

Mass Mobilization to Direct Engagement: American Jews' Changing Relationship to Israel

THE PRACTICES OF AMERICAN JEWS RELATIVE TO ISRAEL SEEM INCREASINGLY to break with patterns established during the second half of the 20th century. Lobbying by American Jewish organizations on the political left and right increasingly competes with the consensus-oriented efforts of organizations such as AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMAJO). Direct giving to Israeli civil society organizations has replaced the federations' annual campaigns as the primary vehicle for diaspora philanthropy. The number of American Jewish teens and young adults visiting Israel has surged, but most are going with private tour companies under the auspices of Birthright Israel rather than programs of the North American denominations. Aliyah is up, but managed by Nefesh b'Nefesh, a private not-for-profit organization, rather than the Jewish Agency for Israel. In short, how American Jews relate to Israel is very much in flux.

This study argues that the *mass mobilization* model that organized American Jewish practices relative to Israel since the founding of state has declined, and a new *direct engagement* model has emerged alongside it. Increasingly American Jews relate to Israel directly, by advocating their own political views, funding favored causes, visiting frequently or living there part time, consuming Israeli news and entertainment, and expressing a distinctively "realistic" rather than idealistic orientation toward the Jewish state. Their new homeland practices have given rise to (and been encouraged by) a new set of organizations that operate privately, beyond the orbit of the semi-public agencies of the established American Jewish polity. These developments are described against the backdrop of the waning mass mobilization paradigm, and their significance for diaspora Jewish organizations and Israeli democratic institutions is examined.

The article is also meant as a contribution to the field of diaspora studies. Not all diasporas but many—including Jews, Greeks, Irish, and Armenians—maintain links to ancestral homelands. Most scholarly literature on the diaspora-homeland relationship emphasizes the political sphere and treats “state-linked” diasporas as more or less unitary actors vis-à-vis host and homeland governments.¹ The dominant emphasis in this literature has been on diaspora lobbying of host government on behalf of homeland interests.² A secondary emphasis, largely corrective, highlights the influence of diaspora groups on their homelands, especially their efforts to bring homeland policies into harmony with host country interests.³ Few studies have explored the circumstances under which diaspora political activity becomes partisan and plural—in which diasporas become sites for waging homeland political struggles.⁴

In contrast, immigration research increasingly emphasizes the diverse ties migrants establish and maintain with their countries of origin. For example, Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc describe the “process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”⁵ Dufoix further describes how “transmigrants develop and maintain all sorts of relations—familial, religious, economic, and political—with the place they come from, thereby laying the foundations for non-territorial nations”⁶ According to this literature, migrants send home remittances, participate in homeland political parties, reproduce homeland cultural practices, and return for frequent visits.⁷

Although the definitional debate goes far beyond the scope of this article, the substantive overlap between diasporas and transnational immigrant communities is clearly considerable. The fact that many transnational immigrant communities qualify as diasporas is reason enough to extend the typology of diaspora-homeland relationships to include a broader range of possible connections. By distinguishing “mass mobilization” from “direct engagement”, I show that there is variability in how diasporas are organized with respect to homelands, and explore the transition from one model to another in a single case.

MASS MOBILIZATION

The mass mobilization paradigm typified the relationship between American Jews and Israel during the period between the early 1950s and the late 1980s.⁸ During the earlier years, responsibility for the diaspora-homeland

relationship shifted from Zionist organizations to the large, centralized, core organizations of American Jewry, including the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Council of Jewish Federations, and the CPMAJO. New organizations were also established to advocate politically on behalf of Israel, including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Jewish Community Relations Councils.⁹

The main tasks of Jewish organizations in relation to Israel were fundraising and political advocacy. Fundraising was organized primarily through the federations as part of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, most funds collected annually—hundreds of millions of dollars—were divided between the United Israel Appeal (UIA), for use in Israel, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC), for needy Jews elsewhere in the world, especially the Soviet Union. The funds allocated to the UIA were turned over to the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), a quasi-governmental body first established under the British Mandate to administer the Jewish Yishuv. Following establishment of the state, the Jewish Agency became responsible for encouraging aliyah, resettling immigrants in Israel, and Zionist education for Jews in Israel and the diaspora. Annual collections by the UJA fluctuated based on the perceived need. During periods of war, especially during the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, fundraising doubled, and the proportion directed to Israel was also increased.¹⁰

The centralization and top-down management of philanthropy was mirrored in the sphere of political advocacy. Between 1948 and signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, most political advocacy by American Jews was directed at the U.S. Congress to encourage military, economic, and diplomatic support for Israel. Lobbying by AIPAC sought to align U.S. interests with Israel by stressing the shared values and commitments. “Aside from the left and right extremes, a wall-to-wall coalition of Jewish organizations promoted Israel as a bastion of democracy surrounded by totalitarian states that were directly linked to and armed by the Soviet bloc.”¹¹ During its most integrated and coherent phase, the Israel lobby pressed for diplomatic and military aid as well as support for Israel’s positions on specific issues, especially in relation to conflicts with Palestinians and the Arab world. There were issues on which the lobby preferred to remain silent despite encouragement by Israeli officials.¹² However, the dominant tendency during the period of mass mobilization was for activist American Jews to promote U.S. identification with Israel and support for the specific policies enunciated by the Israeli government.

