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## REPUBLICANS, DEMOCRATS AND AMERICAN JEWS\*

One of the immutable laws of American politics is the Jewish link to liberalism and the Democratic Party. Jewish voters are consistently more likely to choose liberal candidates, to hold liberal positions and to support liberal causes than are their Gentile cohorts in the American population. And to the extent that the Democratic Party is equated in their minds with this liberalism, it has been the beneficiary of their political preferences since the beginning of the century.

Study after study has suggested the tenacity of this preference, even when such actions appear contrary to Jewish social and economic self-interest. And this preference has ignored generational and regional differences to become a virtual given of American electoral politics, whether national or local.

Several theories have been posited to explain the phenomenon. Some suggest that Jewish political liberalism is the direct offshoot of traditional Jewish values. Concern for the poor, a generally optimistic view of man's place in the world and support for educational and cultural pursuits are said to be basics of Jewish religious thinking. Transferring them to the fertile soil of these United States naturally resulted in their application to the secular political context. What emerged was a Jewish link to liberal thinking.

Others demur. That being the case, they note drily, those most familiar with or most committed to Jewish values should express greater liberalism than those distant from the tradition. In fact, the opposite appears to be true. The more ritually observant members of

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Aside from the historical forces at work, for a generation of immigrants and their children, liberal causes also suited rational political needs. A community seeking to integrate itself into a new society needs help in opening stubborn doors held shut by bigotry and discrimination. Organizing and lobbying to that end was raised to a sacred mission.

And there were many doors closed to Jews in this country, whether at resorts or medical schools, banks or residential neighborhoods. Prying them open was a battle that justified the use of all legal means and political coalitions at hand. The Jewish leadership was quick to recognize that its argument would be that much more compelling if it included, under its umbrella, the needs of other minorities and immigrant groups in search of legal and social remedy. The lesson carried beyond immediate Jewish interests and soon became a matter of principle as much as pragmatism.

So too support for trade unions. As noted above, the Jewish identification with organized labor in the United States developed early upon their mutual arrival. For a community that was made up largely of workers and toilers, such activism made good sense. It allowed them to join forces with others of similar need under the union banner, and helped them target political candidates with analogous sympathies and ethno-social background.

But much of this is no more. The data have already been presented elsewhere. Suffice it to say that economically and professionally, American Jews stand well in the lead among ethnic communities in this country. They are the best educated, most affluent and most upwardly mobile. They have left their proletarian roots well behind and outpaced even the Gentile majority that tried so hard to exclude them. Among their younger contingents, a staggering 80% hold professional or managerial positions.

Most of the civil rights battles no longer affect them. Newer initiatives, such as affirmative action or equal employment opportunity programs, impact negatively—given their disproportionate presence in academia and in the professions. And attempts to integrate their schools and their communities have resulted in social confrontation and real soul-searching.

In many ways, what has changed is not so much Jewish attitudes but the context of liberalism. It is a shift set into motion in the sixties and linked early on with campus rebellion and the anti-war movement. But within, it holds a restiveness that has not yet run its course.

Faced with increasing Black activism, many liberals found themselves confronting militance beyond their control. Jewish interests in particular were often identified, directly or by implication, with the evil to be eradicated. Their desire to “work within the

system” was attacked as establishment liberalism and the thinking of the “old left.” The Jewish position, but a few steps removed from its humble beginnings, was at odds with those just beneath.

They found themselves as landlords and small retailers, social workers and teachers, in communities seeking to rid themselves of all such symbols of external repression. Expressions of civil rage and violence have historically bade evil for Jews—no matter what their source. Here the confrontation was direct and it chilled the spine of even the most committed Jewish liberal.

Born in the turbulence of the late sixties, these shockwaves are still felt in the mid-eighties. And nowhere has it been more evident than in the single issue that stands as the hallmark of contemporary American liberalism: civil rights and the status of Black America.

