accessed at <http://jstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-survey.pdf>, 14 March 2017.

Israel,<sup>50</sup> and in another survey that year (commissioned by the AJC), three-quarters of American Jewish respondents agreed with this statement: “The goal of the Arabs is not a peaceful two-state agreement with Israel, but rather the destruction of Israel” (similar numbers agreed with this statement every year the question is asked). Most American Jews are, therefore, deeply ambivalent in their attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They want peace and favor some Israeli territorial concessions, but they also worry about Israeli security and are highly suspicious about Palestinians intentions. They are concerned about the potentially severe security threat Israel could face if it withdraws from territory in the West Bank, but they are also concerned about the major demographic threat to Israel’s future as a Jewish and democratic state if it continues to hold on to this territory and effectively rule over the Palestinian population within it.<sup>51</sup> They are torn between these conflicting beliefs. They want Israel to end the occupation, but they do not want Israel to take any security risks. They want Palestinians to have a state of their own, but they do not want this state to be a threat to Israel in any way. In short, they are, in Steven M. Cohen’s apt phrase, “conditional doves.”<sup>52</sup>

These general American Jewish attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are remarkably stable and enduring. In the annual surveys of American Jewish public opinion commissioned by the AJC,<sup>53</sup> for the past 25 years, most American Jews have consistently supported the

<sup>50</sup>Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” 89.

<sup>51</sup>In the November 2014 J Street survey, 78 percent of American Jews believed that “a two-state solution is necessary to strengthen Israeli security and ensure Israel’s Jewish democratic character.” J Street, “National Post-Election Survey: November 4, 2014,” accessed at <http://libcloud.s3.amazonaws.com/862/89/0/112/1/jstreet-national-election-night-final-results.pdf>, 15 March 2017/.

<sup>52</sup>Steven M. Cohen, “Amoral Zionists, Moralizing Universalists and Conditional Doves,” *Moment* 14 (August 1989): 56–57.

<sup>53</sup>The annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion commissioned by the AJC since the early 1990s is the most reliable and consistent source of data on American Jewish public opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because it is conducted on a regular basis, with the same methodology (until the 2012 survey), and features the same questions (respondents are regularly asked about three of the main “final status issues” of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process: Palestinian statehood, Jewish settlements, and the future status of Jerusalem), thereby providing consistent results from year to year which allows for meaningful comparisons to be made (the sample size of the survey, ranging from approximately 800 to 1,000 responses, is also sufficient). Nevertheless, the AJC survey does not provide a completely accurate representation of American Jewish opinion because until 2012, it only surveyed people who identified themselves as Jewish by religion, which excludes Jews who are children of intermarried parents and Jews who do not identify themselves as Jewish by religion—both growing segments of the American Jewish population (according to the 2013 Pew survey, “Jews of no religion” made up almost one-quarter—22 percent—of the overall Jewish population in the United States in that year). These Jews generally feel less attached to Israel and may also have more liberal and dovish opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hence, the AJC survey overrepresents Jews who care about Israel. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, another rapidly growing segment of the American Jewish population, are also probably underrepresented in the AJC surveys.

Israeli-Palestinian peace process (since it began with the U.S.-sponsored Madrid peace conference in 1991) while remaining suspicious of Palestinian intentions.<sup>54</sup> There was overwhelming support among American Jews for the “Declaration of Principles” between Israel and the PLO signed on the White House lawn on 13 September 1993. In a poll taken that month, 90 percent of American Jews regarded the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO as a positive development, and 74 percent supported Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.<sup>55</sup>

