

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

# Israel's Diaspora Policy: The Changing Relations Between the State and the Diaspora

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By

Lusine Davtyan

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## ***Table of Contents***

<i>Abstract</i> .....	4
<i>Introduction</i> .....	5
<i>Literature Review</i> .....	9
<i>Methodology</i> .....	13
The development of Israeli State-Diaspora Relations.....	15
Defining the Term “Diaspora”.....	15
Israeli state-Diaspora Relations.....	17
The “dual loyalty” dilemma.....	22
The new era of Israeli state-Diaspora relations.....	24
The Role of the Major Jewish Diaspora Organizations in the development of Israeli state-Diaspora relations.....	28
American Jewish Committee (AJC).....	30
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).....	33
Current Developments and Programs: Partnership2Gether.....	34
Klita and Youth Aliya.....	35
Lobbying organizations.....	36
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	41
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	44
<i>Appendix A</i> .....	47

## *Abstract*

This study aims at exploring the patterns of development of Israeli state-Diaspora relations, as well as the role of Diaspora organizations in fostering those relations. The essay proposes the argument that the Jewish identity in the Diaspora is experiencing a decline. Furthermore, the study shows that because of the increasing number of inter-marriages in the Diaspora, the decreasing interest in Israel, Jewish history and the Holocaust, the once perceived strong ties between the Homeland and the Diaspora has significantly weakened. The first part of the essay discusses different phases of the Israeli state-Diaspora relations throughout history by first conceptualizing the meaning of the term “diaspora” in general and its meaning for the Jews in particular. The second part is dedicated to exploring the major Jewish Diaspora organizations and their role in fostering Israeli state-Diaspora relations.

## ***Introduction***

Nearly 8 million out of 13 million of World's total Jewish population lives outside of Israel.<sup>1</sup> The Jews are the oldest Diaspora in the World: they did not have a “homeland” for over two millennia and the idea of returning there have long remained in their collective consciousness. If for many nations “diaspora” has the meaning of dispersion abroad, this word has had a specific meaning for Jews for a considerably long time, i.e. being in exile under conditions of powerlessness and constant feeling of insecurity.

Two distinct periods can be identified in the world Jewish history during the 20<sup>th</sup> century- before and after the establishment of Israeli State. If before the establishment of Israel, Jews were a historically stateless Diaspora, after 1948 Jews living outside Israel became a state-linked Diaspora. The study does not question the existence of the Jewish Diaspora long before the establishment of the Israeli state. However, for the purposes of the study, the development of the Israeli State-Diaspora relations would be examined after the Israeli state was established in 1948.

The Zionist movement- the nationalist movement that aimed at achieving Jewish political independence arguing that Jews had to have their own territory to feel safe, was expected to put an end on the Jews' two-thousand-year exile. Zionists were sure that the establishment of the Jewish State would put an end to the Diaspora as the original purpose of the creation of Israeli state was to provide safe haven for persecuted Diaspora Jews. According to Zionist ideology, every Jewish insecurity- be it anti-Semitism or loss of identity- would cease to exist if Jews moved to Israel. However, even after Israeli independence in 1948, the Diaspora survived and new patterns of mutual relationship developed between the Diaspora and the Homeland.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish DataBank. 2011. *World Jewish Population: Current Jewish Population Reports*. Jerusalem: North American Jewish Databank: 30

<sup>2</sup> Safran W. 2005. *The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective*: Israel Studies, Vol. 10, No. 1: 38-39

During the period from 1948 to 1967 the Israeli state-Diaspora relationship can be described as hegemonic. Israel emphasized its superiority over Diaspora in every level and every sphere of interaction between the two, even though it relied on Diaspora's financial resources both before the establishment of statehood and certainly during the years that followed. Israeli first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion neutralized any undesirable interference and made clear for the Diaspora that its main function should be to raise funds for the objectives of nation building while the Israeli Government would take care of their allocation. Moreover, Israeli government regarded those donations as some kind of a "Jewish tax" that every Jew was obliged to pay as a compensation for not returning to their homeland.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that the state of Homeland-Diaspora relationship could be reversed, i.e. that Diaspora could become vital in saving Israel had never been considered by Israeli Zionists. However, the relationship between Israel and its Diaspora underwent a significant transformation since 1967. The hegemonic relationship between the two began transforming into partnership relations because of the increasing self-confidence and autonomy of the Diaspora and the perceived vulnerability of Israel. The previously centralized public sector of Israel became more open and pluralistic in which both Israeli society and the Diaspora began finding their expression in the institutional framework and thus fostered further state-Diaspora engagement.<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1990s, both Israel and the Diaspora were undergoing considerable economic and social changes. Nearly one million Jews over a ten-year period have migrated from the Soviet Union and other communist countries. Other developments involved the significant economic growth and considerable advancement in the peace process with the Palestinians in 1993. Furthermore, the communities in the Diaspora, especially in the United States were

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<sup>3</sup> Schwartz R. 2008. *Israel and its Diaspora: A Case Study*. Jerusalem: Center for International Migration and Integration: 4-5

<sup>4</sup> Ibid: 6-7

experiencing significant positive changes as well. Thus, for the first time in the Jewish contemporary history, there was no crisis around which the Diaspora could be unified. For younger members of the Diaspora, especially those living in the United States, Israel became a less stipulating force then before and thus the young generation had little incentive to contribute to Jewish philanthropies. This became a reason for the Israeli state- Diaspora institutions to look for better ways to engage philanthropists and Jewish communities that would support Israeli-based needs.<sup>5</sup>

For this purpose, a number of Diaspora based networks and organizations were established based on ideological, practical and religious connections with the homeland. The establishment of these organizations also aimed at ensuring prosperity, safety and continuity of the Diaspora in the host countries. Some of the major Diaspora institutions include general and specialized organizations like the Zionist Movement and the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and national organizations, such as the American Israeli Public Actions Committee (AIPAC) and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations.<sup>6</sup> The main functions of these organizations consisted of social, financial and religious maintenance, legal defense, as well as promotion of social, political and cultural interests. These and many other Diaspora organizations and communities became greatly involved in all spheres of activities in their host countries, including economics, politics and culture. While on the one hand this active involvement gave Diaspora Jews the power and resources to support their homeland, on the other hand, however, the more the Diaspora was getting involved in such activities in the host-

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<sup>5</sup> Schwartz R. 2008. *Israel and its Diaspora: A Case Study*. Jerusalem: Center for International Migration and Integration: 6-8

<sup>6</sup> Sheffer G. 2002. *A Nation and its Diaspora: A Re-examination of Israel-Jewish Diaspora Relations*: Hebrew University of Jerusalem: 338-342

countries, the more their level of integration and assimilation was increasing which, as the paper argues, would ultimately result in weakening of ties between Israeli state and its Diaspora.

Indeed, many Jews already saw themselves as rooted in the countries they lived in, rather than thinking that they lived in exile or in Diaspora. Moreover, many Jews have even returned to the countries from which they were once expelled, such as Germany, Austria, Hungary and Spain. Despite Israel's significant efforts "to bring the whole Diaspora back home"<sup>7</sup>, only comparably small groups of Jews living in democratic countries chose to immigrate to Israel. Besides, even when several Jews from Diaspora communities were forced to leave their host countries, very few of them chose Israel as their final destination. Instead, they immigrated to other countries the cultures of which were similar to that of their previous host countries. For instance, Jews previously living in Russia and Argentina mainly chose to immigrate to Canada, the United States, Germany, etc. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Diaspora Jews preferred North America as their final destination in the search for a society enhanced with more democratic values and tolerance.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout time, Jews became so successfully integrated, particularly in the United States that started to establish powerful Jewish organizations to promote Israel's interests in the United States and foster its development. As a result, the fact that the United States has been providing Israel with so much political and economic backing is largely due to the presence of those powerful pro-Israel lobbying organizations that use different strategies to make sure that the U.S. policy toward Israel reflects the latter's interests.