For most American Jews, Israel was in fact quite remote. They related to Israel through their local institutions, especially their synagogues, where Israel was depicted as a progressive, secular, communitarian, democratic, tolerant, peace-seeking country led by brave and heroic leaders.¹³ They identified with the Jewish state by attending Israel day festivals and parades, dancing the hora, and decorating their homes with Israel-related art and artifacts.¹⁴ If they traveled to Israel, they likely did so as part of a tightly scheduled synagogue mission or denominationally-sponsored youth tour. They did not, by and large, take stands on issues that animated the Israeli polity. Thus, in 1977 political scientist Charles Liebman wrote that, "Because Israel is a symbol, its particular policies are not very important to [non-Orthodox] American Jews."¹⁵ Nevertheless, as a symbol of Jewish survival and rebirth following the Holocaust, Israel became an object of intense reverence for many American Jews. Political scientist Daniel Elazar coined the term "Israelolotry" to capture the intensity of pro-Israel feelings among American Jews in the decade following the 1967 war.¹⁶

In sum, during the "mass mobilization" phase, the relationship of American Jewry to Israel was highly centralized, top-down, consensus oriented, mediated, and idealized. American Jews were mobilized by large, centralized organizations (UJA, AJC, ADL) to donate money to quasi-governmental organizations in Israel (JAFI, Jewish National Fund), and to provide political support for the policies of the government of Israel (i.e., via AIPAC). Travel and immigration were handled largely by the main denominational movements in the U.S. and the quasi-governmental Jewish Agency for Israel. The mass mobilization of donations and political support encouraged the idealization of Israel but not a direct relationship based on first-hand knowledge or experience.

Since the late 1980s, developments in political activism, philanthropy, tourism, immigration, communications, and public opinion suggest erosion of mass mobilization and the emergence of a new model for diaspora-homeland relations. The following sections describe trends in each of these areas and then draw them together in an account of the new "direct engagement" paradigm for diaspora-homeland relations. Not all of the trends discussed are new; the mass mobilization paradigm has been in decline for nearly two decades. However, it is only in recent years that the various trends have stabilized and emerged as a distinctively new paradigm.

POLITICAL ACTION

Even during the heyday of mass mobilization there were Jewish dissidents from the pro-Israel consensus. On the right, the ultra-Orthodox, including the Satmar Hasidim and in particular the Neturei Karta rejected Zionism as an attempt by mostly secular Jews to “force the end” of their divinely mandated exile. On the left, critics from closer to the center of American Jewry broke public taboos against criticizing Israel by warning against holding the territories acquired in the 1967 war. The organizations Breira and New Jewish Agenda encouraged peace negotiations with the PLO and a two-state solution. Their members were sharply criticized in mainstream circles and their organizations were kept out of the larger representative bodies, including the CPMAJO.

However, the first major break in the relatively united front of the Israel lobby came from the right, not the left. Following announcement of the Oslo Accords, negotiated by the Labor-led Israeli government, Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the opposition Likud party, traveled to the U.S. to rally American Jewish opposition to the pact. He quickly won the support of right-leaning organizations, including the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which successfully lobbied Congress to attach conditions to assistance to the Palestinian Authority—against the wishes of the Israeli government and AIPAC. Americans for Peace Now and the Israel Policy Forum responded by lobbying independently in support of the peace pact. Efforts by the CPMAJO to rein-in the ZOA failed and the conflict “institutionalized the existence of separate lobbying networks above and beyond AIPAC and the Conference”.¹⁷

New partisan organizations on the left and right have since been established and others have stepped up their activity. Whereas mainstream lobbying organizations such as AIPAC typically seek to promote the policies favored by the Israeli government, the new partisan organizations have pursued their own political agendas, promoting more hawkish or dovish policies. On the left, organizations such as Israel Policy Forum, Brit Tzedek V'Shalom, and J Street, have supported a two-state solution, dialogue with Iran, and the Arab Peace Initiative. J Street, a political action committee founded in 2007 as an alternative to AIPAC, claims to have registered 100,000 on-line supporters in its first year. Brit Tzedek claims a network of 40,000 supporters including more than 1,000 rabbis. On the right, the ZOA, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, and Americans for a Safe Israel have lobbied against assistance to the Palestinian Authority and

disengagement from Gaza and in favor of more hawkish responses to Iran's nuclear program. The ZOA claims 30,000 dues-paying members.

The targets of Israel advocacy organizations have also broadened. Whereas in the past, such organizations focused almost exclusively on the U.S. government, especially Congress, today they increasingly target *both* the U.S. and Israeli governments. Moreover, increasingly such organizations join with like-minded Israeli counterparts in transnational alliances to promote their causes in both countries simultaneously. On the right, the ZOA has cooperated with the Israeli National Union party; on the left, Americans for Peace Now and Meretz-USA work with their Israeli sister organizations (Peace Now and Meretz). In 2008, the Israeli human rights advocacy organization B'Tselem opened an office in Washington, D.C., to extend its influence to American Jews and the U.S. government. Such transnational organizations and alliances have engaged in advocacy inside Israel in relation to a number of issues, including the Gaza war, Israeli settlements, peace negotiations, minority civil rights, the environment, and religious pluralism.

The polarization of left and right organizations was amply in evidence during the November 2007 Annapolis Summit. During the summit, the peace-advocacy organization Brit Tzedek organized a demonstration to show American Jewish support for progress toward a two-state solution. At the same time, a number of right-leaning organizations, including the Orthodox Union, the ZOA, and Agudat Yisrael—together with Israeli partner organizations—formed the “Coalition for Jerusalem” (later renamed “Coordinating Committee for Jerusalem”) to lobby against any future concessions that would entail a division of the capital city. In response, PM Ehud Olmert declared that “Israel is sovereign to decide on any issue regarding Israel.”¹⁸ Later, ADL National Director Abraham Foxman defended the political intervention of diaspora Jews over what had become a contentious Israeli political issue: “Since Jerusalem belongs to all of the Jewish people, discussions about its future are not just an Israeli decision.” Foxman thus deemed it “appropriate” for Jewish groups to take a stand on the issue even if that meant opposing the policies of the Israeli government.¹⁹

During the early days of the Gaza ground offensive, Israel advocacy organizations again faced-off. Declaring that “Continuation of the present military operation is [not in] the best interests of either the U.S. or Israel,” J Street called for “strong and immediate American diplomatic leadership to bring an end to the violence through an immediate ceasefire . . . that stops the violence, ends the rockets and lifts the blockade of Gaza.”²⁰ A collection of pro-peace organizations, which also included Americans for