In another poll taken almost a year later, two-thirds of American Jews still expressed support for the agreement, yet far fewer (44 percent) thought that the Palestinians were interested “in a true and lasting peace with Israel,” with 42 percent believing that the Palestinians were not interested in this.<sup>56</sup> There was even greater distrust of the PLO, with a slight majority (53 percent) of those surveyed agreeing with the view that “the PLO is determined to destroy Israel”<sup>57</sup> and only 18 percent agreeing that “the PLO [could] be relied upon to honor its agreements and refrain from terrorist activity against Israel.”<sup>58</sup> While their support for the Oslo peace process declined slightly over time, throughout the years of the peace process (1993–2000), a solid majority of American Jews were in favor of it —although the minority of American Jews who opposed it were so vocal and strident that they gave the impression that there was much more opposition to the peace process among American Jews than there actually was.<sup>59</sup>

When the Oslo peace process collapsed and the Second Intifada broke out, the vast majority of American Jews blamed the Palestinians for the failure to make peace and for the renewal of Israeli-Palestinian violence. In the 2002 AJC survey, 80 percent of American Jewish respondents thought that the Palestinians were responsible for the violence, and 82 percent agreed with the statement “the goal of the Arabs is not the return of

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<sup>54</sup>This does not mean that American Jewish opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not affected by developments in the United States, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and the wider Middle East. Changes in American Jewish public opinion have occurred in response to such developments. Support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, for instance, fluctuates from year to year largely in response to regional events.

<sup>55</sup>Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences?*, 125.

<sup>56</sup>Renaë Cohen, *The Israeli Peace Initiative and the Israel-PLO Accord: A Survey of American Jewish Opinion in 1994* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1995), 3–6.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>59</sup>Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand: American Jews, Israel, and the Peace Process* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel.”<sup>60</sup> Most American Jews also supported the actions of the Israeli government, then led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in response to the wave of Palestinian suicide bombings that took place at the height of the Second Intifada. Almost two-thirds (62 percent) thought that the U.S. government should give the Sharon government a “free hand” to take whatever actions it wanted in responding to terrorist attacks, and nearly four out of five American Jews supported the “targeted assassination” of suspected Palestinian terrorists.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the Second Intifada (2000–2005), most American Jews continued to support a two-state solution to the conflict. In fact, American Jewish support for the establishment of a Palestinian state “in the current situation” increased slightly during the course of the Second Intifada (from 53 percent support in 2001 to a peak of 57 percent in 2004). The majority of American Jews, then, were hawkish in their views about how Israel should respond to Palestinian terrorism, but they remained dovish in their views about how Israel should ultimately resolve its conflict with the Palestinians.

Although American Jews consistently express support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, when it comes to the specific issues that need to be addressed in order to achieve this solution and the time frame for implementing it, there is much less agreement among American Jews. There is no clear consensus on the future of Jerusalem, for example.<sup>62</sup> In general, more educated, more politically liberal, and less religiously observant American Jews are more supportive of compromising on the status of Jerusalem in the context of a peace agreement with the Palestinians than less educated, more conservative, and more religious Jews.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, according to the annual AJC surveys, there is not a strong consensus among American Jews on whether a Palestinian state should be established “in the current situation” or on the future of Israel’s settlements in the West Bank. While a slim majority of respondents generally support Palestinian

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<sup>60</sup>American Jewish Committee, *Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion, 2002*.

<sup>61</sup>Steven M. Cohen, “An Ambivalent Loyalty,” *Ha’aretz*, 24 January 2003.

<sup>62</sup>In the annual AJC survey, a majority of American Jews consistently opposed the division of Jerusalem as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians. In the 2011 AJC survey (the last time the question was asked), 59 percent were opposed to this. Other polls, however, have indicated that a majority of American Jews support a future division of Jerusalem. For instance, in a survey of 800 American Jewish voters conducted on behalf of J Street at the time of the 2014 midterm congressional elections, three-quarters of American Jews (76 percent) said they supported an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that would involve a division of Jerusalem. J Street, “National Post-Election Survey: November 4, 2014.”

