

# Preface

---

Amos Yadlin

At the heart of the study undertaken by INSS with the Ruderman Family Foundation is an axis that connects two formative elements for Israel and the Jewish people. The first is American Jewry, and to a great extent the United States as well, as a component of Israel's national security. The second is the overall relationship between the world's two largest Jewish communities, in Israel and the United States, as a central factor shaping Israel's security and future. The study analyzes the developments and trends that have marked these two issues, indicates the main challenges in these areas, and recommends ways to shape the future of the State of Israel and the Jewish people.

Today, more than seventy years after its establishment, the State of Israel is stronger than ever before. While it still faces significant external threats, it has economic strength, an advanced security-technology industry, and clear military superiority over its adversaries in the region. In addition, it enjoys an enhanced strategic environment based on its regional and international standing and foreign relations, first and foremost the special relationship with the United States, which the Trump administration has brought to new levels. The United States Jewish community has also attained new heights of integration and influence within American society and its various realms – politics, economics, culture, education, and more.

That said, the Jewish communities in the United States and Israel cannot rest on their laurels, as the strategic environment is dynamic and currently challenges some of the shared basic foundations. It is

precisely today, when they are so strong, that the two largest Jewish communities face significant internal trials that relate first and foremost to their identity and purpose: Israel is looking for the right balance among the different groups that comprise Israeli society, and against the backdrop of the continued conflict with the Palestinians, seeks to manage the tensions between its Jewish and democratic natures. For its part, the Jewish community in the United States faces the challenges of its continued existence, cohesion, and future during a period of intergenerational transition, while seeking to find the balance between retaining its unique Jewish characteristics and demonstrating openness and integration within American society.

The relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community has been a central anchor in the ability of both communities to develop and prosper over the past 70 years, and it is vital not only to Israel's national security, but to that of the entire Jewish people. It was the American Jewish community that helped the young State of Israel stand on its own, and convinced the American public and its elected officials to establish the special relationship with Israel, which has no match and is irreplaceable. Today, the two communities are in need of an updated joint plan based on a profound understanding of how each can help the other meet the challenges of the present and the future.

Both in Israel and within American Jewry, the current generation has witnessed increasing trends of distance and alienation, weakened connections and sense of belonging, and the decline of mutual responsibility, care, involvement, and concern for the very relationship between the two communities. These trends join the challenges facing the continuity and influence of the American Jewish community. They are rooted primarily in long term demographic and social processes on the one hand, and current political considerations in Israel, the United States, and the American Jewish community on the other hand. However, they also stem from significant lapses in the existing efforts to bridge between the communities, including mutual ignorance, gaps in knowledge and awareness, and the scarcity

and weakness of dialogue mechanisms. The trends of increasing distance between the communities bear long term consequences for Israel's national security and the security of the entire Jewish people, for Israel's purpose and identity as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and for the internal cohesion and resilience of the Jewish communities in the United States and Israeli society.

The Trump era highlights the dilemmas before us. On the one hand, the President has stood by Israel in a way that is unprecedented. On the other hand, the majority of American Jews oppose him, his policies, and his conduct. In this reality, Israel's short term interests are advanced at the cost of aggravated tensions with American Jewry and undermined relations with the Democratic Party and its supporters in a way that threatens long term bipartisan support for Israel – a vital asset, perhaps the most important one at the base of the special relationship between the two countries.

Israel must help American Jews maintain and even strengthen Israel's role in their identity and their connection with Israel, and help them with the challenges of Jewish continuity and with the threats that come from the increase in anti-Semitism and delegitimization of the State of Israel. The American Jewish community for its part must strengthen its support for Israel and help it maintain its purpose and its identity within the framework of a partnership of values and joint action.

It is common to point out the troubling trends in the American Jewish connection to Israel, especially among the younger generation. However, there are two sides to this coin: even though the Israeli leadership is aware of the importance of the connection with diaspora Jewry, this is generally not reflected in its policy and actions, some of which even contribute to undermining these ties. Systematic, long term change in the State of Israel's stance toward American Jewry requires, first of all, a deep, fundamental change in the Israeli public's conceptions and attitudes, so that the political leadership encounters a public for whom this is important, and this "foreign" issue becomes an internal issue. This is an integrated challenge for

both the leadership and the public, for both Israel and American Jewry independently, and for both of the communities together.

The response to this challenge requires an ongoing, broad process of consolidating the relationship between these two communities and shaping their identity and their future, by increasing mutual awareness and familiarity, along with meaningful joint activity. Each side must see itself as responsible for the other and for how it copes with the challenges it faces. Such a process should be based on several levels: education, experiences, joint meetings, dialogue and discourse, a shared narrative, mutual involvement, and a commitment to joint action. On all of these levels considerable activity already exists today, but it is mostly diffuse, sometimes limited in scope, and insufficient.

This kind of national project requires large scale organization based on the commitment and partnership of many bodies – the State of Israel’s institutions and systems (the President, Knesset, and government); public and sectoral leadership, together with civil society organizations in Israel; Jewish national institutions (with an emphasis on the Jewish Agency); the leadership of the Jewish communities in the United States and its major organizations; and leaders and those with influence among American Jewry. This broad partnership would create an organizing platform – a “national directorate” – that would provide the rationale, direction, resources, and system-wide approach for all of the relevant programs and projects. Only such a significant and joint process by the two communities can stop the negative trends that have arisen and ensure their security and future.

I would like to thank Shira and Jay Ruderman, the heads of the Ruderman Family Foundation, who launched the research study and enabled it to come to fruition. The study, published in full in Hebrew in December 2018, aims first and foremost to serve as a knowledge base and a foundation for discussion of the relationship between Israel and American Jewry as a national security issue, for decision makers in Israel, its foreign affairs and defense establishments, and the public at large. In addition, the study offers a comprehensive

conceptual framework for what is required by the respective sectors as a response to the strategic challenges facing the State of Israel, the American Jewish community, and the entire Jewish people. I believe that the approach presented in this study can serve as a good starting point for the path forward, and especially for the process of detailed planning that will lay the foundations for implementing the recommendations and for meaningful, ongoing joint action by the two largest and most significant Jewish communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.