Thus, if traditionally Israeli state considered its Diaspora as a source of human resources in the form of immigrants, throughout time it started to see the Diaspora as a potential source of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 337-339

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 339-340

moral, political and financial support. Even though members of Diaspora did not choose to physically relocate in their Homeland, they both actively supported Israel politically and financially and recognized it as the most viable source of Jewish identity<sup>9</sup> and the center of Jewish culture.

**Literature Review:** The vast majority of contemporary scholars of Jewish Studies argue that there is a significant decline in the Israeli State-Diaspora relations and in the Jewish identity among Diaspora members. Some observers attribute these changes to general global and transnational processes that lead to diminishing ethno-national and national factors. Others argue that a lot depends on the internal processes going on both inside the Diaspora and Israel. In this regard, Sheffer in his paper argues that more and more Israelis have become less interested in what is happening in the Jewish Diaspora. According to him, this lack of public interest, a certain degree of hostility toward Diaspora and the skepticism about the Diaspora's future, negatively impacted Israeli Government's attitudes and activities directed toward the Diaspora.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Cohen argues that globalism, multiculturalism and tolerance toward the "other," which prevail in the more democratic host countries of the Jewish Diaspora, are the reasons that levels of assimilations among Jews in the Diaspora gradually increase which bring to diminishing Jewish identity in the Diaspora and thus further distort Israeli state-Diaspora relations.<sup>11</sup>

In his study "*The Decline of the Diaspora Jewish Nation: Boundaries, Content, and Jewish Identity*," Gitelman states that even though there is no unified opinion on what factors brought to the

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<sup>9</sup> As a definition of the concept of "Jewish identity," the study suggests Spinoza's definition, according to which "Jewish identity is the objective or subjective state of perceiving oneself as a Jew and as relating to being Jew, be it in terms of culture, religion, etc."

<sup>10</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*:11

<sup>11</sup> Cohen R. 1997. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: UCL: 28

negative shift in Israeli state-Diaspora relations, one thing is certain: while Jews can be identified in Israel with their language, cultural and political boundaries, the same does not apply to Jews living outside Israel because those boundaries that once defined them are now blurry, their culture and language is at the risk of fading. And the paradox here is that the State of Israel that was created by the nation now has to preserve or even re-create its nation and bring it back home.<sup>12</sup> However, as Sheffer neatly presented the case, despite Israel's continuous efforts to bring them all back, this is not likely to ever happen because the attitudes of Diaspora Jews toward the idea of returning to Israeli state has radically changed. Loyalty to Israel for these Jews now does not necessarily mean migration to Israeli state: it rather means an obligation to maintain the cultural links with the homeland and contribute to its development with available resources.<sup>13</sup>

In this regard, Aviv's and Shneer's essay entitled "New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora" has a significant importance, especially for the Jewish Diaspora because the paper proposes the concept of "New Jews" emphasizing that what matters is *how* Jews construct something called home and not *where* they choose to do it. Aviv and Shneer see Israel as Jacob Blaustein, the former director of the American Jewish Committee, once did- *a* Jewish home, not *the* Jewish home. Moreover, the authors argue that not all Jews in Israel feel "at home." Some do not feel at home because of Israel's struggle with religious diversity and pluralism, others, especially recent immigrants do not feel at home because of continuous stereotyping. Conversely, the majority of Jews living in the United States, Germany, Russia and elsewhere no longer see themselves as "in Diaspora," instead they see themselves at home without dreaming of a *Promised Land*.

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<sup>12</sup> Gitelman Z. 1998. *The Decline of the Diaspora Jewish Nation: Boundaries, Content, and Jewish Identity*. Jewish Social Studies Vol. 4, No. 2: 114-116

<sup>13</sup> Sheffer. *A Nation and its Diaspora: A Re-examination of Israel-Jewish Diaspora Relations*: 338

Furthermore, Aviv and Shneer moved beyond the term “diaspora” which, according to them, implies a single center to the Jewish world, a sense of exile for Jews living in different parts of the world. Rather than referring to Jews as “in Israel” or “in the Diaspora,” they refer to new Jews as “global.” All over the world Jews are rethinking their ideas about Israel and the tensions between exile and home, Diaspora and Homeland. They dismantle the very idea of Diaspora in the way they live their lives.<sup>14</sup>

According to Mearsheimer and Walt, who agree with Aviv and Shneer that Diaspora’s interest in Israel has decreased, argue that this is the case because the decline of anti-Semitism<sup>15</sup> in many parts of the world automatically diminishes Diaspora’s need for Israel’s protection. Besides, with Israel developing and consolidating as a state, the shared interest in the Diaspora to guarantee the security of Israeli state also diminishes in importance.<sup>16</sup>

Identification with Jews in the Diaspora, especially in North America, is normally expressed through philanthropy. The extent and degree of one’s manifestation of Jewish identity, as Gitelman argues is visible through the number of organizations joined, the level of activism within them and magnitude of donations to Jewish causes. Within this framework, Kaplan<sup>17</sup> emphasizes the importance of American Jewish organizations both in promoting Israel’s interests through powerful lobbying groups and in bringing American democracy to its fullest expression. Moreover, he argues that Jews’ commitment as citizens in no way conflicts with their culture. Quite the contrary, it helps to maintain and develop the democratic system of the host country

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<sup>14</sup> Aviv C. and Shneer D. 2005. *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press: 29,30

<sup>15</sup> *Anti-Semitism is suspicion of hatred toward or discrimination against Jews for reasons connected to their Jewish heritage. In a 2005 U.S. governmental report, anti-Semitism is defined as "hatred toward Jews—individually and as a group—that can be attributed to the Jewish religion and/or ethnicity."*

<sup>16</sup> Mearsheimer J. & Walt S. 2009. *Is it Love or the Lobby? Explaining America’s Special Relationship with Israel*. Security Studies, 18:1, 58-78; Routledge: 63-65

<sup>17</sup> Wenger B. 2006. *Making American Civilization Jewish: Mordecai Kaplan’s Civil Religion*: Indiana University Press: 58-60

because a nation which embodies different civilizations would less likely involve into totalitarianism.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, as Mearsheimer and Walt argue in their article “*Is it Love or the Lobby? Explaining America’s Special Relationship with Israel*”, there is a special relationship between the United States and Israel which is largely due to the presence of powerful lobbying movement in America. While Slater agrees that these two states share special relationship, he questions the argument that this is the case due to the Jewish lobby. Slater argues that there are some religious and cultural inclinations between Israel and the United States and Israel enjoys the deep sympathy of American public which makes the American policy-makers implement policies that are beneficial for Jewish people.

However, Mearsheimer and Walt bring two major reasons to disagree with Slater’s explanation. First, if the American people firmly supported the special relationship, the Conference of Presidents, AIPAC and other lobbying organizations would not have any reason to work so hard to maintain the good relations between the countries. Second, it is the lobbyists’ efforts that to large extent shape the public opinion about Israel and make it favorable for it.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, even the activism and engagement of Jewish Diaspora members in those organizations are experiencing a significant decline. American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress have suffered large drops in membership in recent years and now have increasingly aged constituencies.<sup>20</sup> Most of the scholars of Jewish studies perceive this as quite natural state of affairs as, today, there is no one goal or an urgent concern that would unify

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<sup>18</sup> Gitelman Z. 1998. *The Decline of the Diaspora Jewish Nation: Boundaries, Content, and Jewish Identity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 115

<sup>19</sup> Mearsheimer J. & Walt S. 2009. *Is it Love or the Lobby? Explaining America’s Special Relationship with Israel*. Security Studies: Routledge: 75-77

<sup>20</sup> Gitelman. *The Decline of the Diaspora Jewish Nation: Boundaries, Content, and Jewish Identity*:118

Diaspora Jews, their interests and active participation as it was back in 1950s, during the establishment of the Israeli state.

What above mentioned academicians agree upon is that the ties between Israel and the Diaspora which were once perceived as strong have weakened. They also argue that the current situation of World Jewry shows that it will further face the major dilemmas that have been discussed above (current and future decline of Jewish identity and the loyalty dilemma) in case the Jewish Nation fails to tackle those problems. This is a topic worth exploration.

