

## ***Current Jewish Periodicals***

Not surprisingly, “American policy towards Israel is the focus of much discussion in current Jewish periodicals.

Norman Podhoretz’s “America and Israel: An Ominous Change” (*Commentary*, January 1992) argues against the Bush administration’s contention that its policies reflect the longstanding position of previous Democratic and Republican administrations, showing how subtle attitudes have indeed changed for the worse. The change in American policy toward Israel, he argues, is expressed in a coldness bordering upon hostility. While the President does not now advocate a Palestinian state, Podhoretz feels that Bush is playing into the Arab policy which is rooted in the Arab unwillingness “to accept the existence of a sovereign Jewish state in ‘their’ part of the world.” According to Podhoretz,

placing Israel in such peril is not something the American people would wish to do, which is why there is a good chance that they will stop their government from doing it—provided that is, an urgent effort is made to open their eyes to the game being played by the Bush administration and to the irrationality of its obsession with its ideas about the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In *Midstream* (January 1992), Victor Perry discusses “The No-Option Option” currently facing Israel. According to Perry, the Arabs are prepared to oppose Israel with a state of “intransigence and unequivocal hostility, which “could mean a war of generations.” Perry believes that the only option that the Israelis could and should accept is the “No-Option Option,” or the maintenance of the status quo.

Perry summarizes the Jaffe Center research project, “Israel’s Options for Peace.” This study determined that while the total annexation of the conquered territories [Yehuda and Shomron] was feasible, its consequences “could be disastrous.” The different compromises which were proposed (autonomy, Palestinian State, a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation) would be rejected by the Arabs, the Israelis, or both. Maintaining the status quo was dismissed in this study “because it would cause a ‘serious degeneration’ in Israel’s position.” It then suggested that Israel accept

a seventh option, namely, a gradual process of compromises from which may emerge some form of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza, but only if the Palestinians, in turn, accept Israel’s existence, legitimacy, and permanence and renounce the Palestinian “right of return” of all refugees, as well as any claim to pre-1967 borders.

Perry argues that Jews look for solutions even when none are to be found, thereby exposing themselves to physical danger. He contends that Jews are plagued by “an exaggerated sense of reasonableness, and are the only people who blame themselves “when another power tries to destroy [them].”

For Perry, Arafat’s enlisting of Jewish supporters is similar to Hitler’s use of Jews “as partners in their own destruction.” On one hand, Jews of the “Peace Camp” want to trust Arafat; on the other hand, the “Judenrat mentality Jews” [Jewish councils which collaborated with the Nazis under the illusion of “self-rule”] ignore, like

their Nazi era counterparts, that Arafat identified with Saddam Hussein's threats and assaults which were directed against Israel, and the announcement of Abu Ayad, Arafat's second-in-command

Now we accept the formation of a Palestinian State in part of Palestine, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. We start from the part and liberate Palestine inch by inch.

For Perry, Israel's best ally is Arab intransigence, which leaves no alternative to the common sense of the status quo.

Ruth R. Weisse's short article "A Purim Homily" (*Commentary*, May 1992) focuses on Purim, "the zaniest holiday of the Jewish calendar because it celebrates the most improbable event in Jewish history—the political victory of the Jews over their claimed foes."

Noting that in the modern period the holiday became "politically incorrect" to the point that some Reform congregations banished it from the calendar, she asks:

And what about today? Can we really imagine Jews highly placed in government or "beautiful people" risking their careers, let alone their lives, to plead the cause of the Jews? . . . . There are four Jews centrally involved in the making of policy toward Israel in the administration of George Bush—Dennis Ross, Aaron David Miller, Richard Haas and Daniel Kurtzer, known to some as the Four Jewish Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Is *this* what they have been doing on behalf of the threatened Jewish polity of today?

Writing in the *Jewish Spectator* (Spring 1992), Edward L. Hudgins and Joel L. Rosenberg (of the Washington, D.C. Heritage Foundation) argue "Economic Reform, not Loan Guarantees: Israel's Only Path To Prosperity." The authors concede that the Bush administration's stated reason for denying Israel the \$10 billion loan guarantees is to apply economic pressure to dissuade Israel from settling Jews on lands that the US believes should remain under Arab sovereignty, and they claim that Bush continues to "tilt American policy unprecedentedly against Israel." While opposing the Bush-Baker policy, the authors feel that Israel's dependence upon these loan guarantees is unwise both for the Israelis and for the U.S.

They argue that without substantial reform in the Israeli economy and with the hiring of 15,000 public sector employees, it appears that the Israelis prefer "to spend money on make-work jobs rather than on housing for immigrants." According to the authors, the influx of hard currency loan guarantees would only enable the Israelis to postpone economic reforms. The fact that Israel has not defaulted on its loans does not impress the authors, who are unimpressed with Israel paying loan guarantees with foreign aid. Long term government bonds receive a BBB-[the lowest investment grade rating of the Standard and Poor's service].

*Midstream* (April 1992) offers Roman Brackman's "'Land for Peace' and Other Twisted Fantasies," which is a critique of the Bush Administration's policies. According to Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, Israel must choose between settling Russian and Ethiopian immigrants and the settlement of the West Bank. But Brackman argues that Israel's first concern should be the physical security of Jews.

Brackman claims that the Soviet Leonid Brezhnev invented the "land for peace" formula, in which the superpowers would force Israel to retreat to pre-1967 borders.

President Nixon rejected this doctrine, Jimmy Carter accepted it, and it has now been revived by the Bush administration. Brackman dismisses this option because it creates an artificial twenty-third Arab State and is incompatible with Bush's twin test of "fairness and security." According to Brackman, "a growing number of Israelis reject the idea of trading "land for peace," recognizing in it a mere stepping-stone to the creation of a hostile state."

