JERUSALEM LETTER

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

JL:112 6 Nissan 5750 / 1 April 1990

HAS THE INTIFADA REALLY WEAKENED AMERICAN JEWISH SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL?

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Is the Intifada Just Another Round of the Arab War on Israel? / What is Appropriate Use of Force? / Perceptions of Media Bias / Impressions of Israel and the Arabs / Negotiating with the PLO / Possible Solutions / Jewish Attachment to Israel

American Jews have traditionally been known for their close attachment to Israel. Some have suggested, however, that due to recent controversial events and scandals such as the Palestinian uprising, the "who is a Jew" issue, and the Pollard spy affair, that Jewish ties to Israel have eroded to the point where American Jews were distancing themselves from their long-standing support of the Jewish state. To test this claim, I compared the attitudes of American Jews and non-Jews toward the Palestinian uprising and fundamental Arab-Israeli issues.

Evidence presented and analyzed here clearly shows that during the uprising American Jews have been more supportive of Israel than non-Jews. This pattern was verified over time and across many central and critical issues related both to the Palestinian uprising and to the more general levels of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even those American Jews who have been critical of Israel distinguished between criticism and attachment. This was best expressed in an April 1988 poll, when an overwhelming majority of 82 to 8 percent said that "even if I disagree with the actions of Israel's government, that does not change how close I feel about Israel."

Is the Intifada Just Another Round of the Arab War on Israel?

The Palestinian Arab uprising represented a new form of confrontation in an ongoing conflict. Due to its unprecedented nature, there has been wide disagreement among observers as to how to characterize the violence. The Palestinians depicted the disturbances as spontaneous, non-violent acts of disobedience against Israeli occupation. The Israelis characterized the same events as just another round of Arab-Israeli warfare, albeit a more subtle and sophisticated one. How did American Jews and non-Jews perceive the

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21 Arlozorov St. Jerusalem, 92181, Israel; Tel. 02-639281. ISSN: 0334-4096

unrest? Which version, the Palestinian or the Israeli, was accepted by American Jews and non-Jews?

In March-April 1988, several months after the outbreak of the riots, American Jews accepted the Israeli version by a 51 to 33 percent majority, with 18 percent not sure. Non-Jews held the same opinion by a lesser plurality of 42 to 33 percent, with 23 percent of this sample selecting the "not sure" answer.

What is Appropriate Use of Force?

With regard to the question of Israel's use of force in dealing with the riots, Jews similarly manifested greater support for the Israeli position than non-Jews. A typical question on this issue read: "In responding to Palestinian protests, do you think Israeli soldiers are using too much force, about the right amount of force, or not enough force?" At the beginning of the riots, 41 percent of the Jewish sample, compared to 31 percent of the non-Jewish sample, said Israel's use of force was either appropriate or not harsh enough, while 31 percent of the Jews, compared to 42 percent of the non-Jews, thought the use of force was too harsh. The continuation of the uprising, rather than bringing Jewish and non-Jewish opinions closer on this issue, appears to have driven Jews further away from their compatriots. In April 1988, the gap between the two groups was much wider. Sixty-five percent of the Jewish sample, compared to only 26 percent of the non-Jewish sample, agreed that: "aside from a few regrettable incidents, Israel has used a reasonable and appropriate level of force in countering recent Arab violence on the West Bank and Gaza."

Perceptions of Media Bias

Jews were furthermore much less willing to accept the media's version of the uprising and much more inclined to see coverage as biased against Israel. In January 1988, the Jewish sample thought the media had been biased against Israel by a 48 to 37 percent plurality, while the non-Jewish sample held the opposite view by a 46 to 26 percent plurality. Once again, the test of time scores against the claim that Jewish support for Israel is eroding. In March-April, the gap between the two groups was much wider. At that time, a 58 to 21 percent majority of the Jewish sample thought the media had been unfair in its coverage of the Palestinian riots. Forty-three to 24 percent of non-Jews held the opposite view. By January-February 1989, one year after the start of the uprising, a national Jewish sample was even more critical of the media; an overwhelming 79 to 9 percent majority felt the press treated Israelis unfairly.

Thus, comparison of Jewish and non-Jewish opinions on several crucial issues in the uprising yielded considerable differences. Jews proved to be much more supportive of Israel in terms of their characterization of the uprising, view of Israel's use of force, and acceptance of media coverage.

Impressions of Israel and the Arabs

Although American Jews remained more supportive of Israel than non-Jews on the immediate issue of the uprising, did their general views toward the actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the peace process, and possible solutions shift towards those of non-Jews during this period?