<sup>63</sup>Theodore Sasson, Benjamin Phillips, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, *Still Connected: American Jewish Attitudes about Israel* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2010), 24–25.

statehood and the dismantling of some (but not all) settlements, a significant minority oppose these things. For instance, in the AJC's 2015 Survey of American Jewish Opinion (the most recent survey in which the question was asked), 52 percent of American Jews supported the establishment of a Palestinian state (a slight increase from 48 percent in the 2010 AJC survey) compared with 46 percent who opposed this.<sup>64</sup> On the question of what should happen to Jewish settlements in the West Bank in the framework of a peace agreement with the Palestinians, while a majority of American Jewish respondents in the AJC surveys consistently support the dismantling of at least some Israeli settlements, a significant minority—ranging from 35 percent to 45 percent—oppose the dismantling of any settlements.<sup>65</sup> In the 2015 AJC survey, for example, 59 percent were in favor of Israel dismantling at least some of its West Bank settlements “as part of a permanent settlement with the Palestinians,” while 39 percent were opposed to the dismantling of any Jewish settlements.<sup>66</sup>

Israel's continued settlement building in the West Bank is particularly controversial among American Jews. Most American Jews oppose this,<sup>67</sup> and a plurality (44 percent) believe that the continued construction of settlements in the West Bank hurts Israel's security (the prevailing view among Israeli Jews, by contrast, is that settlements help the security of Israel).<sup>68</sup> But the minority of American Jews who support Israeli settlements in the West Bank tend to be the most strongly attached to Israel, and

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<sup>64</sup>For instance, in the 2010 AJC survey, 48 percent of respondents supported the establishment of a Palestinian state “in the current situation” and 45 percent opposed it; in the 2013 AJC survey, 50 percent of respondents supported it, while 47 percent were opposed.

<sup>65</sup>American Jews have gradually become more supportive of dismantling some, but not all, Israeli settlements in the West Bank in the context of a peace agreement with the Palestinians. When asked in the AJC survey in 1994 whether Israel should dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza as part of a permanent settlement with the Palestinians, just over half of American Jews (52 percent) answered no, while 37 percent said yes. In the AJC survey 10 years later, in 2004 (during the Second Intifada), only 29 percent of respondents said that Israel should not dismantle any West Bank settlements, whereas 69 percent now thought that Israel should dismantle either all (12 percent) or some (57 percent) of its settlements.

<sup>66</sup>American Jewish Committee, “AJC 2015 Survey of American Jewish Opinion,” accessed at <http://www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=7oJILSPwFfJSG&b=8479755&ct=14759049>.

<sup>67</sup>In the November 2016 survey of Jewish voters commissioned by J Street, 78 percent of respondents were in favor of Israel completely suspending construction of settlements that are outside the core settlement blocs (including 28 percent who wanted Israel to suspend all settlement construction). Similarly, in the poll of American Jewish voters conducted on behalf of J Street following the November 2014 midterm congressional elections, 52 percent wanted Israel to stop construction beyond the major settlement blocs, and 28 percent wanted Israel to stop all settlement construction in the West Bank. J Street, “National Post-Election Survey: November 4, 2014.”

<sup>68</sup>Twenty-nine percent of respondents in the 2013 Pew survey thought that continued West Bank settlement construction made no difference to Israeli security, while 17 percent believed that it helps Israel's security. Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” 91.

they are often the most mobilized and most vociferous. Support for Israel's settlement enterprise is by far the strongest among Orthodox American Jews (who make up about 10 percent of the American Jewish adult population), especially the modern Orthodox (about 3 percent of American Jews). The issue of Jewish settlements in the West Bank divides Orthodox and non-Orthodox American Jews more than any other single issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>69</sup> While non-Orthodox Jews have come to view the settlements as a threat to Israel's security and its future as a Jewish and democratic state, Orthodox Jews continue to support them (emotionally and, in many cases, financially).<sup>70</sup>