Consider, for example, the 1984 Presidential elections and the candidacy of Rev. Jesse Jackson. Tension between Jackson and Jewish leaders was evident from the first. Ethnic slurs attributed to him set the tone for the Democratic convention. His well-publicized suggestions that the United States should rethink its Middle East policy in favor of the needs of the Arab World, and the rumor that contributions had been received from oil shiekhdoms interested in such a change, infuriated Jewish leaders.

The thought that these might not be solitary incidents, but only the tip of the iceberg visible to the media, was soon grossly inflated. After all, the chosen Democratic candidate, former Vice-President Walter Mondale, had little chance of winning the general election. Jackson and his gaffes became the most exciting thing the Party had to offer.

For many, the problem was not primarily Rev. Jackson’s opinions of Jews. Nor was there much surprise in his criticism of Israel—though unprecedented among Democrats vying for their party’s nod. He had never been circumspect about his feelings and it was clear to whom his appeals were directed. What was most disturbing was the impotence of other major candidates, who were unwilling to distance themselves from Jackson and his rainbow coalition, for fear of alienating minority voters. The party that had so long attracted the support of Jewish voters was now a captive of other interests. And the welfare of its Jewish constituency seemed of little consequence.

This phenomenon is neither short-term nor isolated; Jackson’s presence will undoubtedly be felt in future elections. It is all part of the tension within contemporary liberalism, and the tenacity of this political confrontation has major implications for the American Jewish community. But it is only part of the story.

His words notwithstanding, Rev. Jackson's political style was genteel and polished. But there was nothing genteel about the words of his staunch loyalist, Minister Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam. And the profound changes in the context of liberalism became brutally clear to most American Jews through his much publicized persona.

Over the period of the election and its aftermath, Rev. Farrakhan attracted audiences and honoraria well into the thousands. He appeared at large university campuses and metropolitan convention centers in such major cities as Detroit, Atlanta, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and New York. At all of his lectures, he regaled his listeners with a message of economic renewal and self-help for the Black community.

But his remarks were also peppered with comments about Jews as oppressors, as the founders of the slave trade, and as a greedy and corrupt people whose economic manipulations were all that prevented Blacks from helping themselves. To be sure, his rhetoric inflamed already sensitive relations between the two groups.

It was still more infuriating to watch Black leaders, many of whom owed their positions and their successes at least in part to Jewish support, walk gingerly around the issue. As with the Democratic candidates noted above, they were hesitant to distance themselves from Farrakhan's political and social influence. They feared that in so doing, they might alienate themselves from their own people and appear to be yielding to Jewish pressure.

Finally, there was yet another shift in liberalism with consequences for its Jewish patrons, and it emerged in the one political issue that most unites them: the safety and security of the State of Israel. Perhaps it has more to do with public relations. In part it results from a resurgence of political conservatism in Israel over the past decade, a factor that has eclipsed its liberal/socialist foundations. And perhaps it is little more than an instinctive sympathy for the underdog—or for the side that has best succeeded in portraying itself as such.

For whatever reasons, Israel no longer appears to capture the imagination of liberal thinkers and intellectuals. By contrast, they are more fired by the plight of the poor, homeless Palestinian—seeking only human rights and self-determination. A once passionate alliance is quickly passing by the wayside.

It is still possible for Jewish organizations to trot out an aging black leader or a member of the labor establishment—some of whose liberal credentials have themselves been subject to question. But formerly proud linkages between the liberal and civil rights commu-

nities and the Zionist corps in the United States have been subject to severe strain. And this is true even when the representatives of the former are themselves Jewish.

Yet for the foreseeable future, the Jewish link to the Democratic party, at least at the national level, appears to be intact. A quick glance at the results of the 1984 election is illuminating. Despite all that has been said about Jackson and Farrakhan, despite the refusal of many Democratic and Black leaders to repudiate them and despite doubts about the integrity of their support for Israel, the results were predictable. The Democratic candidate, former Vice-President Walter Mondale, was able to garner roughly two-thirds of the Jewish vote.

