

American Jewry's Consensus On Israel

By Julius Berman

(Editor's Note: On July 1 Julius Berman stepped down as chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations after completing two one-year terms. In this article he sums up his view of the consensus that American Jewry has developed in its attitude to Israel.)

Today as in the past the news media are only too eager to seize on any expression of difference voiced by American Jews vis-a-vis Israel government policies. This is variously called a "split," a "rift" or "erosion" of Jewish support for Israel. Indeed, it is a well-known secret that the fastest way to get your Op-Ed article published in a daily newspaper or weekly newsmagazine is to criticize Israel or call for American pressure aimed at changing Israeli policies.

There are of course differences between the organized Jewish community and Israel. But the essence of the American Jewish relationship with Israel, as I have found it to be in my travels, is one of pride, respect, admiration, support -- and love.

I have also found that there is a broad consensus in the views American Jews hold about Israel and U.S. - Israel relations. Let me try to spell out this consensus:

First, we regard the central and overriding impediment to peace in the Middle East as the Arab world's continued rejection of the existence of Israel, the Arab denial of the legitimate and rightful place of Israel in the family of nations, and the Arab refusal to recognize and negotiate openly and directly with the Jewish state. We are dismayed that the Arab world, with the sole exception of Egypt, continues to adhere to a policy of rejection and intransigence.

We welcome Washington's friendship for Israel and concern for its security, a recognition of the American people's high regard for Israel as a strategic ally that shares with our country the values of democracy and freedom. But we also know that Israel cannot and must not rely on any

outside power, no matter how friendly, to repel attack, and that Israel must therefore be strong enough -- economically and politically as well as militarily -- to defend itself.

We reaffirm our conviction that the government of Israel has the right -- indeed the duty -- to protect its people from the terror and hostility that threatens them. And we believe that the arrangements for achieving that security must be decided only by the people of Israel, as represented by their democratically-elected government, through direct negotiations with their Arab neighbors.

Although there are differences of opinion among us with respect to settlement policies in the West Bank, the overwhelming majority of American Jews reject the idea that Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria are illegal.

We oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state as a peril to Israel's survival. Whatever arrangements are finally made by Israel and its neighbors regarding the West Bank and Gaza, any possibility of establishing a Palestinian state must be foreclosed.

There can be no going back to the pre-1967 Arab-Israel border, because of the danger to Israel's survival that such a return would pose, and no role for or participation by the PLO in any consultation or negotiation. By its charter, which calls for the destruction of Israel, and by its tactics, which call for an unremitting war of terrorism against the people of Israel, the PLO has disqualified itself from the peace process.

Jerusalem and Camp David

We remain committed to a united Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel. And we support the Camp David process as the only proven basis for achieving a comprehensive, just and durable Middle East peace.

Finally, we are proud that Israel remains a vigorous island of democracy in a sea of repression. We admire the high moral and ethical standards and respect for human life and liberty that the State of Israel and its armed forces have demonstrated in war and peace.

I believe these sentiments represent the views of the organized Jewish community in America, and of the great majority of American Jews who are not affiliated with the community. There is a diversity of views within the American Jewish community with respect to the details of Israel's policies; our community takes pride in the

staff members of the Israeli liaison office near Beirut captured by the Syrians May 1 on a sightseeing trip.

democracy that characterizes U.S. Jewish life. But that diversity has not detracted from the commitment of the Jews of the United States to the principles listed above, for they constitute the minimal conditions that would enable the State of Israel to live in security, in dignity and in peace -- the ultimate goal we share with our brothers and sisters in Israel.

Herzog "Guest For A Day" At ORT's Ramat Gan High School



Chaim Herzog, President of the State of Israel and immediate Past President of the World ORT Union, recently visited the ORT High School in Ramat Gan, where he praised the calibre of studies in classes ranging from electronics to diamond cutting, announced American ORT Federation President Alvin L. Gray. During his tour, Herzog joined a group of carpentry students who were preparing their end-of-the-class projects.

First POW Exchange Between Syria And Israel Held In 10 Years

TEL AVIV (WNS) — The first prisoner-of-war exchange in a decade between Israel and Syria was held recently in the war-wrecked and deserted town of Kuneitra in Syria, under auspices of the International Red Cross. Six Israeli prisoners held by Syria for up to two years were traded for 291 Syrian POWs and 20 others, mostly Golan Heights Druze.

The bodies of five Israeli officers, three unidentified, were exchanged for the bodies of 72 Syrian soldiers killed in the fighting in Lebanon. There was no direct contact during the exchanges between Israel and Syria.

The exchange came after months of quiet negotiations, mainly by the Red Cross and other international agencies. The Israeli Foreign Ministry expressed its appreciation to the Red Cross and to United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de

Cuellar, as well as the United States and France for their help.

Three of the Israelis were POWs -- Air Force pilot Gil Fogel; tank commander Aryeh Liberman and tank truck driver Yohanan Allon. The others were civilians -- Nahum Neshet, Shmuel Roza and Eran Florentin --

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