These different attitudes toward the Israeli settlement enterprise stem in part from the fact that Orthodox American Jews are much more likely than non-Orthodox American Jews to have family or friends who live in West Bank settlements,<sup>71</sup> and many have probably visited such settlements themselves. Furthermore, over the last few decades, it has become very common for young modern Orthodox American Jews to spend a year or two after high school studying in yeshivas and seminaries in Israel before returning to the United States to go to college. Not only does this experience have a powerful impact on their religious beliefs and practices, it also affects their political beliefs and attitudes.<sup>72</sup> Cumulatively, the attendance of so many young Orthodox Jews at yeshivas in Israel (and some in the West Bank and East Jerusalem) has had a profound impact on the culture and politics of modern Orthodox American Jews, resulting in a stricter adherence to Orthodox religious practices and a stronger commitment to Israel.<sup>73</sup> It

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<sup>69</sup>In the 2013 Pew survey, 47 percent of non-Orthodox Jews thought that the continued building of Israeli settlements undermines Israel's security. Similarly, in a national survey of American Jewish opinion carried out by J Street in March 2009, opposition to Israeli settlement building was highest among unaffiliated and Reform Jews (69 percent and 64 percent respectively). In contrast, 80 percent of Orthodox Jews supported the expansion of Israeli settlements.

<sup>70</sup>An investigation by Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper revealed that settler groups in East Jerusalem and the West Bank received more than \$220 million in tax-deductible donations from U.S. organizations between 2009 and 2013. Uri Blau, "U.S. Donors Gave Settlements More than \$220 Million in Tax-Exempt Funds over Five Years," *Ha'aretz*, 7 December 2015. Ir David, an organization that promotes Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, has received between \$3 million and \$6 million annually from American Jewish donors, and Ateret Cohanim, another organization that promotes Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, raises \$1 million to \$2 million annually in the United States (more than half of its operating budget). Theodore Sasson, *The New American Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 78–79.

<sup>71</sup>Roughly 12 percent to 15 percent of Israeli settlers (around 60,000 people) are American Jews. Sara Hirschhorn, "Israeli Terrorists, Born in the U.S.A.," *New York Times*, 4 September 2015.

<sup>72</sup>Samuel C. Heilman, "Jews and Fundamentalism," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 17 (Spring 2005): 183–189.

<sup>73</sup>Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Orthodox and Other American Jews and Their Attitude to the State of Israel," *Israel Studies* 17 (Summer 2012): 120–128, at 124.

has also, no doubt, generated greater sympathy and support for the settlement project.<sup>74</sup>

The division between Orthodox and non-Orthodox American Jews in their views about Israeli settlements is part of a broader divide between the two groups in their attitudes about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Not only are Orthodox American Jews much more likely than non-Orthodox American Jews to oppose any dismantling or evacuation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, but also they are more likely to oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state. In general, they are much less supportive of Israeli territorial compromise with the Palestinians than other American Jews.<sup>75</sup> In the 2013 Pew survey, for example, a majority of Orthodox Jews (61 percent) did not think that Israel and a future Palestinian state could coexist peacefully, whereas most non-Orthodox Jews thought that this would be possible.<sup>76</sup> Similar findings appear in numerous other surveys over many years. In the mid-1990s at the height of the Oslo peace process, polls showed that American Jewish opposition to the peace process was largely concentrated within the Orthodox community. In a survey taken in September 1995, 64 percent of Orthodox Jews opposed the Yitzhak Rabin government's peace policy, while roughly three-quarters of non-Orthodox Jews supported it (77 percent of Reform Jews and 74 percent of Conservative Jews).<sup>77</sup> A decade later, in a 2005 survey, a large majority of Orthodox Jews (69 percent) opposed the establishment of a Palestinian state, whereas a majority of non-Orthodox Jews wanted a Palestinian state to be established. In the same survey, most Orthodox Jews (65 percent) opposed dismantling any West Bank settlements in a peace deal with the Palestinians, compared with only 36 percent

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<sup>74</sup>This is partly because Orthodox American Jews who have studied in modern Orthodox yeshivas in Israel are likely to have been exposed to messianic religious Zionism, which is a pervasive ideology in such institutions.