The main purpose of this research is to analyze Israeli state-Diaspora relations, to explore the changing nature of the Jewish Diaspora and the role of Diaspora organizations in the development of those relations. In order to explore all the above mentioned issues, the paper will try to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the paradigmatic features of the interaction between the Israeli state and the Jewish Diaspora?

**RQ2:** Is there a decline of the Jewish Diaspora Identity?

The study proposes the following hypothesis: the more the Jewish Diaspora got integrated into the host countries, the more the ties between Israeli state and its Diaspora has weakened.

The method of the research is mainly comprised of the analysis of primary and secondary research data. The primary research data is comprised of interviews conducted for the purpose of this research (see Appendix A). The first part of the research examines the developments in Israeli state-Diaspora relations before and after the establishment of the State. It also conceptualizes the term “diaspora” and defines what it means for Jews. The major Diaspora organizations and their influence on the host countries’ policies toward Israel are discussed in the

second part of the paper. The main emphasize is on those organizations which were established in the United States and that had considerable impact both in the development of the state of Israel and in promoting Israeli interests in the American Government.

## ***Part 1. The Development of Israeli State-Diaspora Relations***

### ***Defining the Term “Diaspora”***

*“Where once was dispersion, there now is Diaspora.”*

*Khachig Tololyan<sup>21</sup>*

In view of the considerable confusion regarding the positions of ethno-national diasporas in the current economic, political and cultural arenas, there is a need to define the term “diaspora.” This is important because academicians have applied this term to almost every type of social-political phenomena and institutions.<sup>22</sup> Thus this multiple usage of the term brought to misunderstandings about its meaning. Besides, several experts continuously related the term “diaspora” only to Jews and the Jewish exile. Thus, if until the late 1960s, the Encyclopedia of the Social Science did not include the term “diaspora” at all,<sup>23</sup> in 1975, *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* included the definition of the term as “the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile.”<sup>24</sup> Until its edition in 1993, the New Oxford English Dictionary, too, defined “diaspora” as “the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentile nations” and as “all those Jews who live outside the biblical land of Israel.” Yet in its 1993 edition, the dictionary also added that the term refers to “the situation of people living outside their traditional homeland.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the highly motivated Vietnamese and Koreans working hard to become prosperous in Los Angeles, the Palestinians living in refugee camps near Beirut, the Jews, Armenians,

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<sup>21</sup> Tololyan K. is the editor of a Journal entitled “Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies”

<sup>22</sup> Safran W. 1991. *Diasporas in Modern Societies*. Boulder: Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies: 83–99

<sup>23</sup> Tololyan K. 1991. *Exile Governments in the American Polity*. London: Routledge: 167–187

<sup>24</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*:9-10

<sup>25</sup> Sheffer G. ed. 1986. *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. London: Croom Helm: 8

Greeks, Kurds, Romanians and several other groups that permanently reside outside of their countries of origin and at the same time maintain contacts with people back in their homelands, are all members of ethno-national diasporas.<sup>26</sup>

Accordingly, in order to clarify the confusion about the term “diaspora” and begin the discussion of this phenomenon, particularly of the Jewish ethno-national diaspora, the study suggests Sheffer’s definition of the term: “*An ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries.*”<sup>27</sup>

Until the late twentieth century, academicians paid little attention both to the diaspora phenomenon and to specific diasporas as they predicted an unavoidable incremental disappearance of such groups. These groups, in turn, tried to hide their ethno-national origins and avoid emphasizing the importance of their contacts with their countries of origin (usually and hereafter, referred to as *homelands*). In addition, diaspora groups preferred not to publicize their membership in organizations that served their homelands. This kind of behavior was related to a desire present among members of diaspora groups to integrate or even assimilate into the countries of settlement (usually and hereafter termed *host countries/hostlands*). Those host societies largely ignored these ethno-national diaspora groups questioning their future existence and thus tried to minimize their economic, political and cultural significance. Consequently, host governments and societies imposed economic, political and cultural constraints and pressures on immigrants who were allowed to stay permanently in those countries. Those pressures aimed at

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<sup>26</sup> Cohen R. 1997. *Global Diasporas*. Journal of Social Studies. London: UCL Press: 153-165

<sup>27</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*: 9

compelling the immigrants to accept all kinds of norms of the host countries and to assimilate or otherwise leave.

Notwithstanding such political analysis, positions and predictions, over the past two decades the total number of diasporas and the numbers of their members has increased significantly. Furthermore, due to their growing self-confidence many diasporas proudly keep their ethno-national identity, freely identify themselves as members of diaspora organizations, do not hesitate to publicly act on behalf of their homelands and co-ethnics and sometimes even return to their homelands and retain citizenship. As a result of such developments, scholars, journalists and politicians are also becoming aware of the phenomenon and are acknowledging the permanent status of diasporas. Some of them even recognize diasporas' positive economic and cultural contributions to host societies, thus enhancing the self-confidence and assertiveness of diaspora members.<sup>28</sup>

If for many nations "diaspora" has the meaning of dispersion abroad, this word has had a specific meaning for Jews, i.e. being in exile under conditions of powerlessness and constant feeling of insecurity. Moreover, exile has been perceived as the 'normal' condition of Jews- as punishment for their denial to accept Jesus as Savior from the point of view of Christians, and as punishment for their sins from the point of view of Jews themselves. Religion has always been the most essential element of Diaspora which emphasized the idea that chosen people unite the host-land and homeland communities.

### ***Israeli State-Diaspora Relations***

In June 2005, twenty highly influential and respectful American Jews held a private meeting in New York to discuss the future of the entire Jewish nation. Those worried Diaspora

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<sup>28</sup> Sheffer. *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*: 4

community leaders discussed two possible scenarios for the future of Jews around the world. They named the first scenario ‘a realistic outlook,’ which was rather optimistic in its nature pointing out that the Jewish Diaspora would prosper, Diaspora’s ties with Israel would be strengthened and Israel would continue to be the center of the Jewish Nation. The second scenario, which was termed ‘a realistic nightmare,’ predicted the opposite, namely, that the Diaspora Jewish nation would ultimately face major difficulties that would threaten the future maintenance of its identity. These challenges would involve increasing levels of assimilation, decline of Jewish identity in the Diaspora and hence, decline in Israeli-Diaspora relations. Many observers argue that now, to a certain extent, the second scenario is eventually materializing. One thing is certain: Israel-World Jewry relations are experiencing major transformations.<sup>29</sup>

Israeli-Diaspora relations would be analyzed within the framework of three periods: the Zionist era before and after the establishment of the State, the second period, from 1970s to 1990s during which State-Diaspora relations significantly prospered, and finally, the 2000s-the new third era of ‘fragmentation.’

During the Zionist era there was a great deal of support and pride for Israel’s achievements from the Diaspora. The establishment of a powerful state and return of all Jews to that homeland was the ultimate goal for everyone. Zionist thinkers perceived life in Israel as the highest level of Jewish existence. As the Hebrew phrase ‘*aliyah*’ described it, the immigration of Jews to Israel would mean rising, going up. Thus, in 1926, Vladimir Jabotinsky, one of the founders of Zionism, called upon every Diaspora Jew to come and share the responsibility with them. He claimed that every Jew, who offers his money but denies the Zionist ideas would be welcomed as ‘co-workers,’ but the advantage of the construction of the Jewish State, the political

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<sup>29</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*: 27-28

work would belong to Zionists.<sup>30</sup> In other words, if Diaspora Jews want to criticize the political decisions of Israel they should either move to Israel or not interfere at all.

During the period from 1948 to mid-1950s, the government and the ministries of newly established State were being established; and the initial government's policy toward Diaspora was being formulated. Several groups from the Jewish Diaspora, mostly Zionists, were engaged in the establishment of the State. The Zionist Movement and the Jewish Agency were the two most active Diaspora organizations at that point. Similarly, Israeli politicians were also deeply engaged in Diaspora affairs. The Political Department of the Jewish Agency headed by Moshe Sharett since 1933 dealt primarily with the relations with the Jewish Diaspora.<sup>31</sup>

During the formative period of the state of Israel, the newly established state emphasized its superiority over Diaspora on every level, especially political. Any criticism about Israel was considered anti-Semitism; those Jews who supported those criticisms were considered betrayers and were accused of self-hatred.