Peace Now, Brit Tzedek, and the Israel Policy Forum, lobbied Congress to press for an immediate ceasefire. Arguing from the opposite side, AIPAC pressed for a statement of unqualified support for Israel's position in the war. The Senate and House ultimately adopted resolutions that more closely reflected AIPAC's position. However, a source involved in the congressional deliberations described the input of the peace groups as "significant".²¹

The new partisan political advocacy has also penetrated the mainstream of organized Jewish life. Thus, Union of Reform Judaism President Eric Yoffie recently pledged Reform movement support for an Israel-Palestine peace treaty, telling Israel's leading newspaper that "If the Israeli right wing mobilizes its supporters in the U.S. against such an agreement, the Reform movement would respond in kind."²² Similarly, at the other end of the denominational spectrum, the Orthodox Union has publicly opposed any peace plan that would divide Jerusalem. Other mainstream organizations are also mounting efforts to shape Israeli society to fit their visions and values. For example, 80 American Jewish organizations and philanthropies have joined together in the Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues to promote civic equality and development in the Arab sector. Partner organizations include the AJJDC, United Jewish Communities (UJC), the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform), the ADL, the AJC, the Orthodox Union, and the CPMAJO. The Task Force's mandate includes engaging in "advocacy" for civic equality inside Israel.²³ One proponent of American Jewish initiatives to foster minority rights in Israel makes the case in this way:

American Jews have a unique opportunity to help Israel and also to help their communities. Significant progress on Jewish-Arab relations will strengthen Israel's international legitimacy as a national homeland for the Jewish people. It will also help make Israel a place that many more young American Jews can be proud of, and an important element in strengthening their Jewish identities.²⁴

In sum, during the 1990s and 2000s, American Jewish advocacy and activism in relation to Israel fragmented and diversified. Increasingly, American Jews have sought to promote political projects in relation to Israel that reflect their own partisan commitments. Advocacy organizations promoting causes on the right and left have proliferated, mainstream organizations are increasingly announcing partisan positions, and the leadership and coordinating role of large, centrist institutions has weakened. In December 2008 the Obama transition team ratified the new pluralistic reality by meeting

publically with a range of Israel-advocacy organizations extending from the ZOA on the right to Brit Tzedek on the left.²⁵

PHILANTHROPY

Since the late 1990s, fundraising by North American Jewish federations has leveled off, and the proportion of funds earmarked for Israel has sharply declined. In 1967, a crisis year, 78% of the federations' UJA campaign was earmarked for Israel; the proportion dropped to 47% in 1990 and 23% in 2004.²⁶ Federation funds once directed to resettle immigrants and provide for social welfare needs in Israel (via JAFI) have been increasingly redirected to education and the broader "continuity" agenda in the U.S. and Canada.

However, compensating for the decline in centralized giving through the UJA, Jewish individuals and foundations increasingly establish direct relations with projects and organizations in Israel, including universities, hospitals, museums, social service agencies, as well as education projects such as Birthright Israel.²⁷ As of the late 1980s, "American Jews were transferring twice as many dollars to Israel through the various 'friends of' agencies as they were via UJA contributions."²⁸ According to one report, donations by American Jews to such organizations increased between 2001 and 2006 by 64%: In 2006, Israeli arts groups received \$94.9m, education groups received \$294m, health care groups received \$170.5m, and human services groups received \$156.3m. Researchers described their data as "a signal that American Jews are more and more looking away from Jewish federations as a means of supporting Israel . . . and instead donating directly to specific Israel-based organizations."²⁹

Federations, too, increasingly manage their own contributions in Israel, for example, through the Partnership 2000 Sister City initiative. In 2008, the Israeli non-profit sector collected an estimated \$1.5b in contributions from foreign donors and foundations, most of it from American Jews.³⁰ Directed giving has thus likely reached historically high levels, offsetting declining federation contributions.

Moreover, much of the new directed, lateral philanthropy expresses the partisan political convictions of its donors. For example, Orthodox American Jews provide a great deal of direct assistance to West Bank settlements, universities, and yeshivot through initiatives such as the One Israel Fund, the Central Fund of Israel, and the Hebron Fund, as well as funds earmarked for particular settlements. Members of Brooklyn's Syrian Jewish community, for example, helped finance a controversial real estate purchase

in Hebron on behalf of Israeli settlers. When Israel's Supreme Court seized the property pending resolution of the land dispute, the Brooklyn Syrian Jews rallied against the decision. "The atmosphere was rife with disgust for what speakers declared was the anti-religious nature of the [Israeli] government. Parallels were drawn between the fight for the Hebron property and the Soviet Jewry struggle."³¹ Members of the community also reportedly provide support to hawkish Israeli political parties as well as Shas (the Sephardi Orthodox party). According to one analysis of U.S. Internal Revenue Service documents, U.S.-based charities that support West Bank settlements collected nearly \$100m during the period 1994–2003 mostly from American Jews.³²

Liberal and left American Jews fund initiatives that promote civil rights, religious pluralism, environmentalism, and Arab-Jewish coexistence, sponsored by organizations such as the New Israel Fund (NIF) and the Abraham Fund. "To date, the NIF has disbursed over \$200m to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, various agencies that promote Arab-Israel coexistence, Panim—Jewish Renewal, rape crisis centers, and the like."³³ Philanthropy has thus become an alternative mechanism, alongside political advocacy, for addressing selected problems and promoting particular visions of what Israeli society should be like.