<sup>75</sup>Joel Perlmann, "American Jewish Opinion about the Future of the West Bank: A Reanalysis of American Jewish Committee Surveys" (Working Paper 526, Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, December 2007), 17-19.

<sup>76</sup>Seventy-two percent of nondenominational Jews, 62 percent of Conservative Jews, and 58 percent of Reform Jews thought this was possible. Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," 87.

<sup>77</sup>"American Jewish Attitudes towards Israel and the Peace Process" (public opinion survey conducted for the American Jewish Committee by Market Facts, 7-15 August 1995). Similarly, in a January 1996 survey (taken not long after the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by an Orthodox Israeli Jew), a majority of Orthodox respondents (56 percent) were opposed to the peace process, whereas an overwhelming majority of non-Orthodox Jews supported it (80 percent of Conservative and 85 percent of Reform Jews). "In the Aftermath of the Rabin Assassination: A Survey of American Jewish Opinion about the Israel and the Peace Process" (public opinion survey conducted for the American Jewish Committee by Market Facts, 10-16 January 1996), 11.

of Conservative, 31 percent of Reform, and 32 percent of unaffiliated Jews who felt this way.<sup>78</sup>

Divergent American Jewish opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, therefore, are closely correlated with different religious denominations.<sup>79</sup> The religious spectrum and the political spectrum in the American Jewish community are almost identical—with more religious Jews generally falling on the right and more secular Jews falling on the left (of course, not all religious Jews are on the right and not all secular Jews are on the left). Orthodox Jews have long held the most right-wing and hawkish views within the American Jewish community, while Reform Jews and unaffiliated Jews (that is, those who do not identify with any denomination) are often the most left wing and dovish; Conservative Jews are typically more centrist, with views somewhere in the middle (much the same way that Conservative Judaism lies between Reform Judaism and Orthodox Judaism).

In addition to the long-standing religious divide between Orthodox and non-Orthodox American Jews over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is also a growing ideological divide between politically conservative Jews and liberal Jews. While liberals still greatly outnumber conservatives in the American Jewish community—in the Pew survey, half of American Jews described themselves as liberal, while only 20 percent described themselves as conservative, and the rest, 30 percent, were self-defined moderates<sup>80</sup>—the minority of American Jews who are politically conservative are well organized and highly vocal when it comes to Israel. Politically conservative Jews tend to be much more hawkish in their views concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than liberal Jews. Compared with liberals and moderates, they are consistently more opposed to Israeli territorial concessions to the Palestinians,<sup>81</sup> including a division of Jerusalem,<sup>82</sup> and they are less willing to dismantle Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Indeed, in the Pew survey, a majority of conservative Jews (63 percent) thought that building settlements in the West Bank either helped Israel's security or made no difference to it. Most liberal Jews (60 percent), by contrast,

<sup>78</sup>AJC Annual Survey, 2005.

<sup>79</sup>A statistical analysis of the results of the annual AJC surveys between 2000 and 2005 demonstrated that American Jewish opinions about the future of the West Bank and East Jerusalem are closely correlated with denominational differences. Perlmann, "American Jewish Opinion about the Future of the West Bank."

<sup>80</sup>Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

<sup>81</sup>Perlmann, "American Jewish Opinion About the Future of the West Bank," 22.

<sup>82</sup>In a June 2010 survey, 59 percent of liberal and moderate American Jews supported a division of Jerusalem, whereas 66 percent of conservative Jews opposed any compromise on Jerusalem. Sasson et al., *Still Connected*.

thought that settlement building undermined Israeli security. In recent years, during which successive right-wing governments have ruled Israel, politically conservative Jews have been much more supportive of Israeli government policies and actions than liberal Jews, who have become increasingly outspoken in their criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.<sup>83</sup> These different attitudes reflect the broader, growing divide between liberals and conservatives in the United States in their views about Israel and its conflict with the Palestinians—a divide that is now also becoming a partisan divide between Democrats and Republicans.<sup>84</sup> Thus, Democrats and liberals in the United States have become increasingly critical of Israel, while Republicans and conservatives have become more supportive (in surveys, conservative Republicans express much greater sympathy for Israel than for the Palestinians compared with liberal Democrats, who now sympathize more with the Palestinians than with Israel).<sup>85</sup> This trend has undoubtedly affected American Jewish opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well.

