

Introduction to the Research

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The American Jewish Community and Israel's National Security focuses primarily on the question: what is the level of awareness in Israel – and especially among the circle of decision makers in the fields of security and foreign affairs – of the contribution of the American Jewish community toward Israel's national security? The research question was formulated at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) together with the Ruderman Family Foundation, which initiated the study. The Ruderman Family Foundation works to strengthen the familiarity of the Israeli public in general, and Israeli decision makers in particular, with the American Jewish community.

Security issues are high on the Israeli public agenda and play a major role in decision making in Israel. Thus, the purpose of this study is to help increase public and institutional awareness in Israel regarding the importance of the relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community as an element of Israel's national security. Although it is aimed first and foremost at Israeli audiences, we believe that this study also has value for leaderships and audiences within the American Jewish community.

The research project was run by a team of researchers at INSS, began its work in early 2017, and continued for the following year and a half. The concluding publication draws from many written sources that discuss various aspects of the areas of study as well as some 60 meetings and interviews conducted with experts and current and former position-holders. This is the place to thank the people who

dedicated their time and contributed from their experience and understanding to the research project.

From the very first stages of our work, we understood that the research question explores only a part of the overall relationship between Israel and the American Jewish community (and to a certain extent, between Israel and diaspora Jewry as a whole). With Israel the nation-state of the Jewish people, clearly there is a lot more to this relationship than the contribution of American Jewry to Israel's national security. Thus, we chose to expand the boundaries of the study and tackle the issue through attention to broader issues at the base of the relationship between the communities. This discussion was carried out from the perspective of Israel's national security and based on the premise that being the nation-state of the Jewish people requires Israel to relate to the security of the nation (that is, the security of the Jewish people), and involves mutual commitment of Israel toward diaspora Jewry and of the Jewish communities in the world toward Israel.

The English version of the study that follows presents the main insights of the research and our recommendations for the future. The complete version, published in Hebrew in December 2018, includes the research chapters in two sections. The first section deals with the connections and relations between Israel and American Jewry. The main characteristics of the American Jewish community are presented, followed by a historical overview of the relationship and the factors that influence it from the perspective of two different researchers, one an American Jew and the other an Israeli. Following this is a review of philanthropy in the American Jewish community – a field that reflects the changes underway in the community and its relationship with Israel.

The study's central research question, discussed in the second section, is broken down as follows: first, we define the elements of Israel's national security; second, we examine the contribution of the United States to Israel's national security; third, we analyze the contribution of the American Jewish community to the relationship

between Israel and the United States and to additional and wider contexts relating to Israel's national security; and finally, we discuss the attitudes and level of awareness of different sectors in Israel regarding the American Jewish community and its contribution to national security, and examine the correlation between the level of awareness and the actual conduct and policy of decision makers.

In our understanding, there is great importance to the integration of the two perspectives discussed in this study. First, the contribution of the American Jewish community to Israel's national security is examined. In addition, the trends in the mutual relationship between the two communities and their long term consequences for Israel's national security and for the future of both the Jewish people and the Zionist project are examined.

The research was conducted during a period of increasing warnings of the outbreak of a crisis in relations between Israel and American Jews – especially in light of the Israeli government's decisions regarding the conversion law and the Western Wall compromise. Without diminishing the importance of these events, this is not the first crisis in the relations and will not be the last. Although there is reference to recent developments, and even though we used them to highlight the perspectives and attitudes of relevant bodies, we attempted to focus on the deeper trends and long term implications so that the study's conclusions and recommendations can assist in a profound and systematic address of these fundamental issues.

Members of the research project team included: Brig. Gen. (res.) Assaf Orion – head of the project; Lt. Col. (res.) Shahar Eilam – manager of the project; Prof. Zaki Shalom; Dr. Scott Lasensky; Dr. Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky; and Adv. Ofer Medem-Friedman. Dr. Hanna Shaul Bar Nissim was an external contributor. Senior advisors included former US Ambassador Daniel Shapiro and Dr. Yehuda Ben Meir. Shahar Cohen, Gideon Kafri, and Mika Fuchs were interns working on the project.