Responding, in part, to declining donor interest in centralized fundraising and allocation, the federations announced in 2009 that they are "considering a plan to end their exclusive funding relationship" with the Jewish Agency and the AJJDC. The new proposal would enable the central body of the federations, the UJC, to channel contributions to additional Israeli NGOs. "The fact we all have to confront is that, like it or not, we have been in transition for the last twenty years or more. As in all transitions, when you're in the middle of it, the outcome is not clear," wrote UJC leaders of their planning discussions.³⁴

TRAVEL AND IMMIGRATION

During the 1980s and 1990s, youth tours to Israel were run mostly by the youth movements of the major American Jewish denominations (NFTY for Reform, USY for Conservative, NCSY for Orthodox). The one prominent exception was Young Judea, an independent Zionist youth movement affiliated with Hadassah. In Israel, the activities of the youth tour groups were often coordinated by educators from the Jewish Agency, which had a special division dedicated to Israel Experience programs. The number

of youth tour participants varied over the years roughly between 4–9,000 participants annually.³⁵

Today, the market for youth tourism has changed dramatically with the introduction of Birthright Israel in 1999. Sponsored mostly by independent American Jewish philanthropists—though today the Israeli government and the North American federations also contribute—the program provides free 10–day trips to diaspora Jewish young adults. More than 200,000 diaspora Jewish young adults—three quarters from North America—went on trips during Birthright Israel’s first decade. In 2008, 35,000 diaspora young adults went on Birthright Israel trips.³⁶

The Birthright Israel trips are managed by more than a dozen independent organizations which receive per-traveler payments from the Birthright Israel organization. The tours vary somewhat in their thematic emphasis; the range includes programs that emphasize outdoor adventure, intensive interaction with Israelis, peace and justice, spirituality, and/or varying degrees of Jewish religiosity. All trips, however, share a more or less standard itinerary that includes visits to iconic Jewish-Israeli tour sites such as the Western Wall, the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, and the Masada fortress. The trips are shorter in duration (ten days as opposed to six weeks) than the denomination-sponsored Israel Experience tours, and they are geared toward older participants (18–26 year olds rather than high school students). In addition, the Birthright Israel trips place greater emphasis on encounters between the diaspora Jewish travelers and their Israeli peers. Every tour group includes a number of Israeli participants—usually soldiers—and overall tens of thousands of Israeli young adults have participated in the program.³⁷

The introduction of Birthright Israel has helped eclipse denomination-sponsored tours and the role of the Jewish Agency in Israel Experience tourism. The denominationally-based Jewish youth movements—as well as Young Judea—still sponsor tours but their relative share of the market has plummeted. The Jewish Agency is keeping a hand in the game by sponsoring a new program that provides scholarship assistance to diaspora young adults for long-term study programs. The Masa initiative also provides development assistance for new long-term programs, as well as one-stop shopping at their website for information about such opportunities. However, the bottom line with respect to Israel Experience travel programs is that the centralization of such programs in the core denominations and the Jewish Agency is a thing of the past.

Similarly, the Jewish Agency’s central role in promoting and coordinating aliyah from North America has apparently come to an end. In

the future, North American immigration will be coordinated by a private agency that has proven to be more nimble and creative: Nefesh b'Nefesh. The privatization of aliyah might be related, in part, to a desire by the Jewish Agency or other influential actors to circumvent limitations on settlement of immigrants in the Israeli Occupied Territories.³⁸ The transition also reflects the broader fragmentation in the Israel-diaspora organizational field, which is its relevance in the present context.

The classic model for aliyah/immigration may also be in flux. Historically, the Jewish Agency treated immigration as a singular life-changing step by immigrants that entailed permanent relocation to Israel and acculturation into Israeli society. Today, however, the Jewish Agency has shifted gears to accommodate the increasing number of partial immigrants who split their time between homes in Europe or the U.S. and a second home in Israel. The gesture toward “part-time aliyah” may never reach beyond a small and unusual cadre of individuals but it does indicate a growing awareness of the need to move beyond the dichotomous “here/there” “diaspora/homeland” model that has informed most policy regarding immigration thus far.³⁹

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Alongside increased travel, globalization has facilitated dramatic expansion of communication, mostly web-based, bringing Israel and the U.S. closer than ever. Israeli newspapers *Ha'aretz* and the *Jerusalem Post* publish on-line in English and are rapidly becoming key newspapers of choice for highly engaged diaspora Jews both for news of Israel as well as news of diaspora Jewish communities. In addition, in 2009 the *Jerusalem Post* began publishing a weekly U.S. edition, distributed in select New York metropolitan neighborhoods together with the *New York Post*. *Yedioth Ahronot*, Israel's largest circulation daily paper also publishes an English version of its newspaper on-line. Finally, it is now easy to watch daily Israeli news programs and listen to Israeli radio on one's computer.

Extensive use of Hebrew language broadcasts is far more common among Israelis living abroad than it is of American Jews. However, research on participants in the Birthright Israel program indicates fairly widespread use of Israeli English-language websites. In surveys conducted three months after the ten-day trips, 26% of respondents reported having checked Israeli websites for news of Israel.⁴⁰ Israeli film and music circulates in the U.S. much more easily today than in the past. Israeli film festivals draw crowds

in many cities.⁴¹ Israeli bands such as *Dag Hanachash* draw large audiences on university campuses and in the larger cities.

Finally, much attention has been devoted in recent years to a new ferment in American Jewish cultural production by young adults. The young adult cultural scene has often been depicted as a post-Zionist phenomenon dedicated to exploration of identity in an age of hybridity and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, on the occasion of a recent visit to www.jewcy.com, a major repository for young adult blogs and essays, Israel-related articles were clearly featured. There were articles on “Durban II: Distasteful and Disgraceful”, “Benjamin Netanyahu’s House of Cards”, and “Israel Apartheid Week”. There were also ads for a performance of the Idan Reichal Project. *Zeek Magazine*, which publishes on the Jewry website, describes connecting “Israeli creativity with the diaspora” as part of its mission. The Israel-themed material fits easily in this hip, young adult oriented venue alongside articles about “coming out” in the Orthodox community, Haredi sexual practices, and the annual Latke-Hamentaschen debates on college campuses.