In sum, while a majority of American Jews are moderately dovish in their views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a significant minority of American Jews—who are more religious and more politically conservative—are much more hawkish and hard-line in their attitudes. The fact that members of this minority also tend to be more strongly attached to Israel and more actively engaged in the organized American Jewish community means that their views can have an outsize influence in American Jewish politics vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>86</sup> Put simply, the more important Israel is to American Jews, the more right wing they are likely to be in their views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict<sup>87</sup> and the more heavily involved they are likely to be in Jewish communal activities, including Jewish politics. Hence, despite the moderately dovish majority

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<sup>83</sup>In the 2013 Pew survey, most conservative Jews (58 percent) believed that the Netanyahu government was “making a sincere effort to bring about a peace settlement with the Palestinians,” whereas most liberal Jews (59 percent) did not (self-described “moderates” were almost evenly split).

<sup>84</sup>On the partisan and ideological divide over the Arab-Israeli conflict, see Jonathan Rynhold, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Political Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 88–91.

<sup>85</sup>A poll taken by the Pew Research Center in January 2017 found that “a greater share [of liberal Democrats] now say they sympathize more with the Palestinians (38%) than with Israel (26%).” Pew Research Center, “The World Facing Trump: Public Sees ISIS, Cyberattacks, North Korea as Top Threats,” 12 January 2017, accessed at <http://www.people-press.org/2017/01/12/the-world-facing-trump-public-sees-isis-cyberattacks-north-korea-as-top-threats/>, 15 March 2017.

<sup>86</sup>No more than one-quarter of American Jews are actively involved in the organized Jewish community. In the 2013 Pew survey, less than one in five American Jews (18 percent) said they belonged to a Jewish organization other than a synagogue. Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” 60.

<sup>87</sup>Mervin F. Verbit, “American Jews—More Right than Left on the Peace Process,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 24 (Spring 2012): 45–58, at 55.

of American Jews, a hawkish minority can sometimes have a louder voice in the American Jewish debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (which in recent years has become an acrimonious argument)<sup>88</sup> and a greater visibility in external perceptions of American Jewry's stance toward the conflict.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have drawn on historical and survey evidence to argue that American Jewish pro-Israel organizations and American Jews in general are not impediments to peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians. The pro-Israel lobby is fragmented and politically divided, and although it may sometimes constrain U.S. policymaking regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, U.S. policy is fundamentally driven by the definition of American national interest, not by the Israel lobby. American Jews are mostly doves who support Israeli territorial compromise and a two-state solution, but they distrust the Palestinians and are divided over whether a Palestinian state should be immediately established and whether East Jerusalem should become its capital. Whatever their views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, American Jews do not significantly influence Israeli government policies toward the Palestinians. Although they provide Israel with a lot of financial and political support, they are generally unwilling to use this as leverage over Israeli governments when it comes to Israeli policymaking vis-à-vis the Palestinians. While American Jews have become increasingly involved in Israeli domestic politics,<sup>89</sup> they have been quite reluctant to pressure Israel on matters concerning Israeli foreign policy and national security.

Might this change in the future? Amid growing despair over the prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace, some hold on to the hope that American Jews will collectively mobilize and prod, if not pressure, the Israeli government to become more conciliatory with the Palestinians.<sup>90</sup> Could American Jews eventually play the same kind of role in promoting Israel-Palestinian peace that Irish Americans played in the Northern

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<sup>88</sup>Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*, 91-122.

<sup>89</sup>Yossi Shain, *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 65-100.