However, Israeli government realized that it could not afford to lose Diaspora's financial support and funding, thus it had to redefine the formal positions of the government, as well as the nature of the relations between Israel and the Diaspora. This redefinition was evident in the new Declaration of the State that was drafted by the Foreign Minister Sharett and the future Prime Minister Ben-Gurion. Although the Declaration encouraged all Jews to unite and fulfill the Jewish dream of the establishment and development of a sovereign state, it did not urge the Jewish people to immigrate to Israel. Based on Sharett's and Ben-Gurion's talks with many Jewish leaders and taking into consideration their firm desire to remain in their hostlands, the

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<sup>30</sup> Shultz E. 2010. *Israel vs. the Diaspora: Why Israelis often bristle when Jewish Americans criticize their homeland*

<sup>31</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*: 29

authors of the Declaration did not refer to immigration as a precondition for belonging to the Jewish People.<sup>32</sup>

However, soon after the formation of the State, there was a conflict between the Jewish Agency in New York and the new government. The conflict occurred because of the cabinet's decision to start an attack on Latrun prior to the second temporary ceasefire in the War of Independence. Sharett instructed Israel's representative in the U.S. to inform the Jewish Agency Executive about this decision. Having in mind the constant demands of the U.S. to stop the war in Palestine, the Jews in New York strongly opposed Israel's decision.<sup>33</sup> This and many other clashes between the Jewish Agency and Israel that followed, was a fight over the right to represent Israel vis-à-vis the U.S. Presidential administration, the UN, Congress and other governments. But if we look deeper, it was over the right of Diaspora to influence Israel's foreign policy and the following analysis makes it obvious.

Regardless of Sharett's decision to announce the cabinet's decision about the operation which clearly contradicted the U.S. policy, the Jewish Agency members succeeded in postponing the decision. Sharett's reaction was really tense as this development contradicted to Israel's plan to gradually affirm its political dominance over Diaspora's leading organizations. This is why the cabinet decided to officially announce that the only representatives of Israel abroad could be Israeli state agencies.<sup>34</sup> This decision showed Israel's clear intentions to achieve superiority over the World Jewry.

In 1950s and 1960s Israeli position toward Diaspora was rather hegemonic: Israel's interests came first, the State policy was rather Israelo-centric, which is why this period is known as the period of the "negation of the Gola (exile-Diaspora)." Ben-Gurion, an advocate of the

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<sup>32</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*: 30-31

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*: 31

<sup>34</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*: 31

Israelo-centric position, did not handle the Diaspora affairs on a regular basis. He occasionally participated in meetings of Jewish organizations, particularly Zionist ones, met with Diaspora leaders to primarily discuss issues concerning Diaspora's financial support to Israel. Ben-Gurion and his supporters perceived Diaspora's financial support nothing else than an obligation, a "Jewish tax" that every Diaspora Jew should pay as a compensation for staying away from the Homeland. At the same time, the right of allocation of those financial resources exclusively belonged to Israeli government: this was a policy that aimed at neutralizing any Diaspora interference into Israeli affairs.<sup>35</sup>

This state of affairs lasted until 1970s, when Sharett radically changed his view and approach towards Diaspora. Several Israeli politicians, including Sharett began to develop an alternative policy approaches toward the Jewish Diaspora. He was one of the firsts to acknowledge that Israel relied on Diaspora's economic, political and diplomatic support, while many others firmly believed it was Israel that ensured Diaspora's existence with its support. Moreover, Sharett rightly predicted that the Jewish Diaspora in the West would not disappear and had the potential to become the most important segment of the entire Jewish Diaspora. He argued that in order to maximize the mutual benefits of both sides, Israel's policy toward Diaspora should include Diaspora's interests as well. Israel should accept Diaspora as an *equal partner*, to respect the leaders of Diaspora organizations and most importantly, never create situations in which Jewish people might face dilemmas like dual loyalties.<sup>36</sup> This became the ideological direction that Israel's renewed policy toward Diaspora soon adopted.

Furthermore, Sharett shifted the functions of State ambassadors, consuls and diplomatic staff members to a new level. He instructed them to have a dual agenda- to serve as Israeli

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<sup>35</sup> Schwartz R. 2008. *Israel and its Diaspora: A Case Study*. Jerusalem: Center for International Migration and Integration: 4-5

<sup>36</sup> Sheffer. *Moshe Sharett, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Jewish Diaspora*: 33-36

official representatives abroad and at the same time to be the Israeli envoys to the Jewish Diaspora communities. Moreover, in 1977, a separate department was established inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deal with Israeli state-Diaspora relations. This resulted in tensions from the side of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish Agency, as they saw their representatives playing the role of envoys to Israel abroad.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, Sharett's policy direction differed significantly from that of Zionists, including Ben-Gurion. During his speech at the Israel's acceptance ceremony at the UN in 1949, Sharett made an important statement about Israeli state-Diaspora relations: "*Israel will not impose any burden of obedience on any Jew [who was not an Israeli citizen]. As a sovereign entity, Israel relies only on the loyalty of its citizens . . . But its most sacred mission will be to keep its gates open to every Jew who is in need of a homeland.*"<sup>38</sup>

### ***The "dual loyalty" dilemma***

Contrary to the majority of his governmental colleagues, Sharett was really impressed seeing Diaspora Jews' resistance to assimilation and the social-political autonomy they had earned in their host-countries. Sharett reconsidered his attitude toward the Diaspora and 'freed' Diaspora Jews from baring responsibility for Israel's actions and policies. Furthermore, his sensitivity to the accusations of 'dual loyalty' toward the host-countries and Israel resulted in his suggestion that Israel should not demand Diaspora's absolute loyalty, instead, Israel and the Diaspora should try to build a mutual bond and commitment to each other.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid 32-33

<sup>38</sup> Sharett's speeches in the UN General Assembly. *Moshe Sharett, At the Gates of the Nations, 1946–1949*: Retrieved 25/04/2012 from <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/1947-1974/Speech+to+the+General+Assembly+by+Foreign+Minister.htm>

Sharett assured the U.S. that their worries concerning Jews' dual loyalty were unfounded, as the American Jewish community was the perfect guarantee for America that there is no way that Israel would become the Soviet satellite and that American Jews' desire to remain connected to Israel is natural.<sup>39</sup> After all, Jews would inevitably be loyal to two kinds of nations: the first defined by consciousness and memory, the second defined by passports and geographic borders. This is the notion that Ben-Gurion and other Zionists never accepted. Ben-Gurion frequently stressed his lack of faith in the adequacy of Diaspora existence when claiming that the only way the Jewish nation would survive was their *aliya* to Israel which was supposed to be every Jew's obligation. This statement was a strong violation of 1950's agreement between Ben-Gurion and then President of the American Jewish Committee Blaustein about Israeli-Diaspora relations, in which Ben-Gurion clearly stated that Jewish immigration to Israel must be an act of free choice.<sup>40</sup> The response of the American Jewish Community followed immediately and aimed at pointing out that Israel should keep out of Diaspora affairs: "*We repudiate vigorously the suggestion that American Jews are in exile. The future of American Jewry, of our children and of our children's children, is entirely linked with the future of America. We have no alternative; and we want no alternative.*"<sup>41</sup>

The fact remains that only in case of accepting dual loyalty- not between two states, but between a historical and cultural nation *and* a political state- can the defining or redefining of Jewish identity become relevant. Otherwise, conflicts would be unavoidable, unless the Diaspora Jews choose to belong to one and only community from the two, which would mean denying the other.

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<sup>39</sup> Myers D. 1989. *Dual Loyalty in a Post Zionist Era*: Judaism Quarterly Journal. Issue no. 151, vol.38, no.3: 337-341

<sup>40</sup> Steinberg H. 1961. *News*. New York: The American Jewish Committee. Institute of Human Relations

<sup>41</sup> Blaustein J. 1950 *The Voice of Reason*. New York: The American Jewish Committee: 11

### ***The new era of Israeli state-Diaspora relations***

The Israeli state-Diaspora relations had been developing in various directions after the Oslo years.<sup>42</sup> Israel and the Diaspora believed that peace in Middle East would modify the Jewish identity as well as the relations between the Jewish existence in the Diaspora and Israel. Normalization and peace in Israel would loosen its responsibility for and involvement with Diaspora while at the same time making Diaspora Jews' lives easier by releasing them from worrisome issues concerning Israeli security. Since the establishment of the State, Israel dominated Diaspora policy agendas and the political directions of major Diaspora organizations. This caused tensions between them and their host countries, thus preventing their full integration.

