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Officially, solidarity remains strong but the relationship between American Jews and Israelis is becoming increasingly rancorous.

There was barely a ripple of protest in the United States when Israel's transportation minister, Moshe Katsav, gathered Israeli reporters in Washington in late January to announce that American Jewish "defeatism" was undermining Israeli hopes of winning \$ 10 billion in U.S. loan guarantees. High-level squabbling between Israeli politicians and American Jewish leaders has become so commonplace in recent months that it scarcely attracts notice.

For the record, American Jewish activists had been insisting that they mounted a highly sophisticated campaign for the loan guarantees, but ran afoul of the most determinedly anti-Israel administration since the late 1950s, when Dwight Eisenhower was in the White House.

A group of top pro-Israel lobbyists told that to Katsav, at a confidential January 23 meeting in Washington. They described the current U.S. mood, and its danger signs for Israel: growing public hostility to foreign aid, impatience with the slow pace of Middle East peace talks and, most of all, bipartisan anger over Israeli settlements.

Katsav's reply: Israel's policies were Israel's business, and the Jews should "not expect the administration to be more supportive of Israel than they are." He promptly repeated this to reporters in his briefing to journalists. The American participants were furious at the breach of confidentiality, but they kept silent.

"Israeli politicians aren't like U.S. presidents," said one cynical participant privately. "They can attack Jewish lobbyists all they want." His comment was an ironic reference to the storm of protest elicited by President Bush's September 12 complaint about the power of the Israel lobby. The Katsav dustup is typical of a persistent rancor that has seemed to underlie ties between Israel and American Jewry in recent months, surfacing at just about every opportunity.

In November, there was the meeting between Saudi ambassador to the United States Bandar al-Sultan and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. A few weeks later, Housing Minister Ariel Sharon described the meeting as a case of Jews "crawling" to a foreign prince. In January there was the veiled threat by Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the leader of the Lubavitcher hasidim, who lives in New York but has several

Knesset members who answer to him, to bring down the Shamir government over its willingness to discuss autonomy with the Palestinians. Left-wing MK Yossi Sarid duly told the Knesset that the "old man in Brooklyn" should stay out of Israeli politics.

The same week, an American Jewish Congress delegation toured Arab capitals and then surfaced in Jerusalem, where its leader, Henry Siegman, was quoted as saying Israel had to choose between settlements and loan guarantees. He denied making the statement, but was roasted in the Israeli press nonetheless.

Throughout the last half-year, American Jewish activists have complained bitterly - if mostly in private - that Israel put them in a dangerous spot by sending them to play hardball with President Bush when it was not prepared to strike a deal itself. "American Jews are left scratching their heads," says Rabbi Eric Yoffie of the Association of Reform Zionists of America. "If the future of the Jewish people is dependent on the continued influx of Russian Jews to Israel, how is it that the Israeli government is prepared to give all that up for the sake of continuing settlements?" Many Israelis say the common thread in such clashes is that American Jews can no longer be relied on to defend Israel at all costs. American Jews reply that Israel's policies are harder to defend than they once were, more inflexible and less tuned to the subtleties of world diplomacy. Some Israelis say such carping only shows how assimilation has weakened American Jews' loyalty to their Jewish roots. Some American Jews counter that Israel is changing in the same way, becoming less "Jewish" and more "Israeli." Running through all the complaints is an alarming lack of communication. "We Israelis often feel that American Jews look down at us," says Israel's consul general in New York, Uriel Savir. "They complain that our phones don't work, that we can't reform our economy."

On the other side, Savir says, American Jews feel Israelis look down on them for not living a fully realized Jewish life, for not moving to Israel and serving in the army. "The trouble is that with all this looking up and down at each other, we rarely look each other in the eye."