PUBLIC OPINION

In recent years, many observers have registered concern over American Jewish attachment to Israel. In particular, several analysts have pointed to cross-sectional survey data showing that younger and intermarried Jews are less emotionally attached to Israel than older Jews. In the view of these analysts, the survey evidence shows that Israel attachment is declining across the generations.⁴² Other scholars (including the present author) have disputed this interpretation, pointing out that younger Jews appeared less attached to Israel in surveys conducted in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, and that the impact of intermarriage on the overall level of Israel attachment has been quite modest. According to this alternative interpretation, age-related differences in Israel attachment are more likely related to stage-of-life than generation, and the overall trend in Israel attachment has likely been quite stable.⁴³

Although American Jews may remain emotionally attached to Israel, there is modest evidence of increased polarization with respect to opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whereas in surveys conducted during the 1980s approximately one-third of each sample reported “no opinion” on questions regarding the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and establishment of a Palestinian state, fewer than 10% typically report no opinion

in surveys conducted since the early 1990s. Notwithstanding increasing polarization at the margins, most American Jews still appear to embrace centrist positions on how best to address the conflict. For example, when asked in surveys whether, as part of a permanent settlement with the Palestinians, Israel should be willing to dismantle all, some or none of the Jewish settlements on the West Bank, a plurality of American Jews consistently favors dismantling “some” settlements (i.e., the centrist option).⁴⁴ Similarly, in focus group interviews with Boston area Jews from across the denominational spectrum, relatively few respondents demanded an immediate end to the occupation or expressed a strong ideological commitment to permanent Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank. Rather, most indicated support for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and establishment of a Palestinian state but only if such moves would translate into an enduring and stable peace. This view is virtually identical to the position of Israel’s centrist *Kadima* party.⁴⁵

However, against the background of stable attachments and political centrism, it is possible to detect a shift in the basic orientations of many American Jews toward Israel. In contrast to the idealization of Israel reported by social scientists during the 1970s and 1980s—a posture that might be regarded as the normal attitude of an ancient diaspora toward its ancestral homeland—increasingly American Jews claim to have discarded the rose-tinted glasses in favor of a new realism. American Jews increasingly regard Israel as a country boasting accomplishments and attractions but also beset with serious social problems and in need of the guidance they can provide. Many on the political right perceive Israelis to be drifting away from Jewish and Zionist commitments in favor of the comfortable lifestyles of the West. In contrast, many liberals and leftists perceive Israel to be losing its democratic character due to the occupation of Palestinian lands and undemocratic practices regarding minorities and the role of religion in the state. Across the spectrum, there is recognition of yawning social gaps and worsening environmental problems.

The new realism was amply on display in a series of focus group discussions I conducted during 2004–2006 in the Boston area. I asked groups of Jewish adults, mostly in synagogue settings, several questions regarding political issues related to Israel. I also asked how their feelings toward Israel have changed over the course of their lives. Here is a typical response to this last question. The speaker is a pediatrician in her 40s:

Well, I think when you’re very young . . . you see things in very simplistic terms. When I was young, there was this land flowing with milk and honey, to

protect everyone from further Holocausts, and there was dancing and singing and the planting of trees . . . I mean to a certain extent some of those are still engraved in your psyche. But as you get older of course you know you come to understand history a bit better . . . and you have a more balanced view of the world, and you know other people suffered because of these glorious victories, and that there were these really messy political and geographical developments. Not that I don't still have very strong, very positive feelings towards Israel but they're somewhat down by the current political situation. I definitely do not agree [that] everything Israel does makes sense. I guess one of the big things that changed is there is Israel the image and Israel the reality. [I] still consider myself possibly a strong supporter of Israel the entity. I have to say that I do not always agree politically with what is going on but I could say the same thing about . . . America. (Boston focus group, 2006)

The speaker attributes her increasingly sober view of Israel to the wisdom acquired with age, as do many of the focus group participants. A more convincing explanation for evolving views, however, may be a changing political and ideological context that favors criticism. Notably, the speaker analogizes her mature feelings about Israel to her feelings about the U.S. Like the U.S., she feels a strong connection to Israel but regards it as deeply flawed and in need of change. At the time of the focus group discussion, her views were “realistic” as opposed to idealistic, and indicative of the new realism in the perspectives of many American Jews relative to Israel.

PARADIGM SHIFT

The practices and signature organizations associated with the “mass mobilization” and “direct engagement” paradigms are summarized in Figure 1. In the sections above, I argued that direct engagement practices are ascendant: Increasingly, American Jews directly connect to Israel by expressing political views, directing donations, working and living in Israel part-time, consuming Israeli news and culture, and embracing the orientation of “sober realists” rather than wide-eyed idealists. Taken together, these changes represent the emergence of a new paradigm for the diaspora-homeland relationship of American Jews to Israel. I am calling the new model “direct engagement” to highlight its core feature.

From an analytical standpoint, it is possible to further distinguish key structuring characteristics of the organizations and practices of each paradigm. At the organizational level (Figure 2), the waning paradigm features

Figure 1
Mass Mobilization and Direct Engagement

Paradigm	Political action	Philanthropy	Tourism/Immigration	Communications	Public Opinion
Mass Mobilization 1967–present	Practices	Centralized fundraising by federated charities. Funds transferred to Israeli quasi-governmental agencies.	Youth tourism sponsored by denominations, coordinated by the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). Immigration managed by JAFI.	News of Israel filtered through U.S. media, U.S. Jewish press, and U.S. Jewish opinion leaders.	Idealism “Israelotry”
	Signature Organizations	American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Jewish Council for Public Affairs	United Jewish Appeal, United Israel Appeal, Jewish National Fund, Jewish Agency for Israel	Television network news, <i>New York Times</i> , <i>The Jewish Week</i>	
Direct Engagement 1993–present	Practices	Decentralized fundraising by Israeli NGOs. Donations made directly to institutions, causes and agencies in Israel.	Youth /young adult tourism sponsored by private organizations & featuring <i>mifgashim</i> (encounters) with Israelis. Immigration coordinated by private organization.	News of Israel received directly, via Internet & English language websites of Israeli media	Realism
	Signature Organizations	Zionist Organization of America, Americans for a Safe Israel, Brit Izedek V'Shalom, J Street, Americans for Peace Now	New Israel Fund, One Israel Fund, “American Friends of . . .” charities.	haaretz.com jpost.com ynet.com jewcy.com	