Since the 1967 Six Day War, Americans have held highly favorable opinions toward Israel and highly unfavorable opinions toward the PLO. At the same time, they have distinguished between the PLO and the Palestinians, expressing less negative views of the latter. The same trends were found in American Jewish opinion, but with greater approval of Israel and stronger rejection of the PLO. How have the riots affected the images of Israel and the Palestinians in the eyes of American Jews and non-Jews?

As can be seen in Table 1, in March-April 1988, the Jewish sample held favorable impressions of the government of Israel by a ratio of 70 to 18 percent, while the non-Jewish sample held the same

TABLE 1
IMPRESSIONS OF ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

	Jews		Non-Jews	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable
Government of Israel	70%	18%	33%	29%
People of Israel	83	4	50	14
Palestinians	26	51	27	35
PLO	9	83	11	52

Source: Los Angeles Times Poll: Israel and the Palestinians, March 26-April 7, 1988.

TABLE 2
SYMPATHIES FOR ISRAEL AND THE ARAB NATIONS

Year	1976		1979		1981		1988	
Party/Sample	Jews	Non-Jews	Jews	Non-Jews	Jews	Non-Jews	Jews	Non-Jews
Israel	97%	52%	85%	49%	95%	44%	87%	51%
Arab Nations	1	6	0	12	*	3	2	12
Neither	2	23	7	19	2	28	5	19
Don't Know (DK)	*	19	8	20	3	25	6	18
Poll	(HS)		(LA)		(YE)		(LA)	

* Less than 1 percent

TABLE 3
U.S. NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PLO

	Jews			Non-Jews			
Date	Yes	No	DK	Yes	No	DK	Poll
Oct. 1979	46%	54%	--	62%	31%	7%	(LA)
Apr. 1988	29	60	11	52	34	14	(LA)
After Arafat statement and U.S. decision to talk with PLO							
Jan. 1989	38	28	34				(MF)
Jan. 1989				67	17	16	(AP)
Jan. 1989				64	23	13	(CN)

impressions only by a 33 to 29 percent plurality. Similarly, impressions of the Israeli people were favorable by a 83 to 4 percent majority among Jews, but by only a 50 to 14 percent plurality among non-Jews.

American Jews and non-Jews held unfavorable views of both the PLO and the Palestinians. Half of the Jewish sample had unfavorable views of the Palestinians; only a quarter had a favorable impression. Among non-Jews, the unfavorable-to-favorable ratio was 35 to 27 percent. Impressions of the PLO were even more negative. Eighty-three and 52 percent respectively of the two samples had unfavorable views of this organization, while only 9 and 11 percent respectively held favorable views of the PLO. Thus, both Jews and non-Jews had unfavorable opinions of both the PLO and, to a lesser extent, the Palestinians, but a much greater percentage of Jews than non-Jews held these views.

The PLO's image in the U.S. did not improve even after PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat's press conference in Geneva on December 14, 1988. His statement was designed to create the impression that his

organization had completely altered its attitudes toward Israel and the U.S. The American public, however, simply did not believe him. In a poll taken in January-February 1989, just a few weeks after his statement, a national Jewish sample overwhelmingly agreed, by a ratio of 86 to 2 percent, that the PLO is a terrorist organization. During the same period, 74 percent of a general national sample said they did not believe the PLO had given up terrorism and only 6 percent believed Arafat.

On the broader plane of the Arab-Israeli conflict, when Israel has been pitted by pollsters against the Arab countries Americans have always sympathized much more with Israel. Table 2 provides data on this issue from 1988 and earlier years for both Jews and non-Jews. In April 1988, the Jews sympathized more with Israel by a ratio of 87 to 2 percent. Non-Jews held the same preference by a ratio of 51 to 12 percent. Table 2 also reveals similar scores and differences in the views of the two groups registering several times since 1976. The results of the Los Angeles Times poll in 1979 are statistically identical to those registered in 1988 in the same poll for both groups. Finally, Table 2 indicates that over time Jews consistently sympathized much more with Israel and much less with the Arab nations than non-Jews.

In sum, both Jews and non-Jews had favorable impressions of Israel and unfavorable impressions of the PLO and the Palestinians. Both had more favorable views of the peoples than of their leaders. Also, both groups continued to view the PLO as a terrorist organization not interested in peace with Israel, even after Arafat specifically renounced terrorism in Geneva. However, the scope of all these feelings was, once again, much wider among Jews.