### III

In contrast, a large portion of the American electorate appears to have moved to the political right—behind the popular leadership of Ronald Reagan, one of the first genuinely conservative Presidents of the modern era. Might not Jewish voters be susceptible to a political change as well, Republicans leaders have reasoned. They too are moved by the same national currents that brought about the Reagan landslides, and they have had to confront powerful changes within their own community of political interests. Perhaps their anchor to liberalism can be shaken.

To drive home the point, Republicans have moved to attract Jewish support both symbolically and substantively in the best way they know how. They have pledged loyalty to the welfare of the State of Israel as the single true democracy in the Middle East and as a bulwark against communist expansion. It is a position that fits easily into President Reagan's view of a world neatly divided into two camps. And it is a view that has been encouraged by Israel's own resurgent right. In many ways, it has the force of history behind it.

The position was transformed well beyond electoral rhetoric early in the Reagan administration. Israel's invasion of Southern Lebanon, the subsequent dispatch of American Marines as part of a supervisory force, and the Israeli occupation that lasted over two years opened a new era in American support for the security of Israel and its military objectives. And it was not lost on American Jews.

For many reasons, the war in Lebanon was protracted and painful. It was Israel's longest war, the first fought entirely on foreign soil and one that gained it international notoriety. Israel suffered some 600 casualties and several thousand wounded as a result less of

the initial days of battle than of the long months of occupation that followed. Its army camped in unfamiliar terrain facing guerrilla and terrorist forces supported by the local civilian population, albeit often under duress. It was a war that drained the economy, costing some \$1 million a day by the end of the occupation.

But perhaps most damaging of all, it was a war that raised moral doubts within Israel itself—doubts in regard to its objectives, in regard to the motives and machinations of its leadership and in regard to atrocities perpetrated in territory under Israeli control. A commission of investigation was empaneled in its aftermath. Military and political leaders at the highest level were censured. Ultimately it led to the resignation of Cabinet officials and contributed to the Prime Minister's retirement from active political life.

But if it was Israel's longest war, in part it was because American leadership allowed it to be. Israeli military strategists have always depended upon lightning victories. In part, this was because of the overwhelming odds they faced and the limitations of their human and military resources. But it also stemmed from the sense that their playing time was severely limited and restricted by international pressure.

Yet this time Israel's leadership was left unfettered by American demands to pull back and mop up. For what may have been the first time in its history, the Israel Defense Force was given its head. New objectives were defined almost "on the fly," i.e., after the initial victories of the first few days, as no calls came from the United States to cease and desist.

To be sure, American intentions were not purely altruistic on Israel's behalf. Nor were they primarily directed toward appeals to the American Jewish voter, though they were used as such during and after the affair. Rather, there were powerful diplomatic and international motivations at work, motivations that reflected "real-politik" as much as anything else.

Allowing Israel to beat up on Palestinian forces in Lebanon made good sense to the American diplomatic and military corps on several grounds. First, it could be used as evidence for the superiority of American military hardware as compared to what the Soviets provided. Israel was employing American matériel almost exclusively, while the other side had been armed by the USSR directly or through its clients in Syria and Libya.

The defeat of Palestinian ground forces and the demolition of the Syrian air corps suggested to all who sought military aid anywhere in the world, that it made good sense to deal with the United States and to respect those who were its allies. The reality, of course, was somewhat different; i.e., it was American armament in

the hands of the Israelis that defeated Soviet hardware being utilized by various Arab forces. Still, the results made the argument.

Related to this was the calculated assumption that neither the Soviet Union nor the bulk of the Arab World would rush to the support of their allies and cohorts in the PLO. Aside from blustery rhetoric from afar, Arafat's forces were left on their own, fighting the Israelis as well as the various militia that held small pockets of the Lebanese political vacuum. Even Syrian support was neither altruistic nor an unmixed blessing, as it later encouraged its Palestinian puppets to turn on the PLO central command.