Figure 2
Characteristics of Organizations

	Mass Mobilization	Direct Engagement
<i>Structure</i>	Umbrella/Federated	Independent
<i>Ideology</i>	Centrist	Partisan
<i>Sphere of Action</i>	National	Transnational
<i>Authority</i>	Public	Private

large umbrella or federated organizations pursuing centrist policies. The typical sphere of action is national, meaning that advocacy and fundraising is confined to the U.S. (i.e., the government of Israel is *not* a target of political advocacy), and the locus of organizational authority is quasi-public—the core lobbying and fundraising organizations belong to the Jewish polity as a whole. Under the emerging direct engagement paradigm, organizations tend to be independent, and to pursue partisan political projects aimed at bringing to life a particular vision of what Israel ought to be. In such pursuits, organizations increasingly engage in advocacy targeted not only at the U.S. government but at the Israeli government as well, and they do so in transnational Jewish alliances with Israeli counterparts. The authority such organizations invoke tends to be private rather than public; they claim to represent their supporters rather than American Jewry as a whole.

The two paradigms can also be distinguished by the distinctive practices of individuals relative to the Jewish state (Figure 3). Under mass mobilization, the relationship between individuals and the state tends to be highly mediated (by organizations, rabbis) and their orientation tends to be idealistic. In addition, under mass mobilization American Jews tend to identify as *American* Jews, which is to say, as U.S. political subjects who happen to have sentimental, ethnic, and religious ties to a foreign country. Under the emerging direct engagement paradigm, the relationship of individuals to Israel tends to be more personal and experiential; moreover, their ideological orientation tends to mix idealism with a heavy dose of realism. Finally, under direct engagement, political subjectivity becomes more complex and fluid; individuals practicing according to the emerging paradigm are more likely to identify and behave as if they were dual citizens of both the U.S. and Israel.

Direct engagement practices are most characteristic of highly engaged, affiliated Jews, but there are entry points for the less engaged, including, for example, participating in a Birthright Israel trip, or signing an on-line petition of one of the many advocacy organizations. Indeed, individuals can and do engage in practices associated with both paradigms, for example,

Figure 3
Characteristics of Individual-level Practices

	Mass Mobilization	Direct Engagement
<i>Experience</i>	Mediated	Personal
<i>Orientation</i>	Idealistic	Realistic
<i>Identity</i>	Bounded	Fluid

by giving money to their local federation as well as donating directly to an Israeli not-for-profit organization, or by volunteering for the AJC as well as their local chapter of Brit Tzedek. Although less common, organizations can also cross over, as when many mass mobilization advocacy and defense organizations joined together to establish the Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues.

Direct engagement practices and organizations do not fully replace but develop alongside their mass mobilization counterparts. Large, bureaucratic organizations, such as the federations and the UJC, and national advocacy organizations of the center, such as AIPAC, the CPMAJO, the AJC, and the ADL, continue to play a prominent role in the communal affairs of American Jewry and in relation to Israel. In addition, most moderately affiliated Jews continue to relate to Israel mostly through mass mobilization practices and organizations and to identify with Israel mainly as a symbol—and in mythic terms—as a diaspora might to its ancestral homeland.⁴⁶ However, mass mobilization is no longer the locus of growth and creativity, and it does not appear to be the direction of future development.

EXPLAINING THE RISE OF DIRECT ENGAGEMENT

How can we explain the emergence of direct engagement alongside mass mobilization? Some aspects of the new model can be viewed, simultaneously, as factors responsible for bringing it about. This is certainly true of increased travel and the new electronic platform for communications. There are also a number of independent causes. First, political polarization in Israel beginning in the late 1970s and becoming more pronounced during the 1990s created a context for polarization in the diaspora. As the Israeli center hollowed out, Israeli parties looked to the diaspora for contributions and political support. Moreover, as political debate over the conflict with the Palestinians and the peace process deepened in Israel, and leadership in the government shifted from right to left and back again, many American

Jews found it difficult to keep track of the shifting positions of the Israeli government let alone adopt them as their own.⁴⁷

Second, direct engagement represents a maturation of the standing of American Jews in the U.S. and in their relationship to Israel. American Jews are less anxious today about the charge of dual-loyalties and hence more willing to engage in citizenship-like behavior in relation to their ethnic homeland. Public officials, including Rahm Emanuel, Dennis Ross, Martin Indyk, and Daniel Kurtzer, have not been disqualified from high office by virtue of their strong ties to Israel. In elite policy-making circles, diaspora ties to homelands are often viewed as a foreign policy asset. Indeed, *The New York Times* recently editorialized that the “Israeli government needs the public support of American Jews and moderate Israelis” to effectively confront the Israeli settler movement.⁴⁸

IMPLICATIONS

What are the implications of the new direct engagement for the future diaspora-homeland relationship of American Jews? The large, centralized, consensus-oriented Jewish organizations still play a major role in mobilizing political and philanthropic resources on behalf of Israel. However, as both mainstream and politically-oriented organizations engage increasingly in partisan advocacy, the centrist umbrella organizations in the U.S. have increasingly become sites of conflict. Thus, in 2007, the CPMAJO debated and affirmed a resolution supporting a united Jerusalem; shortly thereafter, another umbrella organization, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, debated and endorsed a two-state solution. Under other circumstances, umbrella organizations experienced gridlock and ignored or adopted neutral positions on divisive issues, ceding the terms of debate to organizations on the ideological flanks. In the future, maintaining the vitality of centralized organizations, including AIPAC and the CPMAJO, might prove difficult. Moreover, as unity gives way to pluralism, the political influence of such organizations may decline.