*Tikkun* (November/December 1991) presents a survey of options on linkage, loans, and land for peace from the perspective of leftist Jewish intellectuals. Michael Lerner is distressed that Shamir forced Bush to take a hard line on loan guarantees, and he calls attention to the Shamir government's establishment of settlements on the West Bank or Gaza when American officials were in Israel. In an editorial column, Lerner writes that in

a supreme act of chutzpah, Shamir turned to the U.S. and asked Bush to provide the funds to make a mockery of Bush's own land-for-peace policy.

Recognizing that "right-wingers like to dismiss us on the Jewish left as idealists and dreamers," Lerner maintains that only those on the left are "free enough of narrow, nationalist fantasies to be able to look at the situation of the Jews around the world."

While U.S. Representative Stephen Solarz argues that economic pressure should not be used to bring Israel to the negotiating table, Prof. Michael Walzer believes that the economic lever should be used: "The U.S. should not be underwriting policies that we believe ought to be negotiable at the peace conference."

Leftist Knesset member Yair Tzaban and Jerome Segal of the Peace Now lobby believe that economic pressure should be imposed upon Israel, because the government policy of building settlements and rejecting land-for-peace is provocative and objectionable. David Saperstein, who directs Reform Judaism's Religious Action Center (which deals with liberal political issues), opposes Israeli expansion of settlements, but he disagrees with his colleagues on the left because he fears that American ties to Israel are too fragile to be tested. He worries that the concept of linkage could be extended to other forms of American support for Israel, and pleads that humanitarian aid and political pressure are morally incompatible.

*Commentary* inaugurated a new regular column, "Israel Watch," in its June 1992 issue. Its aim is

to deal with a new situation: the escalation of the ideological and political wars against Israel which have been going on since, roughly, the end of the Gulf War. Every day, it seems, brings another lie about Israel . . . and every day, it also seems, there are fewer and fewer voices raised to expose the lie, to refute the slander, to correct the misrepresentation. . . . [We] hope to keep track of and to answer the main charges which enemies of Israel—and some of its self-proclaimed "friends"—have been hurling at it with relentless ferocity.

The first column in this new department is David Bar-Ilan's "The Patriot Smear and its Progeny."

In *L'Eylah* (Passover 1992), which is published by the Office of the Chief Rabbi and Jews' College of London, Dr. David Newman of Ben Gurion University describes the ideologies and programs of the religious parties in Israel today. The two major religious party groups that Newman describes are *Religious Nationalist* and *Chareidi*.

The former understand their Zionism in traditional Jewish terms while the latter do not accept the theological validity of a secularly defined Jewish state. While the Religious Zionist community served as a bridge between religious and secular Jews, the *Chareidi* community separates itself as much as possible from what it takes to be a contaminating secularity. National Religious power has diminished because many religious Jews often vote for *Likkud*, the right-wing block, and many religious voters are attracted to what is seen as the more authentically religious consistency of the *Chareidi* community.

The *Chareidi* vote is split in three very distinct factions. Rabbi Shach's *Degel Torah* represents the Lithuanian yeshiva community [Lithuania spawned the great yeshivot in Europe], Agudat Yisrael the Hassidic community, and Shas the *Chareidi* Sefardim who are allied with Rabbi Shach but, because of ethnic concerns, prefer a Sefardic party. The Lithuanians and Hassidim not only disagreed on which leader was pre-eminent [the Lithuanians emphasizing scholarship, the Hassidim, charisma]; they differed on voting power, which is often a consequence of community size. Since the Sefardim felt that they were objects of discrimination in the award of the governmental largess that is allocated to its institutions, they felt that they could best represent their constituency by a direct appeal to ethnic loyalties.

Common to all the religious parties is the preservation of the Jewish character of Israel. All the religious parties are concerned with the closing of cinemas, the ban of pork and *hamets*, rulings regarding Sabbath observance, and legislation concerning family status, Jewish identity and modesty. While the *Chareidim* do not recognize the secular government as religiously valid, they nevertheless feel responsible for the Jewish identity of the population. Ironically, the National Religious community, which does see itself as part of the larger Zionist enterprise, is unwilling to be overtly coercive in these areas.

In recent times, the identity of religious parties has undergone change. By being more rigorous in its standards, the *Chareidi* kashrut supervision is considered "more kosher," because *Chareidim* do not accept the authority of the State's Chief Rabbinate. The Lubavitch and the Mercaz ha-Rav community have adopted a hawkish nationalism which regards territorial compromise as a breach of faith and Jewish law. On the other hand, Rabbi Shach and his followers are willing to consider territorial compromise because they do not invest modern Israel with messianic stature. However, R. Shach is unwilling to support the relatively dovish Labor bloc because of its militant anti-religious bias. Newman calls attention to the fact that while Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and Shas's leadership identify with R. Shach's dovish politics, the rank and file align themselves with the more hawkish Likkud, Lubavitch, and Mercaz ha-Rav communities.

Because electoral power carries with it access to public funding of religious institutions, the various religious parties vie for that access which enlarges their power base and their control of political loyalties. But this merger of political and financial concerns is a source of anger on the part of the non-religious population. Lamenting the political situation of religious parties in Israel, Newman observes that many once-religious people adopt secular life-styles because of their dissatisfaction with the realities of publicly displayed religious life in Israel. They perceive right-wing nationalism, violent Shabbat demonstrations, and the attempts to obtain ever larger financial hand-outs as signs of religious vulgarity.