Once again the events played into the hands of American foreign policy. Without its firing a shot, the diplomatic status of the United States rose throughout the Middle East as the USSR and radical Arab regimes looked on. The Soviet Union was effectively eliminated as a credible actor in war; it appeared that an alliance with the United States was the only game in town.

Subsequent events in the Middle East have pushed the United States and Israel still closer together. Largely because it has been identified as the prime mover and supplier in Israeli military superiority, the US has become a target for Arab terror throughout the world.

American citizens and military personnel have been subject to sniper fire, bombings, and hijackings in the civilized capitals of Europe as well as within their airspace or off their shores. Some 21 American diplomats have been murdered by Mideast terror since the advent of the Reagan Administration while others have been kidnapped and held hostage—along with British, French and Italian colleagues.

But in contrast to the confusion and indecision of the Carter years, President Reagan won plaudits for establishing a tough posture toward terrorists and those states that supply or shield them. An American bombing mission in Libya and a call for anti-terrorist coordination among the Western allies were the immediate results. Public investigation of linkages between Middle Eastern terror and support for revolutionary movements in the Caribbean, notably through Cuba and the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, were also initiated.

Alas, revelations of American negotiations with and arms sales to Iran, in return for the release of hostages in Southern Lebanon, have compromised this policy that declared it would never capitulate to terror. The waning years of the Reagan Presidency will undoubtedly suffer from the resulting loss of credibility, aside from the natural weakness of a lame-duck administration. This is an issue that the President will not easily shake.

IV

But historical trends are not broken by events of the moment, powerful and profound though they may be. Jewish political predilections toward liberalism will survive, no matter how vigorously Republican leaders advertise their support for Israel or other issues dear to the hearts of American Jewish voters. Even short-term voting shifts will be “corrected” as liberal tendencies reflect themselves over time or move from local to statewide and national races.

Additionally, there is a serious concern raised over the President’s foreign policy, especially as it is reflected in many pockets of the electoral support he has received over the past few years. And this has mitigated some of its positive impact on Jewish opinion. The chance that Jewish voters will switch to the Republican column has been limited still further as a result—especially as Ronald Reagan’s powerful personal appeal begins to fade from memory.

The concern is the manifestation of political conservatism in the garb of Christian fundamentalism, an important element of the Republican coalition in many parts of the country. As they have rallied in favor of school prayer and opposed abortion, Evangelical leaders of all stripes have also loudly proclaimed that the United States must help maintain Israel’s safety and military superiority.

Their reasoning, or at least their rhetoric, for this come-lately Zionism is straightforward. The simple sense of American security demands it. The battle against communist expansion demands it. But most important of all, God and Scripture demand it. In the words of one veteran Zionist leader: “Jimmy Swaggart says things on national television that my rabbi wouldn’t say in his living room!”

And in the justifiable enthusiasm to cultivate friends in any corner, Israeli leaders—both in Jerusalem and throughout the United States—have actively encouraged linkages between America’s Jews and Evangelicals. They have shared the podium with them, encouraged tourism and financial investment among them and offered them coveted awards. Though not without some misgiving, American Jewish leaders have followed suit and at times overtaken their mentors in both passion and enthusiasm.

The advantages of fostering a friendship with a well-organized and politically favored community of substantial size and resource are evident. But the development has troubled many American Jews, leaders and rank-and-file among them. And because of their distance, these are concerns that Israelis will not fully appreciate.

First, Zionism implies the renaissance of Jewish identity in its ancestral homeland. American Jewish political directions are based in large part upon perceptions of support for the well-being of that

homeland and the people attached to it. There is something monumentally inappropriate, even ironic, about joining forces with those whose theological foundations call for damnation, in its most literal sense, to all who fail to choose salvation through Jesus. To join in political coalition with Evangelical Christianity is at best an anathema.

In fact, fundamentalist theology is so close to the surface of its political organizations that it has emerged in honest, though ill-conceived, public discourse. Pronouncements regarding the aural capacities of the Deity, whose prayers He hears and whose He does not, stand as obvious cases in point. Embarrassing though they may be, such comments are rarely retracted, for honesty cannot be recanted. One who accepts unequivocally the Evangelical Christian call must have difficulty tolerating those who reject not just its fundamentalism, but its very Christianity.

