

Foreword

Jay and Shira Ruderman

The discourse about Israel's relationship with the United States and its relationship with the American Jewish community often seems to resemble train tracks: two parallel lines that connect the same places but never meet. A quick look showcases the public discourse about the relationship between the two countries, and the public conversation about the relationship between the world's two largest Jewish communities. Rarely do we hear of the connection between these relationships; it is as if they are unrelated. This artificial separation is a strategic error since it conceals, and sometimes distorts, the truth. The truth is simple: the American Jewish community plays a vital role in the relationship between the countries, and it is impossible to have an honest discussion about US-Israel bilateral relations without accounting for this community.

Israeli agents of change tend to talk about the relationship with US Jewry in the context of Jewish peoplehood and philanthropic donations to various projects – in welfare, education, and other fields. The Israeli media focuses on this relationship mainly during times of crisis, such as severe anti-Semitic incidents in the US or disputes regarding religious pluralism in Israel (i.e., the Western Wall compromise or the conversion law). At the same time, there are written publications and an ongoing discourse about the government-level cooperation between Washington and Jerusalem on issues ranging from Iran's aspirations to its nuclear program, to trade deals and visa waivers.

The research undertaken through the project with INSS demonstrates the absurd in the dichotomy between the two dialogues, as you cannot talk about Israel's relationship with the United States without talking about the American Jewish community. In 1948 it was Eddie Jacobson, President Truman's friend, who convinced him to meet Chaim Weizmann and, in doing so, contributed greatly to Truman's decision to recognize Israel – against the advice of those in the American diplomatic and defense establishment. In the years since, including today's efforts to battle the delegitimization and BDS campaigns against Israel, it is the Jewish community that has spearheaded the efforts to ensure US support for Israel. Thus, this study is an attempt to bridge these two worlds and launch a more accurate conversation.

Previous research has focused on the support of US Jews for various aspects of Israeli life: philanthropic donations to the health, welfare, and education systems; investment in the hi-tech sector; or tourist-generated income. What all these have in common is that they are relatively easy to quantify and measure. The research conducted in this study seeks to understand the contribution of the American Jewish community to Israel's national security – not only to its social resilience and economic prosperity, but also to its ability to define its identity and defend itself from its enemies.

One part of the study is dedicated to how Israel views the Jewish contributions it has received. Do Israelis understand the transatlantic connection, which is based first and foremost on the deep sense of commitment felt by American Jews toward Israel, which they see as the homeland of the Jewish people? And at the same time, do Israeli decision makers understand that shifting the conversation requires them to change the elements they consider when steering the ship?

This professional study is the product of the hard work of many people, and we are not able to thank everyone. However, we must acknowledge those individuals who gave of their time and expertise to listen, ask, read, and comment on the various topics at hand. We also thank the INSS researchers and staff for their professionalism

and hospitality, and especially Executive Director Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin, along with Assaf Orion, Shahar Eilam, and Ofer Medem Friedman, who managed and oversaw the project.

We hope this research is the first page of a new Israeli discourse about the American Jewish community – a discourse based on the Israeli understanding and recognition of the commitment American Jews have to a strong Israel, and of their ongoing contribution to its national security and society. The American Jewish community is not just a distant relative; it is a strategic asset. It is time to stop the artificial separation between the Jewish conversation and the diplomatic conversation, and to understand that the two are necessarily intertwined.

This is also why an English version of this study is important: for this conversation to be truly strategic and have an impact, everyone involved needs to be engaged. The dialogue between Jerusalem and Washington is tied to the dialogue between Jews in Israel and Jews in the US. These are not two separate and parallel relationships, but a triangular relationship in which every side is linked to the other two.