However the Jewish Diaspora soon entered a new post-Zionist, post-Soviet, post-assimilationist era where collective Jewish nation and individual Jewish identity opposed each other. Diaspora Jews gradually changed the way they regarded Israel back in 1950s. Back then, Israel succeeded in creating the impression of being the ideal place for Jews to live in. Now Diaspora looked at it through more realistic lenses. Israel was still their ancestral homeland with developing future and serious accomplishments, yet, full of social problems and in need of some assistance and guidance that Diaspora thought it could provide. Many Diaspora Jews believed Israel was losing its democratic features because of the Palestinian occupation and undemocratic activities involving minority issues and the role of religion in the country.<sup>43</sup>

Several observers began to pay more and more attention to this process of increasing detachment. Study after study came out exploring how Jews in Diaspora, especially in America,

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<sup>42</sup> *The Oslo Accords, officially called the Declaration of Principles (DOP), was an attempt to resolve the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict. One of the major continuing issues within the wider Arab-Israeli conflict, it was the first direct, face-to-face agreement between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The Accords were subsequently officially signed at a public ceremony in Washington, DC on 13 September 1993, in the presence of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and US President Bill Clinton.*

<sup>43</sup> Shneer D. 2008. *We are global Jews now: The Jewish Chronicle online*. Retrieved 25/04/2012 from <http://www.thejc.com/comment/essays/we-are-all-global-jews-now>

were firmly integrating and becoming less connected to Israel. While younger generation of Jews stayed deeply interested in exploring Jewish culture, they were less religious and less interested in Israel and the Holocaust. The increasing number of inter-marriages, declining interest in Israeli state and its actions implied a decline in Israeli state-Diaspora relations, In June 2007, the newly elected President of the European Jewish Congress made an announcement marking a change in Diaspora Jewry policy: “It is the job of Israeli ambassadors to speak on behalf of Israel to the European Union. We need to support Israel, but we speak on behalf of European Jewry.”<sup>44</sup> The directions of funding changed radically from political sphere to culture and education which reflected the preferences of most European secular Jews.

Many Jews already saw themselves as rooted in the countries they lived in, rather than thinking that they lived in exile or in Diaspora. Moreover, many Jews have even returned to the countries from which they were once expelled, such as Germany, Austria, Hungary and Spain. Despite Israel’s significant efforts to bring the whole Diaspora back home, only comparably small groups of Jews living in democratic countries chose to immigrate to Israel. Moreover, even when Jews were forced to leave their host-lands, not many of them chose Israel as their final destination. As the Eastern European Jewish immigrant writer Mary Antin presented the case: “Not ‘may we be next year in Jerusalem,’ but ‘next year’ in America! So there is our promised land.”<sup>45</sup> In her interview, the head of the Armenian Jewish Community Rima Varzhapetyan emphasized that while 1<sup>st</sup> generation Diaspora Jews certainly consider Israel as their Homeland, this is not the case for 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Jews who consider Armenia to be their homeland in the first place. As Ms. Varzhapetyan shared in her interview, most of these people actually have

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<sup>44</sup> Aviv C. & Shneer D. 2005. *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. New York & London. New York University Press: 7

<sup>45</sup> Ibid: 7-8

the opportunity to repatriate to Israel anytime they want and they have all the needed documents for repatriation as well, but they choose to keep those documents in their closets all their lives.

As Shneer once stated, “the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century showed that Jews were and is a privileged nation. They are wealthy and powerful enough to define foreign policy decisions of their concern according to their interests, wealthy enough to build Jewish global networks and communities, to get the best education and highest ranking positions in almost every sphere.”<sup>46</sup> So, maybe this decline of Jewish identity that makes the most prominent Jewish scholars worried about the future of Jewish nation actually makes the Jews all over the world more powerful and rich. Especially taking into consideration the fact that Diaspora Jews themselves, living in the U.S., Russia, Germany and elsewhere in the world, no longer consider themselves living ‘in Exile’ and under unprivileged conditions.

Moreover, maybe the constant focus on notions of “Israel” and “Diaspora” had prevented Jews in Diaspora to fully invest their abilities into successful integration process, as the fear of being accused in dual loyalty and betrayal of their identities always existed. Today, Diaspora Jews do not have to worry about anti-Semitism and racism as much as they ever did before during their history. For more than a thousand years Jews had to face hatred, prejudice, persecutions and massacres. Nowhere can we see today the ‘phenomenon’ of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of stone-throwing at Jews by Muslim children. In the 1930’s Nazi Germany heavily adopted the idea behind this quote about Jews by Martin Luther, a person who was generally regarded as heroic for his stand against intolerance: “*Let the magistrates burn their synagogues and let*

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<sup>46</sup> Shneer. *We are global Jews now*

*whatever escapes be covered with sand and mud. Let them be forced to work, and if this avails nothing, we will be compelled to expel them like dogs . . .”*<sup>47</sup>

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the U.S. Jews were discriminated in terms of employment, membership in clubs and organizations, limited rights of enrolment and teaching opportunities in educational institutions.<sup>48</sup> Today, however, the U.S. is the place where Diaspora Jews feel secure and free, enjoy equal rights and freedoms under the law. And even having the opportunity of migrating to Israel, they somehow prefer moving to the United States.

“And if so, why keep worrying so much about Jewish people or Jewish peoplehood in the Diaspora? Besides, even the assumption that Israel is not the center of all Jews does not mean that the Jewish peoplehood, Jewish identity is not central to Jews. Furthermore, Jewish peoplehood in twenty-first century is about centers and not a single center. It is about being a Jew not as an obligation, but as a consciousness.”<sup>49</sup> It is also more about global Jews instead of being “The Jews.”<sup>50</sup> The present of Jewish communities is about traveling people, ideas and networks. This globalization is the reason that interest to Israel has declined which does not mean though that it is no longer the cultural and historic center of all Jews. It is just that the Diaspora prefers to develop and flourish without having in mind the hierarchy of values and privileges based on where they call or are expected to call home.

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<sup>47</sup> Luther M. 1543. *On the Jews and Their Lies*: Fortress Press and Augsburg Fortress: Retrieved 09/06/2012 from <http://www.humanitas-international.org/showcase/chronography/documents/luther-jews.htm>

<sup>48</sup> Finzi R. 1999. *Anti-Semitism: From its European Roots to the Holocaust*. New York: Inter-Link Publishing Group: 75-78

<sup>49</sup> Ibid: 78

<sup>50</sup> Ibid: 78-79

## ***Part 2. The Role of the Major Jewish Diaspora Organizations in the development of Israeli state-Diaspora relations***

The developing partnership between Israel and the Diaspora has resulted in several mechanisms designed to strengthen their ties for mutual benefit and prosperity. The most important and successful of those mechanisms have been Diaspora organizations established in those parts of the world which are home to largest Jewish Diaspora communities.