<sup>90</sup>See, for example, Phillip Weiss and Adam Horowitz, "American Jews Rethink Israel," *The Nation*, 2 November 2009; Gary Kamiya, "Can American Jews Unplug the Israel Lobby?," Salon, 20 March 2007, accessed at [http://www.salon.com/2007/03/20/aipac\\_2/](http://www.salon.com/2007/03/20/aipac_2/), 15 March 2017; Shalom Lappin, "The Need for a New Jewish Politics," *Dissent* 54 (Summer 2004): 34-38; David Landy, *Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights: Diaspora Jewish Opposition to Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2011); and Tony Kushner and Alisa Solomon, eds., *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Grove Press, 2003).

Ireland peace process in the 1990s, when pressure on Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army from the Irish American community helped lead it to renounce violence and disarm and brought about the Good Friday Agreement? It is abundantly clear that growing numbers of American Jews, especially younger ones,<sup>91</sup> are becoming more critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.<sup>92</sup> Many are now deeply worried about Israel's ability to remain a Jewish and democratic state if it continues to effectively rule over Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They want Israel to stop its continued expansion of Jewish settlements and resume serious peace talks with the Palestinians aimed at achieving a two-state solution to the conflict. In the 2013 Pew survey, for example, almost 50 percent of American Jews (and a majority of non-Orthodox Jews) thought that the Israeli government at the time, led by Prime Minister Netanyahu, was not sincerely trying to make peace with the Palestinians, despite its repeated proclamations that it was and that the stalemate in the peace process was solely the fault of the Palestinian leadership. Since then, a more right-wing Israeli government has come to power, and the peace process has stalled, so American Jewish frustration with the Israeli government's failure, even unwillingness, to pursue peace with the Palestinians is only likely to intensify.

Not only are American Jews becoming more critical of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians, they are also becoming more willing to publicly challenge them. The rapid rise of the dovish pro-Israel group J Street since its formation in 2008 is the clearest manifestation of this (but by no means the only one). Within only a few years, J Street has gone from being a small start-up (with four full-time staff members) to a major player in the pro-Israel lobby (with a staff of 50).<sup>93</sup> It has quickly built a national network of

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<sup>91</sup>In the 2013 Pew survey, only one-quarter of Jews ages 18 to 29 believed that the Israeli government was making a "sincere effort" to reach a peace agreement (compared with 43 percent of those over age 50), and half of young American Jews thought that settlement building undermined Israeli security. Even more strikingly, young Jews were also more critical of U.S. government support for Israel, with one-quarter of them saying that the U.S. supports Israel too much compared with only 5 percent of Jews age 50 and older. The Pew survey also showed that young, non-Orthodox American Jews are less suspicious of the Palestinians, and more hopeful about the prospects for peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian state. They were more than twice as likely as older (over 50) non-Orthodox American Jews to think that the Palestinian leadership was making a sincere effort to bring about a peace agreement with Israel; three-quarters of them (76 percent) believed that Israel and an independent Palestinian state could peacefully coexist compared with 63 percent of non-Orthodox Jews between the ages of 50 and 64, and 56 percent of those over 65. Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," 89–91.

<sup>92</sup>For a detailed account of this, see Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*.

<sup>93</sup>J Street's operating budget increased from roughly \$1.5 million to almost \$7 million from 2008 to 2012. Jeremy Ben-Ami, *A New Voice for Israel: Fighting for the Survival of the Jewish Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 108.