A SLOW PROCESS OF EROSION

Officially, Diaspora-Israel ties are rock-solid. In America, despite periodic sniping by minority critics, Jewish solidarity with Israel seems strong. In 1991, both the United Jewish Appeal and the Israel Bonds Organization had their best years ever, with donations spurred to new heights - about \$ 1 billion, despite the U.S. recession - by the Soviet exodus. "Jews understand that this is a historic moment in Jewish history," says UJA executive vice-president Brian Lurie.

Official Israel has responded graciously, as Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir did in a November speech in Baltimore, acknowledging the magnitude of the \$ 1.5 billion per year now transferred to Israel by world Jewry.

Still, American Jews complain that Israelis take their support for granted, and expect it to be unconditional. Says Beth Wohlgeleter, executive director of Hadassah Women's Zionist Organization: "You hear Israelis saying they'll just do without us, and that's dangerous. Israelis don't realize how dependent they are on us. The reality of their lives is that there is a tremendous amount of support coming from here, and they shouldn't take it lightly."

The current round of Israel-Diaspora strains is often dated back to 1977, when Menachem Begin was elected prime minister of Israel. The right wing's rise ended the chummy alliance between liberal establishments that had dominated the two communities for a half-century.

Strains worsened in the 1982 Lebanon War, when TV images of Israel bombarding civilian Beirut bruised the liberal sensibilities of many American Jews. The war touched off a spate of public criticism by Jews, rare at the time but now almost commonplace.

SAME EVENT, TWO VIEWS

But possibly no single event more embodies the gap in the two communities' perceptions of one another than last year's Gulf War. For American Jews, the war is commonly remembered as a high point in their feelings for Israel. It was a rare moment when the two countries that share their loyalty were actually united against a common enemy. Jewish communities across America were mobilized to furious activity during the war, donating blood for Israel and staging mass rallies. Crisis hotlines were set up for Jews traumatized by fears for Israel. Donations to Israeli causes, already at historic peaks because of the Soviet exodus, went through the roof.

The night Iraqi Scud missiles first hit Tel Aviv, AT&T reported a 3,000-percent increase in attempts to call Israel from America. A survey conducted by the American Jewish Committee after the war showed a marked increase in American Jews' feelings of closeness to Israel by several measures, from 11 percent who said they had become "more hawkish" on the Middle East to 67 percent who said they felt "more worried about the fate of Israel than I have ever felt in the last 10-15 years."

But the feelings were not necessarily mutual. Many Israelis, in fact, experienced the same events very differently. "What happened during the Gulf War was that many Israelis said the American Jews abandoned us," says Hebrew University demographer Sergio Della Pergola. "Many groups of American Jews who were planning to be here on tours simply withdrew. The hotels were empty. In the press, it seemed every day there was another group that was supposed to come and didn't. It included leaders as well as tourists. Israelis starting asking what this partnership is all about." This wasn't just the usual blip in tourism that accompanies upsurges in terrorist activity. From August 1990 - when Iraq invaded Kuwait and sparked fears of war in the region - through March 1991, Israel lost a full 500,000 tourists, as compared to the year before, according to the Israel Ministry of Tourism. And most of the drop was among American Jewish visitors; tourism from Europe and Christian America remained more or less stable.

"It's a perfectly human reaction that during a time of war you don't go running to the war arena," says Phil Baum, associate director of the American Jewish Congress, an organization that is a major operator of tours to Israel. "Israelis were running away from Tel Aviv to Eilat. People don't go flying into a war zone if they have no reason to be there. I think it's regrettable, but I don't know if it's reflective of any moral failing." But American-born Israeli pollster Hanoch Smith points out that "in previous emergencies, fair numbers of American Jews rushed to Israel's aid. On this occasion, virtually nobody came." Of course, considering Israel's passive role in the war, the need for foreign volunteers was not remotely similar to that in previous wars. Still, the impact on many Israelis was devastating. "Starting from August and increasing toward the war, there was a feeling of hostility verging on contempt toward American Jews," said U.S.-born Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, leader of a Reform congregation in Jerusalem. "I represent a segment of Israel that's very connected to the Diaspora, and even I can't begin to talk about it without getting emotional. I suppose it reflects a certain lack of understanding of what Diaspora Jewry is all about. But I felt it."