Moreover, direct engagement raises the challenge of civility in other, medium-sized communal organizations and congregations. Together with the rise of direct engagement, as both its cause and effect, political differences among American Jews regarding Israel have come to the fore. It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the broad consensus of a diaspora fan club can be fully recovered. Maintaining civility in communal discourse and defining the boundaries of legitimate dissent may prove increasingly

difficult in an emerging context of deeply held but politically divergent opinion.

Finally, as the individual and organizational ties between Jews in the U.S. and Israel strengthen, the role of American Jewry in Israeli democracy may become increasingly problematic. Increasingly, Israeli politicians and public officials recognize the new citizenship-like behavior of American Jews. For example, former Israel president Moshe Katsav, and former director general of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute Yehezkel Dror have discussed establishing a formal body to provide diaspora Jews with a consultative role in Israeli policy making. In a similar vein, former minister Natan Sharansky (appointed Chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel in 2009) has proposed making concessions on Jerusalem contingent upon a vote of all of the Jewish people, including those in the diaspora. However, some Israeli journalists and academics claim that diaspora participation in Israeli political affairs undermines democracy in the Jewish state.⁴⁹ In this view, only the sovereign citizens of a state ought to be enfranchised to make decisions. Moreover, in this view, the prominent role of the American Jewish diaspora militates against cultivation of a strong and inclusive Israeli identity that can unify the country's majority and minority populations. Other scholars disagree, arguing that diasporas can play a legitimate role in the democratic politics of homeland countries.⁵⁰ Identifying and building consensus around the proper diaspora role and the institutions it will require will prove challenging.

CONCLUSION

The sizeable literature on “transnationalism” describes immigrants as heavily involved with their countries of origin, sending home remittances, participating in homeland political parties, reproducing homeland cultural practices and returning for frequent visits. As a maturing, state-linked diaspora, American Jews increasingly relate to Israel in much the same fashion, i.e., less as an ancient diaspora might its recovered homeland and more as recent immigrants do their country of origin. Thus, for the more highly engaged segment of American Jewry, Israel has become, in effect, a “real country”, in addition to being a symbol and source of identity. A pattern of diaspora development from political consensus to contentiousness, and from highly mediated to increasingly direct engagement, may be characteristic of other diaspora–homeland cases as well. For example, Sheffer notes that the Armenian diaspora provided blanket support for the

homeland government in the period immediately following establishment in 1991 of the modern, independent state of Armenia. Over time, as in the case of American Jews, Armenian diaspora politics became more divisive.⁵¹ More generally, the paradigm shift in American Jewish relations with Israel suggests that diaspora–homeland relations assume diverse forms in different political and historical contexts. The comparative study of diaspora–homeland relations might profitably investigate the range of diaspora–homeland structures and identify the contexts that favor each.

The article has argued that the increasingly critical orientation of diverse sets of American Jews toward Israel and their disengagement from centralized fundraising do not indicate alienation but rather the opposite: More American Jews care sufficiently about Israel to seek to influence her. The trend reflects primarily the actions of a minority of American Jews, but includes large sections of elite and organized segments of the community. For such individuals and the organizations they establish and support, mere support for Israel no longer reflects and expresses their deepest passions. Rather, they seek to mold, direct, shape and influence Israel's future development. Moreover, they increasingly seek to connect to Israel in a personal, direct, and experiential fashion. They have exchanged the role of passive diaspora fans sitting in the bleachers to active players on the field of contentious Israeli politics.

NOTES

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1. For discussion of state-linked and stateless diasporas, see Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge, 2003) 148–79.

2. For example, see Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA, 2000); Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy” (Working Paper) (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

3. Yossi Shain, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad* (New York, 1999).

4. The exceptions are Jonathan Rynhold, “Israel's Foreign and Defense Policy and Diaspora Jewish Identity,” in Danny Ben-Moshe and Zohar Segev, *Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish Identity* (Brighton, 2007); and Yossi Shain, *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007).

5. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Basel, 1994) 7.
6. Stephane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley, 2008) 32.
7. See Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley, 2001).
8. I have adapted the term from Steven M. Cohen and Charles Liebman, "Israel and American Jewry in the Twenty-First Century: A Search for New Relationships," in *Beyond Survival and Philanthropy: American Jewry and Israel*, ed. Allon Gal and Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati, 2000).
9. Jack Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel: A 60 Year Retrospective," in *American Jewish Yearbook* (New York, 2009).
10. On the UJA and its relationship to JAFI and JDC, see Mark I. Rosen, *Responding to a World of Need: Fundraising at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee* (Bloomington, IN, 2009). For total raised annually by UJA, see www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/US-Israel/ujatab.html.
11. Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel," 69.
12. For example, notwithstanding strong Israeli opposition, the CPMAJO declined to criticize Reagan's 1988 decision to initiate dialogue with the PLO. See Steven Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences? Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel* (Waltham, MA, 2001) 108.
13. Yossi Shain, *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007) 56–7; Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel."
14. Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel," 21.
15. Quoted in Shain, *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs*, 71.
16. Daniel J. Elazar, *Community & Polity* (Philadelphia, 1995) 107.
17. Ofira Seliktar, *The Changing Identity of American Jews, Israel* (Brighton, 2007) 127. See also Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences?* 128–9.
18. Gregory Levey, "The Right Wing's Jerusalem Gambit," Salon.com, 13 December 2007.
19. James D. Bresser, *The Jewish Week*, 18 October 2007.
20. www.jstreet.org/blog, accessed 6 January 2009.
21. Nathan Guttman, "In Resolution, Congress Backs Israel's Actions in Gaza," Forward.com, 9 January 2009. Like the peace camp, the Zionist Organization was dissatisfied with Israel's prosecution of the war, but instead of a cease fire it called on Israel to "defeat Hamas" and retake sections of the Gaza strip. www.zoa.com; accessed 5 March 2009.
22. *Ha'aretz*, 17 February 2008.
23. "Task Force activities will include . . . supporting Task Force members with a mandate to advocate on behalf of civic equality and working with Israeli organizations to strengthen civil society activity including the strengthening of Jewish and Arab leadership" Mission Statement. www.iataskforce.org.
24. Mike Prashker, "Teaming Up for Equality in Israel," *The Forward*, 5 December 2008, 9.