Negotiating with the PLO

Actors in the peacemaking process in the Arab-Israeli conflict have had to contend with several serious preliminary negotiating issues such as representation of the Palestinians, the appropriate forum for negotiations, the roles of the U.N. and the superpowers, and the principles and goals of the peace process. In recent years, the most difficult issue has been representation of the Palestinians. The Palestinians claim that the PLO is their only legitimate representative. Israel rejects the PLO because of its practice of terrorism and its extreme ideology, as embodied in the Palestinian National Covenant, which calls for the elimination of Israel.

In the past, the U.S. rejected the PLO for the same reasons. It laid down several conditions for official and formal negotiations with this organization including acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, recognition of Israel's right to exist, and cessation of terrorist attacks. Arafat's Geneva statement was interpreted by the Reagan administration as sufficient to meet the conditions for a dialogue. Consequently, the two sides began official talks.

Table 3 shows that in April 1988, prior to Arafat's statement and the U.S. decision to begin talks with the PLO, American Jews opposed such talks by a 60 to 29 percent majority. The non-Jewish sample, however, approved of hypothetical U.S.-PLO talks by a 52 to 34 percent majority. Therefore, in the middle of 1988 Jews and non-Jews diametrically opposed each other on this issue. As can be seen in Table 3, the same pattern existed in 1979. Following the onset of the Palestinian riots, the ratio of Jews who opposed U.S.-PLO negotiations grew substantially, from 54-46 percent to 60-29 percent, and support among non-Jews decreased from 62-31 percent to 52-34 percent. In just a few months, however, these attitudes changed again.

Following Arafat's statement and the U.S. decision to begin talks with the PLO, 38 percent of a national Jewish sample agreed that "it is good that the United States decided to talk with the PLO." Twenty-eight percent disagreed, while a substantial group, 34 percent, was not sure. Non-Jews approved of the talks by clear majorities: 64 to 23 percent in a

CBS-New York Times poll and 67 to 17 percent in an Associated Press-Media General poll.

While American Jews were divided on the American dialogue with the PLO, they justified Israel's refusal to negotiate with this organization. In February 1981, they backed Israel's refusal by a 62 to 28 percent majority. In a January-February 1989 poll, they disagreed with this statement: "Israel should talk to the PLO without further preconditions" by an even larger ratio of 69 to 14 percent. The necessary preconditions were revealed in responses to another question, when a 58 to 18 percent majority agreed that "if the PLO recognizes Israel and renounces terrorism, Israel should be willing to talk with the PLO." As can be seen in Table 4, a similar result was found in an April 1988 poll. Yet, few American Jews believed this had already happened. Section 2 in Table 4 indicates that in January-February 1989, even after the Arafat statement, 62 percent of a Jewish sample said the PLO still wanted to destroy Israel. Only 8 percent of the same sample thought the PLO wanted to coexist with Israel.

Table 4 reveals that in February 1981, non-Jews agreed with the Israeli refusal to talk to the PLO by a close 31 to 25 percent plurality, and that the largest group, 44 percent, did not have an opinion. In April 1988, non-Jews, like their Jewish counterparts, approved of conditional Israel-PLO negotiations. Unlike the Jewish sample, however, in January 1989, after Arafat's statement, they were in favor of unconditional talks between Israel and the PLO. Yet, non-Jews were also suspicious of the PLO intentions. Only 36 percent thought the PLO wanted to coexist with Israel, while 33 percent said they believed the PLO wanted to destroy Israel.

The riots increased both Jewish and non-Jewish opposition to U.S.-PLO talks. However, Arafat's statement and the U.S. decision to lift the ban on negotiations with the PLO again altered the attitudes of the two groups. Jews moved from opposition to indecision and equally divided opinions, while non-Jews gave much stronger support to the talks. It is possible that the move from a hypothetical situation to an actual one, authorized and endorsed bv President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz, affected American attitudes on this issue. However, Jewish opinions on Israel-PLO negotiations, unlike the opinions of their compatriots, were not affected. They continued to support the long-standing Israeli refusal to negotiate with the PLO.

Possible Solutions

The 1978 Camp David Accords called for autonomy to be negotiated by the relevant parties as a temporary solution in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. The 1988 Shultz initiative and also the 1989 Shamir peace proposals included such a provision for an interim agreement and autonomy.

As can be seen in Table 5, the public had no faith in this solution. Both Jews and non-Jews had reservations about the autonomy idea. In January 1988, 40 to 37 percent of the Jewish sample favored this solution. By March-April 1988 only a slightly larger plurality, 44 to 30 percent supported the idea. Non-Jews favored autonomy even less. In January 1988, 35 percent favored the idea, 33 percent opposed it and 33 percent were not sure. A similar distribution of responses among non-Jews was recorded in March-April: 33 percent favored the autonomy, 26 percent opposed it and 41 percent were not sure.