The first major Diaspora organization- The World Zionist Organization (WZO), was founded by Theodor Herzl at the First Zionist Congress in 1897, and served as an umbrella entity for the Zionist movement whose aim was the establishment of the Homeland in Palestine. To fulfill this goal, during its first years, the World Zionist Organization concentrated on establishing formal institutions in Eretz Yisrael<sup>51</sup>.<sup>52</sup>

The Jewish Agency for Eretz Yisrael was formed in 1929 to represent the World Zionist Organization in relation to the League of Nations, the British Government and the administration in Palestine. The official goal of the WZO was determined in 1942 being the firm desire to establish a “Jewish Community” which would be integrated into the new democratic world. This was the first official demand of Zionists for the establishment of the Jewish State, even though the aim of the Zionists to form an independent sovereign state was agreed upon long before that. In fifty years WZO together with the Jewish Agency succeeded in bringing about the establishment of the Jewish State. The newly established State of Israel even adopted the anthem and flag used by the World Zionist Organization.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Land of Israel’ translated from Hebrew

<sup>52</sup> *The World Zionist Organization*. Jewish Virtual Library: Retrieved 19/05/2012 from <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/wzo.html>

<sup>53</sup> *The World Zionist Organization*. Knesset. Retrieved 20/05/2012 from [http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/wzo\\_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/wzo_eng.htm)

However, the formation of Israel concluded the primary goal of WZO which raised the question of its future necessity. The vast majority of Israeli and the Zionist leadership disagreed with Prime Minister Ben Gurion's claim that the organization should be dissolved. Thus, in 1951 at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Zionist Congress the Zionist movement defined new missions and new priorities for itself. These became known as the "Jerusalem Program" which focused on the following goals: "Reinforcement of the State of Israel, gathering of the Diaspora in Eretz Yisrael, and guaranteeing the unity of the Jewish people."<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, certain tasks and responsibilities were assigned by law to both the WZO and Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). These activities involved organizing immigration, housing and settling immigrants, assisting their employment, organizing educational and youth activities, raising funds abroad and buying land in Israel for settlers through the Jewish National Fund. Furthermore, while WZO was primarily responsible for organizational and political issues, particularly issues concerning the control over the Jewish National Fund and Jewish education in the Diaspora, JAFI's responsibilities related to economic and financial activities. Both of these entities had a significant role in the consolidation of the State of Israel by supporting immigrants and fostering the unity of Jewish Diaspora.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, during the years that followed, many of the roles and responsibilities of WZO and JAFI have been presumed by the Israeli government which made the division of functions rather complex and that caused a negative shift in Israel-Diaspora relations. After the Six Day War<sup>56</sup> in 1967 Israel requested the support of Diaspora organizations in order to strengthen the ties between the Diaspora and the State. Impressed by great willingness of both

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<sup>54</sup> *The World Zionist Organization*: [http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/wzo\\_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/wzo_eng.htm)

<sup>55</sup> Gidron B. et.al. 2006 *Philanthropist Foundations in Israel*. Jerusalem: Ben-Gurion University: 17-20

<sup>56</sup> **1967 Arab-Israeli War** was fought between June 5 and 10, 1967, by Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt (known at the time as the United Arab Republic), Jordan, and Syria.

sides, the WZO directed the Jewish Agency to hold discussions with all fund-raising institutions working for Israel. Besides raising money, these negotiations also aimed at establishing a central framework for cooperation between the Jewish Agency and other fund-raising groups. These discussions resulted in an agreement in 1971 which implied that different bodies of the Jewish Agency were to be enlarged to be able to provide equal representation for Israeli and Diaspora Jews.<sup>57</sup> The 1971 rearrangement, in terms of basic functions, separated the WZO from JAFI but the former still remained in leadership. The primary tasks of the WZO nowadays are youth work, Jewish education, Zionist organizational work, cultural programs, and rural development.

### ***American Jewish Committee***

During the earlier years, responsibility for the relations between the Homeland and the Diaspora shifted from Zionist organizations to the large organizations of American Jewry- American Jewish Committee (AJC), United Jewish Appeal (UJA), the Council of Jewish Federations and many others. New organizations were established to politically advocate on behalf of Israel- American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Jewish Community Relations Councils and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMAJO).<sup>58</sup>

Before the establishment of the State and for over a decade after that, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) was the Diaspora Jewish organization to whose reaction and opinion Israeli leaders were most sensitive. AJC was perceived by them as the organization that represented wealthy American Jews and had the best access to the U.S. policy-makers.

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<sup>57</sup> Metz H. 1988. *Israel: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress

<sup>58</sup> Liebman C. 1974. *Diaspora Influence on Israel: The Ben-Gurion-Blaustein "Exchange" and Its Aftermath*. Indiana: Indiana University Press: 271-272

Therefore, the AJC linked Israeli and the American governments in terms of political support and financial assistance.<sup>59</sup>

AJC was involved in the enlarged Jewish Agency at the time when Zionist leaders were looking for cooperation with leading non-Zionists in 1920s. Moreover, AJC leaders took most of the important non-Zionist posts, even though the AJC never became a part of the Jewish Agency's structure per se. This was the case primarily because some of the AJC members were against any cooperation with Zionists. Their position was to support the Jewish settlement in Palestine for humanitarian purposes but in no way to support the legitimacy of Jewish nationalism.<sup>60</sup> In comparison with WZO's view on the establishment of Israeli state, the AJC leadership claimed that a Jewish state would bring to charges of dual loyalty against Jews and would increase anti-Semitism. As the chairman of the executive committee of the AJC stated in 1950: *"Sympathetic though we were and are with the upbuilding of Israel, we have nonetheless realized that the new state could create serious problems for us."*<sup>61</sup>

The AJC's sensitivity to these problems is clearly reflected in its proposal that references to the "Jewish State" in the Israeli Constitution be replaced with the "State of Israel." Moreover, the executive committee requested Israel to avoid any pronouncements from which it can be derived that Israel considers itself as the spokesman of Jewish communities abroad and Jews all over the world. In order to assure the AJC that Israel would not present itself as the spokesman of World Jewry, Israel's Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion invited three AJC leaders to visit Israel and gave assurances that Israel would not seek large-scale immigration of the American Jews and would not create problems for them.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid: 272-273

<sup>60</sup> Liebman. *Diaspora Influence on Israel: The Ben-Gurion-Blaustein "Exchange" and Its Aftermath*:271-273

<sup>61</sup> Ibid:272

<sup>62</sup> Ibid:272-274

However, soon after that Israel started to increasingly focus on the demand for aliya<sup>63</sup> from Jews living in the U.S. Whatever assurances Ben-Gurion gave to the AJC were shaken by his report to the American Jewish delegation emphasizing the importance of large-scale immigration of American Jewish youth and threatening to appeal directly to the youth in case of objections. In response to this, AJC president Jacob Blaustein wrote to Ben-Gurion emphasizing that Prime Minister's statement was most unfortunate and contradicting to his assurances given not so long ago. He added that if Israel went on with its demand for immigration and its "propagation of Jewish nationalism in the U.S.," the AJC would have to reconsider its support for Israel.<sup>64</sup>

Israel's response came quickly. As Foreign Minister Sharett stated, Ben-Gurion's speech had been misquoted and that instead of massive immigration, the Prime Minister only mentioned "selected migration" from America and that Israel had no desire to intervene in the internal affairs of the American Jewish community:

*"The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel..."*<sup>65</sup>

This is one of the instances of successful pressure from Diaspora Jews on Israel. On the one hand Israeli policy on Diaspora continued to emphasize the issue of immigration after these events but on the other hand Ben-Gurion became more careful in his wording when speaking about the necessity of aliya from the West.

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<sup>63</sup> The immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*). Literally it means "ascending" because it means rescue in ancient Jewish and modern Zionist tradition. It is a basic tenet of Zionist ideology.