And, of course, it is precisely this call that informs Evangelical support for Israel; convictions about America's security or its long-standing moral commitments are only secondary. Put graphically, the Second Coming requires that Jews be gathered in their land so that they may accept Jesus in the way that they rejected him in times past. Zionism has been turned on its head.

Add to this a missionary zeal that cannot be denied. The titles and organizational manifestations are numerous: Messianic Judaism, Hebrew Christians, Bnai Sar Shalom, Bnai Yeshua or Jews for Jesus. By whatever name, fundamentalist proselytizing among Jews, giving witness to the divinity of Jesus and to the infidelity of those who reject him, has become a scourge and a plague especially, though not exclusively, among Jewish youth.

These more recent forms have a particularly insidious character. Whether as a genuine expression of religious fervor or merely as a cynical ruse, the liturgy and the ritual of many services are remarkably similar to practices in traditional Jewish homes and houses of worship. Many estranged Jews are vulnerable to such appeals. The classic image is the college student with minimal Jewish education far from home, seeking friendship and a familiar environment. And it is one that at times extends to faculty and staff as well.

The appeal has also taken hold among newly arrived Russian or Israeli immigrants, too ignorant or indifferent to know much better. It has been leveled at elderly Jews seeking companionship and an inexpensive hot meal. This is a "ministry" that reaches more than simply the youth.

The present discussion would be no more than a harangue but for a gnawing sense that political and theological expressions of Christian fundamentalism are not isolated phenomena. Both logic

and experience imply that the over-arching Evangelical priority, one that cements all others, is the call to bear witness to spread the Gospel—especially among Jews. Is it too cynical to suggest that large fundamentalist political organizations, the Moral Majority or the Religious Roundtable as examples, are supporting well-heeled missionary movements even as they proclaim their allegiance to Israel's security—and that their support is more than just moral?

Finally, a new-found alliance between Jewish voters and the forces of the political/religious right may also be poor politics. At the very least, it can put the American Jewish community in rather ticklish and embarrassing circumstances. The past few Congressional elections make the point painfully clear. Conservative candidates have ridden the coattails of the popular mood, gaining control of the Senate and making major inroads in the House of Representatives, the 1986 Congressional elections notwithstanding.

Yet, despite what has been offered as a change in the context of American liberalism, Israel still has many close Democratic friends in Congress, friends whose primary political sins are their long-standing liberal commitments. Some, like Paul Sarbanes, were threatened by this new conservatism. Others, like Frank Church or Birch Bayh, were defeated by candidates whose conservative credentials were impeccable but whose declared concern for Israel was unproven at best. Even if political support is by its nature selective and eclectic, an alliance with Republican and conservative resurgence may be contrary to simple political sense.

And with it all, the change in political mood, the noted conservative shift, may only be temporary and short-lived. As with most political contests, Presidential elections are frequently won because of the appeal of a single individual. His ability to capture the vote is often based on little more than media presence.

Ronald Reagan's coattails have been remarkably short. Perhaps the Republican electoral conquests of 1980 and 1984 were little more than personal victories that imply no grand political realignment. Indeed as of November 1986, control of the Senate has swung back to the Democratic Party where it resided for decades. The new conservatism and its swipe at the Jewish electorate is likely to loom ever more distant as Mr. Reagan retires from the scene.

As a result, Jews will continue to favor liberalism and the Democratic Party. But will the reverse be true, i.e., will liberalism favor them? Or will it continue to estrange them, will it take them for granted and assume that they have no political choice? It remains for the Democratic leadership to rethink the needs of all its middle-class minorities lest it become a captive to the "rainbow coalition" and the forces of Jackson and Farrakhan. And the re-evaluation must come

soon, before Jewish voters, as an example, take the choices available to them much more seriously.