The Palestinians and the PLO have always demanded the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, to begin with, at least, in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Traditionally, Israel and the U.S. opposed this solution. Both the Reagan peace proposal of September 1982 and the Shultz initiative of March 1988 rejected an independent Palestinian state under the PLO, and instead favored a solution within a Jordanian context. During the U.S.-PLO dialogue the United States repeated this position. While the principal political parties in Israel differed over the future of Judea, Samaria and Gaza and over the solution to the Palestinian problem, they all opposed an independent Palestinian state.

TABLE 4
ISRAEL-PLO NEGOTIATIONS

1. Israel - PLO Negotiations

Date	Jews Yes	Jews No	Jews DK	Non-Jews Yes	Non-Jews No	Non-Jews DK	Poll
Feb. 1981	28%	62%	10%	25%	31%	34%	(YE)
Conditional Negotiations							
Apr. 1988	67	16	17				(MF)
Apr. 1988				63	12	25	(CT)
Unconditional Negotiations							
After Arafat statement and U.S. decision to talk with PLO							
Jan. 1989	14	69	17				(MF)
Jan. 1989				62	15	24	(AP)

2. PLO Goals towards Israel
(After Arafat statement and U.S. decision to talk with PLO)

Date	Jews Destroy	Jews Coexist	Jews DK	Non-Jews Destroy	Non-Jews Coexist	Non-Jews DK	Poll
Jan. 1989	62%	8%	31%				(MF)
Jan. 1989				33%	36%	32%	(AP)

TABLE 5
SOLUTIONS

1. Autonomy

Date	Jews For	Jews Against	Jews DK	Non-Jews For	Non-Jews Against	Non-Jews DK	Poll
Jan. 1988	40%	37%	23%	35%	33%	33%	(YT)
Apr. 1988	44	30	26	33	26	41	(LA)

2. Palestinian State

Date	Jews For	Jews Against	Jews DK	Non-Jews For	Non-Jews Against	Non-Jews DK	Poll
Jan. 1988	39%	42%	19%	56%	17%	26%	(YT)
Apr. 1988	26	46	28	50	18	19	(LA)
May 1988	41	59	--	59	41	--	(JS)

3. Conditional Palestinian State

Date	Jews For	Jews Against	Jews DK	Non-Jews For	Non-Jews Against	Non-Jews DK	Poll
July 1980	39%	41%	20%	56%	16%	28%	(HS)
Jan. 1989	47	23	30				(MF)
Jan. 1989				44	25	31	(AP)

4. Threat to Israel

Date	Jews Threat	Jews No Threat	Jews DK	Non-Jews Threat	Non-Jews No Threat	Non-Jews DK	Poll
July 1980	73%	11%	16%	40%	26%	34%	(HS)
Jan. 1988	82	9	9	54	25	21	(YT)

How did Americans feel about this solution?

American Jews had reservations about a Palestinian state. In January 1988 they opposed even a much softer definition -- "a Palestinian homeland" -- by a close 42 to 39 percent plurality. In April 1988, the Jewish sample opposed the Palestinian homeland solution by a ratio of 46 to 26 percent. In contrast, non-Jews favored a homeland by a ratio of 56 to 17 percent in January 1988, and by 50 to 19 percent in March-April.

Table 5.3 reveals that in 1980 the Jewish sample opposed even a Palestinian state that would not threaten the security of Israel. Conversely non-Jews supported such a state by a 56 to 16 percent majority. In 1989, similar pluralities of both groups supported a conditional Palestinian state. However, as can be seen in Table 5.4, the majority of Jews and non-Jews alike accepted the Israeli reasoning for rejection of the independent state solution by agreeing that a Palestinian homeland would threaten Israel's security. The Jews agreed with this statement by an overwhelming majority of 82 to 9 percent; non-Jews held the same opinion by a 54 to 25 percent majority. In January-February 1989, after Arafat's Geneva statement, a sizeable plurality of a national Jewish sample, 46 to 17 percent, agreed that "even with international guarantees and an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty, a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza would be used to threaten the very existence of Israel."

As was the case with opinions toward the actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process, differences between Jewish and non-Jewish opinions were found in the complex field of possible solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Both groups were divided on the autonomy solution, but a greater percentage of Jews favored this remedy. Jews clearly opposed the creation of an independent Palestinian state, while non-Jews clearly supported this solution. Jews, like their compatriots, supported a Palestinian state that would not threaten Israel. However, both groups, the Jews much more than the non-Jews, felt that such a state would in fact threaten Israel.

