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Trump, Israel, and the American Jewish Community

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While Israel's right wing politicians were busy celebrating Donald Trump's electoral victory, much of the American Jewish community expressed profound concern. Over the course of his campaign, Trump said a great deal that appealed to Israel's right: he threatened to sink an Iranian gunboat, emphasized the need to take a tough stance against radical Islamic terror, and declared that West Bank settlements were not an obstacle to peace. At the same time, the rebellion he led against political correctness fostered an environment condoning xenophobia and hate speech; Trump himself made anti-immigrant statements and chose not to condemn such sentiments and expressions among his supporters. Should the Trump administration fail to condemn hate speech and incitement, in particular rhetoric that is anti-Semitic in nature, while at the same time fulfilling its promise to strengthen ties with Israel, it will likely become a point of contention in the relationship between the American Jewish community and Israel.

Concerns of American Jews about the rise in xenophobia and hate speech that accompanied Trump's meteoric rise in politics proved justified. On the eve of the elections, the Trump campaign released an election advertisement that presented three powerful Jewish people and used typical anti-Semitic tropes like "global special interests" and "those who control the levers of power" to describe them, prompting the *Washington Post* headline "Anti-Semitism is No Longer the Undertone of the Trump's Campaign. It's the Melody." Shortly after declaring victory, President Trump appointed his campaign's CEO and former editor of *Breitbart News* Steve Bannon as his future administration's chief strategist. *Breitbart* is infamous for running articles that reject political correctness, including articles that referred to conservative commentator Bill Kristol as a "renegade Jew," and Bannon's ex-wife testified that he made anti-Semitic comments in his personal life as well. Although it is unknown whether Trump and his chief strategist personally espouse anti-Semitic beliefs, it is notable that neither has condemned anti-Semitic sentiments with anything approaching the ferocity with which they attacked Trump antagonists.

Some have tried to allay the American Jewish community's concerns by pointing to the Trump campaign's pro-Israel statements. Indeed, Trump's advisors on Israel, David Friedman and Jason Greenblatt, did not miss an opportunity to demonstrate that the views of the Republican candidate were in-line with those of the government of Israel. A week before the elections,

Friedman and Greenblatt released a statement declaring that, if elected, Trump would move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, take action to contain Iran, and defend Israel's standing in the international arena against BDS and delegitimization efforts. However, support for Israel does not relieve Trump of the need to decry hate speech against all Americans, including Jews. This imperative is particularly urgent, as the Anti-Defamation League 2016 report shows a clear positive correlation between the Trump campaign's failure to renounce anti-Semitism among his supporters and an increase in online harassment of Jewish Americans.

The Jewish communities in Israel and the US, which constitute about 80 percent of the world's Jewish population, are already tested by their divisions over religion and politics. The policies of Israel's Orthodox state rabbinate to attack non-Orthodox institutions and reject their legitimacy regarding personal status laws (conversion, marriage, divorce, etc.) as well as worship at the Western Wall have been the cause of much frustration among the ideologically diverse American Jewish community (only about 10 percent identify as Orthodox, and about half identify as Conservative or Reform, which are not recognized by the Rabbinate of Israel as legitimate institutions for determined issues of personal status).

There are also significant gaps between the US and Israeli Jewish communities in attitudes relating to politics. While according to a 2013 PEW survey 49 percent of US Jews describe themselves as liberal, only 8 percent of Israelis identify similarly, according to a poll conducted in 2016. These differences became more pronounced in the Obama years, given the tensions between Obama, who won the vast majority of the American Jewish vote, and Prime Minister Netanyahu in the context of dramatic changes in the region. These developments included the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process led by Secretary of State John Kerry, as well as the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1. The majority of Jews in America and Israel find themselves on opposite sides regarding those issues.

The different environments of the respective communities undoubtedly play a major role in shaping the fundamentally different religious and political values that they hold. In the US, Jews are a small minority among a large Christian majority, and therefore it is not surprising that a large percentage espouse liberal values such as protecting the rights of minorities and political correctness. In contrast, Jews in Israel constitute the vast majority and their religious identity is a source of shared identity rather than a factor that causes them to feel any difference or alienation. In addition, security concerns and the strong influence of the military in society have often cast typical liberal values aside. The growing hate speech and incitement towards foreigners and minorities evident after Trump's victory may well distance the US Jewish community from the incoming administration, at the same time that the incoming President's pro-Israel positions could lead to closer ties between Jerusalem and Washington. These different attitudes toward the Trump presidency, within the context of preexisting tensions, could easily deepen the divide between American Jewry and Israel.

Furthermore, surveys indicate that the younger generation in the United States, Jews and non-Jews alike, supports Israel less than its predecessors did. According to a recent report by Philip Gordon and Robert Blackwill, "Younger Americans—those born after 1980—are markedly less supportive of Israel than previous generations." This diminished sympathy is likely the result of numerous factors that will deepen over time, including growing historical distance from the Holocaust and Israel's transformation from a "David" into a "(regional) Goliath." The opinions of young Jewish Americans (18-29) are not detached from overall trends in the US, evident in the fact that they are more than twice as likely than the preceding generation (30-49) to state the US is "too supportive" of Israel, at 25 percent and 12 percent, respectively.

Donald Trump's victory, which surprised the media and pollsters alike, has created a great deal of uncertainty for both the American people and their allies in Israel. Many in Jerusalem see the Trump administration as an opportunity to restore the special relationship between Israel and the United States, its most important and irreplaceable ally. At the same time, many of their American coreligionists are worried about the negative consequences of Trump's victory: the zeitgeist he has cultivated, threats to their safety, and the standing of minorities in the US in general, and Jews in the US in particular. If the incoming administration pursues a different strategy from the one it took on the campaign trail and chooses to bridge gaps among the American people, it could also help bridge a potentially widening gap between the American Jewish community and Israel.

