



PERSPECTIVES

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Do Not Give Diaspora Jews a Formal Voice in Israel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israel's Blue and White party and its minister for Diaspora Affairs, Omer Yankelevich, are supporting a new bill in favor of the radically misconceived idea that Israel should give a formal voice to Diaspora Jews regarding decisions that could affect Jews abroad. Israel is a sovereign state and should not share any part of its decision-making, however small, with Jews abroad. If the bill is passed, it is highly likely that Israel will find itself giving a voice to Jews who are outspoken opponents of its policies.

Israel's relationship with the Diaspora is highly complex. Israel is a sovereign state, and Diaspora Jewry consists of small Jewish minorities spread across many countries in many different environments. American Jewry represents about three-quarters of Diaspora Jewry, which is also sometimes called "Jewry in exile" or "Galut" Jewry.

From time to time, the idea is raised that Israel should give a formal voice to representatives of Diaspora Jewry regarding decisions that could affect Jews abroad.

This is a radically misconceived idea. The most obvious reason is that as a sovereign state, Israel should not share any part of its sovereignty, however small, with Jews abroad. Israel has been very generous in its legislation toward the Diaspora. In recent years across the Western world, there has been a rise in support for placing limits on immigration, but Israel's Law of Return has not been changed. For decades, Israel has granted Diaspora Jews the right to settle in the country. Often it has even been generously incentivized.

Those Jews who have declined to avail themselves of this opportunity should not have any legal or formal right to intervene if Israel were to restrict the

conditions of the law or change other laws. They can use soft power, communicate their views through lobbyists, and write articles.

It was recently announced that proposed Knesset legislation would give Diaspora Jewish leaders a formal role in Israeli affairs. Knesset member Tehila Friedman of the Blue and White party sponsored the measure. The proposed law would require the Israeli government to consult world Jewish leaders on issues it deems crucial to the 8 million or so Jews who live outside the country. A JTA article claimed that such a bill is supported by the Israeli Diaspora Affairs ministry. The minister in charge, Omer Yankelevich, also belongs to Blue and White. Her CV shows that she has no experience in the field in which her party leaders have appointed her minister.

To better explain why Israel's consulting of Diaspora Jews is such a bad idea, a simple means of analysis is to assume that Israel would set up a council representative of organized Diaspora Jewry. (It is impossible to give a voice to unorganized Jews—or, as they are often called by US statistics, "just Jews.")

Who would represent US Jewry on such a council? Those who line up with Israel's enemies, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, would probably be too small to claim representation. Yet it is reasonable to assume that the world's largest organization of Jewish masochists, the American group J Street, would be entitled to have representation on the Council. This is likely to be true irrespective of the fact that J Street was barred from becoming a member of the Conference of Presidents of major Jewish American organizations in 2014. The latter body aims to advance the interests of the American Jewish community, sustain a broad base of support for Israel, and address critical concerns facing world Jewry. Sources within the organization as well as outsiders close to it have repeatedly told me that in the last few years the Conference of Presidents has to a large extent been paralyzed.

That is just one indication of the decline of American Jewry over more than a decade. There are many others. In 2005, when my book, *American Jewry's Challenge*, was published, one could still claim that American Jewry was the second major force in world Jewry next to Israel. The book contained 17 interviews with American Jewish leaders and thinkers.

Few of the interviewees are still in the limelight of American Jewry. Some, including Rabbi Norman Lamm and Shoshana Cardin, have passed away. Some are no longer publicly active, while others have been replaced, often by people of lesser caliber. Today, one can barely speak of a national American Jewish lay leadership. The title of the interview in my book with Daniel Pipes, *The End of American Jewry's Golden Era*, was particularly prescient. The strength of American Jewry has partly moved to local leadership, including some synagogue rabbis and grassroots organizations.

American Jewry reached a new moral low when 600 American Jewish organizations identified themselves with the antisemitic Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. After an initial letter of support on June 25, 2020 for BLM, these Jewish organizations added insult to injury by publishing the letter in *The New York Times*. By that time it had become clear that supporting BLM was radically different from coming out against discrimination against blacks and other minorities in the US.

Of BLM's original founders, two identify as neo-Marxists. It is, in essence, a black, racist, anti-democratic movement that should be exposed and fought. Its original platform was permeated by hatred of Israel, as were some of its gatherings.

In 2005, the future of world Jewry was still resting on two pillars, the State of Israel and American Jewry. Such an assessment is no longer valid. American Jewry, with its widespread assimilation (of which mixed marriage is only one major expression) and the main leanings of its majority toward generally liberal rather than Jewish fundamentals, holds no great promise for Jewry's future if the State of Israel were no longer there. In the meantime, Israel has grown stronger and has started to integrate itself more into the political reality of the Middle East. The disparity in power, influence, and importance between the two entities has increased.

On a Diaspora Jewry Council one would find representatives of organizations that identify with the black community without reservation. They pay no attention to the fact that, for instance, the ADL has found that antisemitism among blacks is substantially higher than among whites.

Lumping all black Americans together with the iconic figure of the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is a caricature. America's leading antisemite, Louis B. Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, is black. Barack Obama's longtime church leader, who married him and his wife, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, is an extreme anti-Israel inciter. In his recently published autobiography, Obama continues to ignore Wright's antisemitism. The black communist feminist Angela Davis is a rabid anti-Israeli. The list goes on.

One can also look at smaller Jewish communities in other countries. The umbrella organization of Swiss Jewry (SIG), for example, elected a new chairman who had not been active in the community for decades. He sits on the board of the New Israel Fund. According to NGO Monitor, this organization subsidizes groups that demonize Israel.

The problem can be even better seen with respect to the Dutch Jewish community, which numbers 50,000 at the most. About one-third of the 150 Dutch parliamentarians come from anti-Israeli parties: the left liberal D66, the

social democrat PvdA, the Green Left party, and the left-wing socialist party SP. To this one has to add the small and bizarre Party for the Animals.

A poll was taken by the Dutch Jewish weekly *NIW* before the last parliamentary elections in 2017. At that time, the PvdA received approximately 7% of the general vote. Among the Jews, 20% intended to vote for this anti-Israeli party. A variety of Jewish leaders are members of it. They did not even leave the PvdA in March 2013 after the party's first Middle East Congress took place in the town of Zwolle. Then party leader Diederik Samson spoke at that gathering about the Middle East. This arrogant nitwit called the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the oldest conflict in the Middle East.

He had apparently never heard of the Sunni-Shiite conflict, which preceded the Arab-Israeli conflict by more than a millennium. He also blamed Israel for the non-solution of the problem with the Palestinians even though by that time Israeli PMs Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert had both offered generous peace proposals to the Palestinians that were rejected by Arafat and Abbas, respectively. Samson did not mention Palestinian terrorism, its political support among Palestinians, or the culture of death in their society.

Any self-respecting Jewish member of that party should have left it in disgust after that speech. At the very least, they should have protested against Samson's distortion of the truth. They did not. This is typical of many "Galut" Jews: they have a weak relationship to Jewish honor and an inability to straighten their moral backs.

If world Jewry had the strength to create its own representative council, that would be a different story. It is obviously not. There are a variety of international Jewish organizations, such as the Jewish Agency, where one finds Jews from abroad who have an interest in Israel. But that is very different from a representative council of Diaspora Jews founded by Israel.

The probable upcoming elections are likely to stall the bill for many months—but that doesn't take away the need for Israel to improve its outreach in general and more intensively to Jews abroad, both organized and individuals.

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