<sup>64</sup> Liebman. *Diaspora Influence on Israel: The Ben-Gurion-Blaustein "Exchange" and Its Aftermath*:273

<sup>65</sup> Ibid: 274

### *American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)*

JDC has been the organization that gave global proclamation to the principle that Jews all over the World hold responsibility for one another. Jews of Palestine (then under Ottoman Turkish rule) who found themselves cut off from their normal sources of support after the World War I, needed assistance and support. The Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for the Relief of Jewish War Sufferers, which later became the JDC, started to collect money first in New York, then all around the U.S.<sup>66</sup>

Since its establishment in 1914, JDC's support was vital for improving the well-being of Jews around the World. JDC's mission in Israel was to represent North America's Jewish Federations in assisting Israel to improve the life of most vulnerable members of the society. The importance of JDC's mission is that it chooses to support less fortunate Jews living in Israel and especially in developing host-countries. JDC has had a significant role in the establishment of Armenian Jewish Community. As the Chief Rabbi of Armenian Jewish Community Rabbi Burshtein stated in his interview, the Armenian Jewish Community was too small for major Jewish organizations to notice and try to support it: JDC became the first Jewish organization to fill in this gap. Indeed, JDC was tried to universally spread the idea that every Jew, every Jewish community in the Diaspora is responsible for another. JDC funds sponsored welfare programs, Jewish schools, medical care, etc. After a while though, JDC shifted its range of activities from emergency relief to long-term rehabilitation. It established loan institutions, employment projects and training centers both for Jews living across the continent and for those starting new lives in the Jewish Homeland.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. *Our story*: Retrieved 19/05/2012 from <http://archives.jdc.org/our-story/?s=archivestopnav>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

## ***Current Developments and Programs***

### ***Partnership2Gether***

Previously known as Partnership 2000, this project was designed to meet the challenges of Israel's priority areas- the Galilee, Negev and Jerusalem, and to transform the Israel-Diaspora relations into a cooperation of equal partners working to strengthen the ties between Israel and the Jewish people around the World.<sup>68</sup> Created in 1994 by the Jewish Agency for Israel, the United Israel Appeal and United Jewish Communities, Partnership2Gether (P2G) became global Jewish communities' direct connection to the people of Israel.<sup>69</sup> This program has established cooperation projects between more than 550 Diaspora communities in the U.S., South America, Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa and 41 regions in Israel. More than 300.000 participants both from Israel and all over the world take part in over 500 programs every year with P2G's annual budget of \$25 million. These programs are about creating lasting connections between people joined by common interests and linked by common history and values.<sup>70</sup>

The two main goals defined by the Partnership2Gether are the following:

- Development of Israel's main concern areas
- Linking Jews in Israel and the Diaspora to foster Jewish stability

During several years after its establishment, P2G programs focused on economic development and social welfare issues. Today, however, its focus is more on developing Israel-Diaspora relations. The main areas of partnership are education, youth work and volunteering. Jewish volunteers from abroad come to Israel, share ideas, propose new projects, establish

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<sup>68</sup> Jewish in St. Louis. *Partnership2GetherLinks St. Louis to Yokneam-Megiddo, Israel*: Retrieved 20/05/2012 from <http://www.jewishinstlouis.org/page.aspx?id=219289>

<sup>69</sup>The Jewish Agency Peoplehood Platform. *Partnership2Gether*: Retrieved 18/05/2012 from <http://p2g.jewishagency.org/about-us/>

<sup>70</sup> Jewish in St. Louis. *Partnership 2000*: Retrieved 20/05/2012 from <http://www.jewishinstlouis.org/page.aspx?id=91330>

contacts with other Jewish communities and return to strengthen their own communities.<sup>71</sup> In this sense, The Partnership2Gether has been the most successful project that bonds Israeli Jews and the World Jewish communities.

### ***Klita and Youth Aliya***

*Klita* which in Hebrew literally means ‘absorption’ is one of the major projects of the State of Israel which aims at assisting the social and economic integration of Jewish immigrants. The key elements in *Klita* are getting settled, learning Hebrew, finding a job and integrating into the community and the State. The implementation of *Klita* is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption. The Ministry provides assistance to the immigrants from the day they enter the country and further tries to assure their full integration into the society. This is done by first identifying the immigrants’ potential for growth, finding opportunities for realizing this potential and providing the immigrants with the appropriate resources at a quality that meets their needs.<sup>72</sup>

*Youth Aliya* is another extremely successful program which is provided by Jewish Agency for Israel and plays a significant role in Diaspora youth absorption. Originally established in 1993, *Youth Aliya* was then responsible for the rescue of Jewish youth from Nazi Germany. Youth Aliya took care of the children illegally moving to Palestine by moving them to live in well-developed youth villages. As a result, more than 300.000 children got successfully integrated into the Israeli society.

Today, the *Youth Aliya* project is applied through two main directions; first by founding youth centers that are daytime programs for disadvantaged young people and second by

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<sup>71</sup> The Jewish Agency Peoplehood Platform: Retrieved 21/05/2012 from <http://p2g.jewishagency.org/about-us/>

<sup>72</sup>Ministry of Immigrant Absorption. *Fields of Activity*: Retrieved 22/05/2012 from [http://klita.gov.il/Moia\\_en/AboutOffice/FieldsOfActivity.htm](http://klita.gov.il/Moia_en/AboutOffice/FieldsOfActivity.htm)

implementing programs that bring Jewish Diaspora youth to Israel for obtaining education. Furthermore, the *Youth Aliya* villages are continuously developing and by that keeping their vital role in Jewish youth absorption to Israel.<sup>73</sup>

Marking the immigration and absorption of more than 3.000.000 new immigrants over 60 years since the time the State of Israel was established, the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption and the Jewish Agency declared May 5<sup>th</sup> as “Aliya Day 2008.”<sup>74</sup>

### ***Lobbying organizations***

*“I would trade ten billionaires for one senator anytime if I wanted to influence the White House,”*

*Aaron David Miller*

The definition of a lobby used in this paper refers to individuals and groups who support a certain interest or cause and try to influence public officials to make specific decisions and vote in a certain way. The pro-Israel community in the U.S. is known as the *conventional Israel lobby*. It consists of people who do not have the same stance on every issue but who:

1. Oppose any president who tries to put pressure on Israel or publicly disagrees with Israel,
2. Either support Israeli settlement and the occupation of Palestinian territory or do not do anything to change the status quo,
3. Actively oppose negotiations with Israel’s major adversaries-including Iran and Hamas-or do not speak in favor of those negotiations.

This *conventional Israeli lobby* includes AIPAC and many, but not all of the 52 organizations in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations-the most

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<sup>73</sup> Elazar D. *The Jewish Agency and Israel-Diaspora Relations: Some Concrete Steps for the Improvement of Jewish Agency Programs*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

<sup>74</sup> Halevi E. 2008. *Monday Declared ‘International Aliya Day’*. Israel National News: Retrieved 21/05/2012 from <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/126054#.T8M89dVzUTZ>

famous umbrella organization in the American Jewish community.<sup>75</sup> The current conventional lobby's roots go back to the American Zionist Emergency Council that was established during the World War II in order to pressure for the Jewish State. The Council was headed by the leader of the World Zionist Organization Nahum Goldman.

After Israel's War of Independence the Council's leaders realized that the philanthropic support of American Jews was not enough to help Israel to absorb newly arrived refugees and stay aboard in the hostile Arab Sea.<sup>76</sup> Having insufficient support and sympathy from the Eisenhower administration, which was careful not to offend the Arab leaders with too much attention toward Israel, the Zionists had no other way but to look for support in Congress.

In 1954, one of the Council's key figures- Isaiah (Sy) Kenen, established a new lobbying organization which was free from tax exemption and could legally bring Israel's case to the U.S. Government. This organization was named American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs. A few years later Kenen changed the name of the organization to American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in order to attract the support of non-Zionists too.<sup>77</sup>

Even though a number of lobbying organizations try to represent American Jews in the corridors of power of America, AIPAC is the driving force of the conventional Israel lobby in Washington. Moreover, it is the only organization authorized to lobby the U.S. Government on behalf of Israel. Capitol Hill is the place where AIPAC applies its influence and makes the most noise. In fact, in the Congress and especially in the House of Representatives, most of the members prefer not to oppose AIPAC. As a former AIPAC staffer once stated: "The thing you need to understand about AIPAC is that it is more about Washington than it is about Israel. It is

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<sup>75</sup> Fleshler D. 2009. *Transforming America's Israel Lobby: The limits of its Power and the Potential for Change*. Washington: Potomac Books: 9-10

<sup>76</sup> Ibid: 84

<sup>77</sup> Fleshler. *Transforming America's Israel Lobby: The limits of its Power and the Potential for Change*: 84-85

more about getting a political win and showing political muscle and staying in the game than helping Israel.”<sup>78</sup>