The anger seems to have tapped into deeper feelings that lay just below the surface. "Part of the anger came from the fact that American Jewry for the last decade had been telling Israelis what to do," says Detroit-born Israeli political theorist Daniel Elazar, who still spends part of each year at Temple University. "They'd been demonstrating their disappointment on issue after issue. American Jews have become Americans. Israel's immediate interest is clearly its security in a very hostile environment, in which there is none of the American legacy that people would be nice if they had a chance."

ISRAELIS: BASICALLY INDIFFERENT

How widespread Israeli resentment might be is difficult to gauge. The only recent survey of Israeli views on the Diaspora was conducted in February 1991, at the war's height. It showed 10 percent of Israelis claiming to feel "anger" or "disappointment" toward American Jews, versus a full 44 percent who felt "gratitude." The survey was conducted for the Los Angeles-based Wilstein Institute by the Israel Institute for Applied Social Research. The survey's key finding may be the 36 percent who said they had "no feeling." That figure rose to 46 percent among native-born Israelis. No polls have been taken since then.

"The Diaspora is not something the average Israeli thinks about a great deal," says U.S.-born political scientist Charles Liebman of Bar-Ilan University. "There's a sense of dependence. In times of crisis the Israeli expects the Diaspora to come to his assistance. But does he think about it on a regular basis? Of course not."

The opposite is true of Diaspora Jews, Liebman argues. "Israel is a major factor in their Jewish identity, if for no other reason than that the television and newspapers remind them constantly. Israel's survival is of great concern to them. But there's nothing comparable for Israelis. There's no reason for the Israeli to be thinking constantly about Diaspora Jewry." Most observers agree on at least one thing: A key problem in Israel-Diaspora relations is the assimilation of American Jews. With rising intermarriage and a decline in Jewish knowledge and practice, Jews are simply becoming more American and less Jewish. Weaker attachment to Judaism, it is argued, causes weaker attachment to the Jewish state.

For many Israelis, Israel-Diaspora strains are essentially a by-product of the Diaspora's inevitable decline. "What the Israeli does or thinks has no impact on Israel-Diaspora relations," says Liebman. "The American Jew plays out his relations with Israel in his own mind. It has very little to do with Israel, and I don't think there's very much Israel can do about it." But to many American Jews the critical view of Diaspora Jewry held by Israelis seems to arise from the classic Zionist credo of "negation of the Diaspora," and they are troubled by it. "I find a sense among Israelis that the center of gravity of the Jewish world has shifted because of the Gulf War and Russian aliyah," says Yoffie of the Reform Zionists. "Given the fact that in 20 or 30 years the majority of the Jewish people is going to be in Israel rather than the Diaspora, there's a sort of cockiness growing up, a feeling of to hell with them - if the American Jews aren't with us, we don't give a damn.' All of which I find very frightening."

Ironically, it may be that friction between the two communities stems not just from the assimilation of American Jews, but also from their unexpected failure to disappear altogether. Despite years of predictions that American Jews would dissolve into American society by the end of the century, the community continues and is, at least on the surface, thriving.

"That talk about disappearance is just not coming true," says Mendel Kaplan, chairman of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors. "You have to go to America and see the Jewish life there."

There is evidence, in fact, that the American Jews are metamorphosing into something new, neither strongly Jewish nor entirely un-Jewish. In this new American Jewish world, Israel continues to hold an honored place, but it inspires little of the awe felt by past generations.

In last summer's American Jewish Committee survey of attitudes toward Israel, 68 percent said that "caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew" and 72 percent said they felt "close to Israel." At the same time, 55 percent had no objection to American Jews publicly criticizing Israeli government policies.