Attitudes of American Jews and non-Jews toward Israel and many central Arab-Israeli issues have moved in similar directions. This was evident particularly in the basic perception of the uprising, impressions of the actors, including the PLO, and in attitudes toward the international peace conference idea and the autonomy solution. However, Jewish opinions on these issues were much more supportive of Israel and the Israeli positions than those of non-Jews. On certain issues such as Israel's use of force, talks with the PLO, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, the two groups held opposing views.

Jewish Attachment to Israel

For most American Jews, Israel's existence is seen as crucial for their own ethnic survival and expression of Jewishness. For many secular Jews, Israel is in essence a "civil religion." In January-February 1989, a national Jewish sample agreed by a considerable margin of 73 to 15 percent that "caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew." The distribution of responses to the same question in 1986, prior to the uprising, was 63 to 24 percent. Another substantial majority, 65 to 17 percent, said in January-February 1989 that "if Israel were destroyed, I would feel as if I had suffered one of the greatest personal tragedies in my life." The distribution of responses to this question in 1986 was 61 to 21 percent.

When asked in April 1988 how close they felt to Israel, 75 percent of the Jewish sample said they felt "very" or "fairly" close. In a different poll taken in January-February 1989, 62 percent of the Jewish sample felt close to Israel while 31 percent felt distant. When the same question had been asked in 1986, the distribution of the responses was identical to the 1989 score: 62 percent close and 33 percent distant. This indicates considerable stability in levels of attachment to Israel.

Even more enlightening were the responses to the following question: "Compared to three or four years ago, do you

feel closer or more distant from Israel, or about the same?" In March-April 1988, 65 percent of the Jewish sample said they felt the same, 19 percent felt closer and 14 percent felt more distant. In another April 1988 poll, the Jewish sample disagreed by a considerable margin of 72 to 13 percent that "because of the violence, I feel less warmly about Israel." In a January-February 1989 poll, 75 percent said they felt the same about Israel, 14 percent felt closer, and only 8 percent felt more distant from Israel. The preceding data suggest that, despite the uprising, a considerable majority of respondents to several Jewish polls did not change their feelings toward Israel. Of those who did change their views, more felt "closer" than "more distant."

The attachment of American Jews to Israel creates an interest in many more sources of information on Israel, compared to those employed by non-Jews, such as national Jewish periodicals, Jewish newspapers, lectures, visits to Israel, and correspondence and talks with Israelis. About a third of American Jewish adults have been to Israel and about one in eight have visited at least twice. In a 1986 survey, 40 percent of the national Jewish sample said they have friends or family members living in Israel. In a 1989 survey, 60 percent of the Jewish sample said they "often talk about Israel with friends and relatives." Therefore, they do not depend solely on the American media for information about Israel and the Middle East.

Jews pay much more attention to events in Israel and the Middle East than non-Jews. This was clearly evident in the level of awareness and interest in the uprising. Both Jews and non-Jews were aware of the events in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. However, Jews followed the riots much more closely than non-Jews. Sixty-six percent of the Jewish sample in a January 1988 poll, compared to only 27 percent of the non-Jewish sample, said they "paid close attention" to the riots. A similar gap was found in a March-April 1988 poll, where 67 percent of the Jewish sample, compared to 28 percent of the non-Jewish sample, said they heard or read "a great deal" about the clashes. Because of their special interest in the issue, Jews are more knowledgeable about the Arab-Israeli conflict than non-Jews and therefore tend to place current events within a historical context. They probably viewed the uprising, as Israel did, within the general historical context of Arab-Israeli violence and thus came up with a more favorable evaluation of Israeli conduct.

Both American Jews and non-Jews have certainly been disturbed by the Palestinian uprising. However, despite the harsh criticism of Israel by certain prominent Jews, published and aired by the American media, a detailed analysis of the public opinion data clearly shows that the overwhelming majority of American Jews continues their strong support of Israel.

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Note: The following polls were used in the preparation of this study: Media General-Associated Press (AP): January 4-12, 1989; CBS-New York Times (CN): January 12-15, 1989; Gallup (GP): January 27-30, 1989; Harris (HS): July 11-August 3, 1980; Chicago Tribune (CT): April 21-23, 1988; Los Angeles Times (LA): March 26-April 7, 1988; Market Facts (MF): 1. October 1986, 2. April 1988, 3. January-February 1989; Penn and Schoen (PS): January 20-24, 1988; Yankelovich, Skelly, White (YE): February 1981; Yankelovich, Clancy, Shulman-TIME Magazine (YT): January 27-28, 1988.

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