Of course, for AIPAC and for any other lobbying organization, “the most effective and necessary enforcement mechanism is money.”<sup>79</sup> Money has critical importance in U.S. elections, in terms of campaigning, which has become more and more expensive. So, AIPAC makes sure its friends get good financial support as long as they stay on its side. According to Mearsheimer and Walt, AIPAC’s success is in large part thanks to its practice of rewarding congressional candidates and legislators who support its agenda and punish those who do not.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, here is a typical statement on Israeli lobbying from a radical libertarian Ted Lang: “*Our entire government is controlled by Israel! Through a small, rich and powerful Jewish supported tax-exempt lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, or simply AIPAC, virtually all American domestic and foreign policy is now being controlled by a foreign government entanglement.*”<sup>81</sup>

Now, however, it is hard to say that the Jewish lobbying organizations are united and share common ideologies and values. As Rabbi Epstein claims, until recently ‘pro-Israel’ meant an Israel-right-or-wrong approach. But this kind of thinking is breaking down now. More people, especially the young generation, agree to support Israel but also agree that not everything Israel does is right.<sup>82</sup> The relatively united front of the Israeli lobby first broke down after the announcement of the Oslo Accords which was negotiated by the Labor-led Israeli government. The head of the opposition Likud party, Benjamin Netanyahu visited the United States to get the American Jewish opposition to become a part of the pact. The right-leaning lobbying

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid: 29-34

<sup>79</sup> Fleshler. *Transforming America’s Israel Lobby: The limits of its Power and the Potential for Change.* 35-36

<sup>80</sup> Mearsheimer J. & Walt S. 2009. *Is it Love or the Lobby? Explaining America’s Special Relationship with Israel:* Routledge: 56

<sup>81</sup> Ibid: 36

<sup>82</sup> Ibid: 74-76

organizations, including the Zionist Organizations of America (ZOA), eagerly supported him thus opposing to the Israeli government and AIPAC. Meanwhile, the Israel Policy Forum and Americans for Peace Now chose to lobby independently in support of the peace pact. Even though the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMAJO) tried hard to control the ZOA, it failed and the conflict “institutionalized the existence of separate lobbying networks above and beyond AIPAC and the Conference.”<sup>83</sup> Since their establishment, the new partisan organizations on the left and right have tried to pursue their own agenda rather than promoting policies in favor of the Israeli government like the mainstream lobbying organizations did.

*Center:* The so-called American Jewish center involves several of most influential and well-funded lobby groups- the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) with around 300,000 members. They are the ‘defense agencies’ that are responsible for the relations between American Jews and the World. They prefer to take forceful measures against the enemies of Israel-Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, rather than support peaceful initiatives. The *center-right* is primarily referred to AIPAC, which is known for acting more pro-Israeli than Israel itself.

*Pro-Israel left:* Many critics of Israel would rather want it to disappear. The pro-Israel left wants to help Israel to prosper and become a better place. Most people on this side believed that a two-state solution is possible much before it was fashionable.<sup>84</sup>

*The center left:* These organizations together represent more than 3 million American Jews. Their leaders share *pro-Israel left’s* most political goals but they restrain from officially taking sides. And finally *the far left* are the Jewish groups who feel free to call Israel an

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid: 5

<sup>84</sup> Fleshler. *Transforming America’s Israel Lobby: The limits of its Power and the Potential for Change: 64-70*

“apartheid state” and to encourage the U.S. to take harsh measures in order to stop the occupation.<sup>85</sup>

But no matter how diverse has the Israeli lobby become, no matter how different are the policy priorities of lobbying groups nowadays, it is still true that in order to be part of the lobby, one has to work hard and direct American policy toward Israel and its interests.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid: 71-73

<sup>86</sup> Ibid: 8

## ***Conclusion***

Nineteenth-century nationalists perceived their nations as “awakening” after having fallen asleep at some point in the history. In contrast, several contemporary analysts define some nations as having been invented in the modern era. Jews fit neither image. In the “age of nationalism,” unlike other nations, Jews did not have to think about redefining the concepts of who they are because those were not different from their previous understanding. As people moved from being Ruthenians or “Little Russians” to being Ukrainians, from Prussians to Germans, from Muslim to Uzbek or Kazakh, most Jews neither evolved a new identity nor redefined themselves as a nation. Instead, the establishment of Israeli state rather represented a reconsolidation of elements of Jewish nations which were present since ancient times.

The Zionists’ assumption was that a nation needs a state to feel secure and at home. This was the main goal of the Zionist movement- to create a homeland where Jews from all over the World would migrate and with that put an end on the Jews’ two-thousand-year exile. The Zionists succeeded in establishing a homeland for Jews but contrary to their expectations, not all of them migrated to Israel. This resulted in tense relations between the Israeli state and the Jewish Diaspora during the 20 years that followed the establishment of the state in 1948. During that time, Israel continuously demanded unconditional loyalty from the Diaspora obliging them to migrate to their one and only homeland thus making the nature of the State-Diaspora relationship quite hegemonic. This phase of Israeli state-Diaspora relations was marked by Israel’s superiority over Diaspora and Diaspora’s non-interference into Israeli affairs. This situation started to gradually change since 1970s, when Israeli government realized it could not afford to lose Diaspora’s financial support and funding. Thus, by redefining Israel’s Diaspora policy, which now focused on respectful mutual relations and equal partners’ cooperation, Israel

shifted the state-Diaspora relations to a higher level. Several major Jewish Diaspora organizations were established which aimed at promoting Israeli interests in the Diaspora through lobbying organizations and helping Israel prosper through funding and philanthropy.

However, with the beginning of the new 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Jewish Diaspora entered a new post-Zionist era when the individual Jewish identity opposed the collective Jewish nation. Jews in the Diaspora, while still considering Israel as their ancestral homeland, began to see Israel through more realistic lenses. Israel ceased to be perceived as the ideal place for all Jews to live in; instead it was now perceived as a country full of social problems and in need for guidance which Diaspora thought it could provide. Nevertheless, this willingness to help and support Israel did not mean that Diaspora Jews aimed at returning to Israel. Instead, they already saw themselves rooted in their host-countries. And even if some Diaspora Jews were forced to leave their host countries, only few of them chose Israel as their final destination. Moreover, they certainly preferred the United States as their new host-country, which easily became their homeland due to its respect for diversity and democratic values. Jews felt home being far from their historical homeland and did not see the repatriation to Israel as their dream or life-time goal. This became a clear indication of the decline of the Jewish identity in the Diaspora because the most important characteristic of a strong Jewish identity in the Diaspora was the constant idea of return rooted in their consciousness and that idea was gradually fading away.

While Israel has traditionally viewed the Diaspora as a potential reservoir for human resources in the form of immigrants and over time has come to view it more as a source of financial, political and moral support, the Diaspora has always been linked to Israel through a combination of historical, cultural, religious and/or family ties. However, the increasing number of inter-marriages, the decreasing interest in Israeli state, Jewish history and Holocaust, the

declining religious affiliation in the Diaspora, especially among Diaspora Jewish youth weakened those ties between the Homeland and the Jewish Diaspora. Thus, there is a support for the hypothesis of this study which states that the more the Jewish Diaspora got integrated into the host countries, the more the ties between Israeli state and its Diaspora has weakened.

As a finale note, just as the relations between other state-linked ethno-national diasporas and their homelands, Israeli state- Jewish Diaspora relations constitute a highly sensitive issue. This essay has analyzed certain, but by no means all, aspects of the growing complexity that comes from the Israeli state- Diaspora relations and the Jewish Diaspora's existence as a trans-state entity that operates on multiple levels and in various arenas.

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## *Appendix A*

### *Interview Questionnaire*

1. Would you say that the Jewish Community of Armenia is successfully integrated into the Armenian society?
2. Is assimilation a major concern for the Jewish community in Armenia? (include the factor of high intermarriage rate in the discussion)
3. What do you think Israel is for the Jews living in Armenia? A historical and cultural symbol around which all Diaspora Jews in the World unite or The Home where every Diaspora Jew wants to go back to?
4. What is your opinion about the arguments of a number of contemporary scholars of Jewish studies which state that there is a decline of Jewish identity in the Diaspora?
5. Has the Armenian Jewish Community ever faced the issue of “dual loyalty”?
6. How would you describe the relations of the Armenian Jewish Community with major Jewish Diaspora organizations?
7. Do you receive enough support from them or do you think the assistance should have been more visible?