25. Six months later these organizations had staked out diametrically opposed positions in response to the Obama administration's insistence that Israel freeze settlement construction and negotiate a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Brit Tzedek launched a campaign entitled, "We've Got Your Back on the Settlement Freeze, Mr. President." <http://btvshalom.org> The ZOA launched a parallel campaign featuring the slogan: "Mr. President, there cannot be a 2 state solution when the goal of the Palestinians is a 1 state solution." <http://www.zoa.org/>.

26. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/ujatab.html

27. Morris Talansky's fundraising for the Jerusalem hospital Sha'ari Tzedek, revealed in press accounts of the corruption investigation of former PM Ehud Olmert, is one timely, if dissonant, example.

28. Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel," 51. See also Gabriel Sheffer, "A Nation and Its Diaspora: A Re-examination of Israeli Jewish Diaspora Relations," *Diaspora*, 11.3 (2002) 331–57; Shain, *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs*.

29. Jacob Berkman, "Report: American Giving," www.blogs/jta.org/philanthropy, 15 September 2008.

30. Reut. "Non-Profit Sector in Israel" (Tel-Aviv, 2008).

31. Michael Orbach, "Reclusive Syrian Jews Denounce Hebron Eviction," *The Forward*, 2 January 2009.

32. Yitzhak Ben Horin, "From America to the Settlements," *Yediot Achronot*, 5 September 2005.

33. Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel," 51.

34. Jacob Berkman, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 28 January 2009.

35. Based on Eric H. Cohen, *Youth Tourism to Israel* (Bristol, UK, 2008), which provides estimates of annual participation in Israel Experience programs for all Diaspora youth.

36. Leonard Saxe, Benjamin Phillips, Graham Wright, Mathew Boxer, Shahar Hecht, and Theodore Sasson, *Birthright Israel Evaluation: 2007–08 North American Cohorts* (Waltham, 2008).

37. Theodore Sasson, David Mittelberg, Shahar Hecht, and Leonard Saxe, *Encountering the Other, Finding Oneself: The Birthright Israel Mifgash* (Waltham, 2008).

38. In a working paper, Charles Kadushin notes that the transfer of responsibility for aliyah to Nefesh B'Nefesh occurred in the year the Annapolis Accords—which oblige Israel to freeze new settlement in the West Bank—were signed. An official current (2008) Knesset document states that, "The Jewish Agency does not engage in tasks that would conflict with the authority of the Israeli government . . . Its activity behind the 'Green Line' has been suspended due to political limitations." Nefesh B'Nefesh, which now handles 90% of American immigration to Israel, openly advertizes communities in "Yehuda V'Shomron"—the West Bank—as options for North American immigrants. See Kadushin, "American Jewish Financial Support for Israel," on file with the author.

39. Chaim I. Waxman and Sergio DellaPergola, "Time Sharing Aliyah," *Ha'aretz*, 26 January 2007.

40. Leonard Saxe, Theodore Sasson, Benjamin Phillips, Shahar Hecht, and Graham Wright, *Birthright Israel Evaluation: 2007 North American Cohorts* (Waltham, 2007).

41. Wertheimer, "American Jews and Israel."

42. Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, *Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and their Alienation from Israel* (New York, 2007); Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer, "Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?" *Commentary*, 121 (2006) 33–7; Robert Wexler, "Israel in the Identity of American Jews" in Ben-Moshe and Segev, *Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish Identity*.

43. Sasson, Kadushin and Saxe, "Trends in American Jewish Attachment to Israel," *Contemporary Jewry* (forthcoming); Sasson, Kadushin and Saxe, "American Jewish Attachment to Israel." See also Benjamin Phillips, Eszter Lengyel, and Leonard Saxe, *American Attitudes toward Israel* (Waltham, MA, 2002); and Steven M. Cohen, "Did American Jews Really Grow More Distant from Israel, 1983–1993?—A Reconsideration" in *Envisioning Israel: The Changing Ideals and Images of North American Jews*, ed. Allon Gal (Detroit, MI, 1996).

44. In a 2005 AJC survey, 15% favored dismantling all settlements, 46% favored dismantling some settlements, and 36% favored dismantling none. AJC Annual Survey, www.ajc.org (accessed July 2009).

45. Sasson, "The New Realism: American Jews' Views about Israel" (AJC, 2009).

46. Regarding the Israel connections of "moderately affiliated" Jews, see Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M., Eisen, *The Jew Within* (Bloomington, IN, 2000).

47. Jonathan Rynhold, "Israel's Foreign and Defense Policy and Diaspora Jewish Identity," in Ben-Moshe and Segev, *Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish Identity*. See also Seliktar, *The Changing Identity*.

48. *The New York Times*, "The War Within," 5 November 2008.

49. Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia, PA, 2006); Bernard Avishai, *The Hebrew Republic* (New York, 2008); Gideon Levy, "Let's be Done With All the Talanskys," *Ha'aretz*, 26 January 2009.

50. Jakobson argues from a comparative perspective that an "inclusive civic concept of national identity within the country" can be compatible with "maintaining official ties with an ethno-cultural Diaspora". See Alexander Jacobson, "Constitutions: How Unique is the Israeli Case?" *Israel Studies*, 13.2 (2008). More generally, the "extent to which citizenship should be understood primarily, or even at all, in relation to the nation-state" is increasingly a matter of theoretical and sociological debate. See Nira Yuval Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40.13 (2006) 197–214.

51. Gabriel (Gabi) Sheffer, "Transnationalism and Ethno-National Diasporism," *Diasporas* (forthcoming).

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