grassroots supporters and established the largest pro-Israel political action committee (PAC), JStreetPAC.<sup>94</sup> With its financial firepower and rapidly growing cadre of activists, J Street has emerged as a group that American and Israeli policymakers cannot afford to ignore.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Israeli officials initially tried hard to do so—Israel’s ambassador to the United States famously declined an invitation to speak at J Street’s inaugural conference—but they eventually had to acknowledge that J Street was “significant,” as one senior Israeli government official succinctly put it.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, although the Israeli government now has to contend with a much noisier and better-organized opposition among American Jews to its policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians, it is unlikely to alter these policies simply because of American Jewish pressure. The present right-wing Likud-led government in Israel appears determined to maintain Israel’s current policy toward the conflict with the Palestinians, which is basically aimed at managing the conflict rather than trying to resolve it. It also continues to staunchly resist international pressure, including American pressure, to cease its ongoing settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.<sup>97</sup> Its apparent imperviousness to international pressure and criticism, even from its most important ally, suggests that it is highly unlikely to succumb to American Jewish pressure, however much this pressure increases in the years ahead.

Even the possible erosion of American Jewish support for Israel (which Israeli governments have come to rely on over the years) is unlikely to sway right-wing Israeli governments from their present policies.<sup>98</sup> For one

<sup>94</sup>Dan Eggen, “New Liberal Jewish Lobby Quickly Makes Its Mark,” *Washington Post*, 17 April 2009. In the 2012 U.S. elections, JStreetPAC distributed \$1.8 million to 71 congressional candidates (70 of whom won their races); 35 percent of all pro-Israel PAC funding and half of all pro-Israel PAC contributions went to Democratic candidates.

<sup>95</sup>A little over a year after it was founded, one observer wrote, “While other dovish Jewish groups have attempted, over the years, to influence America’s Mideast policy debates, none has managed to generate anything comparable to J Street’s potent combination of grassroots enthusiasm, inside-the-Beltway political cachet and media buzz.” Daniel Treiman, “J Street and Main Street: The Israel Lobby We Need,” *The Forward*, 14 October 2009.

<sup>96</sup>Ron Kampeas, “J Street and Israel Are Still Arguing—But on Friendlier Terms,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 27 March 2012, accessed at <http://www.jta.org/2012/03/27/news-opinion/united-states/j-street-and-israel-are-still-arguing-but-on-friendlier-terms>, 15 March 2017.

<sup>97</sup>Ian Fisher and Isabel Kershner, “Israel Defiantly Cranks West Bank Settlement Plans Into High Gear,” *New York Times*, 1 February 2017.

<sup>98</sup>It is worth noting that Israel’s current government has not even implemented an agreement that was reached to create an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, despite the fact that major American Jewish groups (most notably the Reform and Conservative religious movements) and most American Jews strongly support this. If the Israeli government has proven to be unresponsive to American Jewish pressure regarding the rights of non-Orthodox Jews in Israel, then there is surely little reason to expect that it will be more forthcoming in response to American Jewish pressure regarding the rights of Palestinians.

thing, there is a widespread tendency among right-wing Israeli politicians and pundits to simply dismiss criticism coming from secular, liberal American Jews as naive and ill-informed at best, or at worst motivated by self-interest or even self-hatred.<sup>99</sup> For another, as long as Israeli policy-makers think that major American Jewish organizations will continue to support Israel, financially and politically, they are not especially concerned by weakening grassroots support for Israel within the American Jewish community. As one commentator notes, “for very practical and understandable reasons any Israeli prime minister cares more about what AIPAC’s position is on an issue than the position voiced by your representative American Jew on the street.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, although American Jews are undoubtedly becoming more critical of Israel and more vocal about it, they probably cannot persuade or pressure Israel’s government to make peace with the Palestinians. Only Israelis and Palestinians can really do that.

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<sup>99</sup>It is sometimes claimed by right-wing Israelis that American Jewish criticism of Israel is only really aimed at currying favor with gentiles—trying to please the “goyim.” It is also suggested that liberal American Jews, and Diaspora Jews more generally, are uncomfortable with Jewish power, as embodied by Israel, and some argue that secular Jews are not really Jewish anymore and that they will soon assimilate themselves into oblivion.

<sup>100</sup>Michael Koplow, “Why the Israeli Government Isn’t Worried about American Jews,” *Matzav*, 28 January 2016.