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Netanyahu Visit Reveals A Sharply Divided American Jewish Community

The visit to Washington by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in January revealed a sharply divided American Jewish community, writes Robert S. Greenberger in *The Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 20, 1998). He notes that, "The dispute among U.S. Jews has intensified in the last few months. A poll of Jewish opinion taken for the Israel Policy Forum found that 67% supported the notion that the path to peace will sometimes involve disagreements between the U.S. and Israel. But another poll, taken for the Middle East Quarterly, which tends to support Mr. Netanyahu, found that a similar two-thirds took issue with any confrontational approach by Mr. Clinton toward Israel. And a full-page advertisement in Sunday's New York Times calls for evenhandedness in the peace process, while another ad in the same paper shows Mr. Clinton's back to the camera and asks why he has turned his back on Israel."

Just before his meeting with President Clinton, Netanyahu met in Washington with conservative Christian evangelical leaders. *The Washington Post* (Jan. 22, 1998) reported: "Netanyahu, anticipating pressure from the ad ministration to speed Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank, received a rapturous reception . . . organized by Voices United for Israel, a group of conservative Jews and Christians opposed for now to any further territorial concessions by Israel to the Palestinians. Chanting 'Not One Inch!' the crowd of more than 500 gave Netanyahu a standing ovation, as he was greeted by the Rev. Jerry Falwell . . ."

A number of Jewish leaders criticized this meeting. Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, declared: "These meetings, with these people, at this time, under these circumstances, were a mistake." David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, said Netanyahu's overtures to conservative evangelicals posed two problems: "How does that play with an administration that is both friendly with Israel and key to the peace process? And second, how does this play with the American Jewish community, the large majority of which is very uncomfortable with the Falwell and Robertson constituencies."

In an interview with the Washington Post, Jerry Falwell described the West Bank, where Palestinians hope to eventually have their own independent state, as "an integral part of Israel." Pressing Israel to withdraw, he added, would be "like asking America to give Texas to Mexico to bring about a good relationship. It's ridiculous."

Discussing the fact that the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations rejected a strong protest against the Clinton Administration's policy of moving Israel forward in the peace process, Mark Rosenblum, political director of the Americans for Peace Now, declared: "Netanyahu very much wants the American Jewish community to pull his chestnuts out of the fire, and that ain't happening. If there were those that wanted to take the administration to task for embarrassing the prime minister, they went home disappointed. The government of Israel is no longer able to get an automatic, 'We're with you and we're going to take on the administration for you.'" *(The Forward*, Dec. 12, 1997)

Writing in *The Los Angeles Times* (Jan. 12, 1998), Stanley K. Sheinbaum, a member of the board of the American Jewish Congress, states: "What has become clear in these last months is that support for Israel is diminishing . . . Only through peace with the Palestinians and the surrounding Arab nations would terrorism wane and Israel blossom into its fullest potential . . . Netanyahu sends mixed messages about where he stands on this important agreement. Sometimes he appears against it. Other times, he sends the message that he is locked in by the radical right . . . He has alienated not only President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright but especially the American Jewish constituency which is losing confidence in him." ●

Zionism Was A 19th Century Dream Which Must Be Redefined, Rabbi Declares

The Zionist idea of creating a "normal" place for the Jewish people in a nation-state of their own, writes Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg in *Moment* (Feb. 1998), represented a 19th century dream which may not be relevant to the multiethnic world of today.

Rabbi Hertzberg is Bronfman Visiting Professor at New York University, and is now in the final stages of preparing *Jews: The Essence and Character of a People*, with co-author Aaron Hirt Manheimer.

He writes: ". . . it is now clear that the nation-state is not the permanent, lasting form of political organization. On the contrary, everywhere in the world political structures are under pressure to make room for ever more prominent, and prevalent, minorities. In many places in the world the price for the purity of the nation-state is still being paid in blood and terror. There is 'ethnic cleansing' in the former Yugoslavia, genocide in Rwanda and unending strife in northern Ireland . . . But this is not the tide of the future. The economies of the most advanced, technologically adept societies are now interlocked in a global market . . . The new 'normalcy' will be multiethnic, multicultural state or region."

Because of its dedication to the nation-state, Hertzberg declares, Zionism "has never been at peace with the Diaspora. Indeed, the Zionist doctrine of the 'denial of the Diaspora' insisted that the Diaspora must come to an end . . . The judgment that the Diaspora must come to an end was the most incendiary assertion of modern Zionism."

Among the questions the early Zionists never asked, Hertzberg notes, was: "How was it that the uncreative and supposedly moribund Diaspora of a hundred years ago was the place in which Zionism, in all its forms, was fashioned? The Diaspora was the birthplace of all the movements through which Jews have tried to define themselves in the modern era . . . It is simply not true that the Diaspora, in a sort of last gasp, imagined Zionism and then prepared to say some kind of secular kaddish for itself. On the contrary, precisely the opposite was true."

Zionist leaders, in addition, failed to understand that emigration to the U.S., as much as emigration to Palestine, represented a rejection of the status of Jews in Eastern Europe: "The early kibbutzniks in Palestine who proudly excluded all traces of religious piety . . . had their parallel in turn of the century New York, Chicago and Philadelphia . . . Even the most religious immigrants fought bitterly against recreating the kehillah, the overarching Jewish community structure . . . They preferred the new American freedom . . .