All of this poses a fundamental challenge to the average contemporary Israeli citizen, whose sense of Jewishness was likely molded by classic Zionist theory. "When we first built this country, we wanted to get away from everything associated with the Jewish Diaspora," says

Moshe Prywes, founding president of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. "If they spoke Yiddish, we spoke Hebrew. If they excelled in finance and intellect, we returned to the land. We wanted to negate the Diaspora, and that determined our attitude."

HOME, OR AN INSURANCE POLICY?

"Negation of the Diaspora" is widely believed to have dissipated a generation ago, smothered in a post-1967 wave of worldwide Jewish solidarity that caught up Israelis as well as American and Russian Jews. But there remained a fundamental reality: Zionism created a Jewish community in Israel for which Jewishness consisted of the daily acts of life in a Jewish state. As second and third generations of Israelis have grown up, they find fewer and fewer points of common ground with their fellow Jews in the Diaspora - and fewer reasons to search for them. Many are left with the feeling that, for Diaspora Jews, Israel exists mainly as a safety net, the haven to be turned to when things get bad at home.

As Haggai Sessler, a 26-year-old engineering student at Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba, said: "American Jews aren't so different from the Russian Jews. When they need Israel, they come here. When they don't need Israel - when we have a war going on, for example - they don't. Sure, they give money in between. It's an insurance policy. If not for them, then for their children or their grandchildren. Somewhere in the back of their minds, they know it's there."

But for its residents, Israel is home, not an insurance policy. Just by being there, they are living, to varying degrees of course, a Jewish life. Explains Israel Radio journalist Gideon Remez: "We don't have to bother with the voluntary acts of identification that the Jews in America worry about. We speak a Jewish language, live by a Jewish calendar, serve in a Jewish army." Remez, son of a sabra father and an American mother, continues: "I don't worry if my kids are going to meet a gentile and get married. American Jews have come up with all kinds of funny contraptions to identify themselves as Jewish, things like Reform temples, which strike the average Israeli as faintly ridiculous. If you're not religious, why bother going to shul?"

Compounding Israelis' alienation from American Jews is a development that caught both groups by surprise: the post-1967 emergence of American Jewry as a political power in its own right. "I doubt very much whether most Israelis are aware of the extent to which American Jewry has come to be regarded by governments around the world as an important factor," says historian Gideon Shimoni of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University. Even as the Israeli government expects American Jewish leaders to do their bidding on Capitol Hill, for example, "Many Israelis would not like to think there is a Jewry in Diaspora that carries a weight of its own." Instead, common Israelis tend - as shown in polls and interviews - to dismiss American Jewish leaders as "self-appointed" nonentities, while their leaders paradoxically overestimate the Jewish lobby's influence in Washington. The result is deep ambivalence, turning to anger when American Jews express their own views on the Middle East.

Among Israelis, it is axiomatic that Israelis alone bear the consequences of their decisions, and American Jewish opinions amount to "preaching" or "dictating" to Israel. "A clear, substantial majority of Israelis say the American Jewish leadership should not criticize Israel," says Israeli pollster Hanoch Smith.

TWO DISTINCT AGENDAS

Silence, however, is not on the cards. "The American Jewish community has concerns which are indigenous to American Jewish life," says **Shoshana Cardin**, chairperson of the Conference of Presidents. "We cannot ignore them, and we will not ignore them. And I think the Israeli leadership is listening and trying to understand the questions that need to be

asked. Just as we need to understand Israel's position, of course."

Israel and American Jewry are both still experimental forms of Jewish life. Both arose in conscious rebellion against the traditional Jewish society of pre-Holocaust Europe. Each is straining to preserve its Jewishness in the face of modernity. "We're talking about two relatively young communities, and the role of the Diaspora has yet to be clarified," says Cardin. "We are a viable, vibrant, productive Diaspora Jewish community, blessed to be functioning at a time that there is a vibrant, sovereign state of Israel. All this is without precedent, so there are times when, in dealing with each other, there will be areas of friction and tension. Each of us needs to respect the other. We are not the same entity. But we are part of the same totality."