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NOTES

3. Ibid., p.16.
9. D. Bensimon, S. della Pergola, La population juive de France. All the figures cited from here on have been taken from this enquiry, carried out in the 1970s.
10. Ibid., pp.188-9.
11. Ibid., pp. 174, 176.

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Israeli Activity on Behalf of Soviet Jewry

Benjamin Pinkus

In the years 1969 to 1985, 266,000 Jews emigrated from the Soviet Union, of whom 164,000 went to Israel. This was an impressive achievement – perhaps unexpected too – with few precedents in the modern history of the people of Israel. It had of course numerous accoucheurs. The activists of the Zionist movement in the Soviet Union credited it to their heroic, self-sacrificing struggle. People in Israel responsible for activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry prided themselves that only their prudent and many-sided policy over a long period could have brought this about. Their opponents contend that if only the policy that they proposed had been adopted, the achievement could have been secured ten years earlier and with still better results. The bystander may be astounded at the miracle occurring before his eyes and take it for the work of providence, but the historian cannot jump to conclusions and must examine this complex and sensitive subject in balanced fashion and base his findings on all the relevant material at his disposal.

The question of State of Israel activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry has in the past provoked bitter controversy, political sensibilities and 'wars of the Jews,' and it continues to do so today, though with lessened intensity. It is one of the main existential problems in the life of the State and the Diaspora since the Holocaust. The sensitivity of the issue and the exaggerated secrecy around it for many years had made it difficult until now to carry out unprejudiced, objective research.

All research on Israeli activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry must address itself to a certain number of basic questions.

First of all, the primary question arises whether throughout the period under review Soviet Jews were indeed in any need of activity
on their behalf on the part of the State of Israel and world Jewry, and
if so whether all or most of them were interested in it.

Second, was the State of Israel really bound to lead the fight on
behalf of Soviet Jewry, and was there indeed full and absolute
identity of interests between the State and the Jews of the Soviet
Union?

Third, it is important to understand the basic conception that
prevailed in Israel in this matter and how it affected determining
short- and long-term aims.

Fourth, it is necessary to examine the means to be adopted and the
optimal conditions for reaching these aims, or in other words, what
the most propitious historical constellation is for achieving the best
results.

Finally, it is important to consider the central question whether it
is at all possible to influence the Soviet administration and get it to
adopt the policy desired by Israel and part of Soviet Jewry, and if so,
how.

In order to answer these basic questions, we shall deal in
concentrated résumé with the following points: Soviet Jews and the
State of Israel; the obligation of the State of Israel towards Soviet
Jewry; the policy of the State of Israel on behalf of Soviet Jewry in
practice; and the results secured, as a basis for reaching conclusions
for the future.

1. SOVIET JEWS AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The short historical period of 1947 to 1948 was one of decisive
importance for understanding Soviet policy regarding the Jewish
question, in all its many internal Soviet, Israeli and global com-
ponents. In that period an exceptional correlation came into being:
a positive attitude to Israel was accompanied by a cessation of
attacks on Zionism, this without any immediate worsening of
the situation of the Soviet Jews, a correlation which signified
strengthening their national awakening, as we shall see later; the
Soviet reaction to this awakening produced a negative correlation—a
change of attitude towards Soviet Jews and in consequence thereof
to the State of Israel as well. At first glance, the development of a
correlation of this kind seems strange and even paradoxical, since
the initial positive Soviet attitude to the State of Israel should
impose a similar attitude to the Jews in the Soviet Union, in the
knowledge that their fate was important to the State of Israel and to
the Jews of the Diaspora. This also holds good in the opposite
direction, that is to say, a favourable attitude to the Jews in the
Soviet Union does not go together with unlimited hostile attacks on
the State of Israel. In the national policy of the Soviet Union,
however, a correlation of this kind is precisely ‘natural’.

Clearly it is not possible to treat the Jews in the Soviet Union
as an organic entity all of a kind, with common desires, fears
and expectations. Actually, substantial differences came into
being between various sectors of the Jewish population under
the influence of geographical, demographic and socio-economic
factors. These differences are manifest in the different Republics
and in the different communities (for example, Ashkenazi Jews and
others), observant Jews and the non-religious, Zionists and anti-
Zionists, and so forth.

Nonetheless there is no doubt that the trauma of the Holocaust,
the exploded myth of the Soviet fraternity of peoples and the
continued policy of anti-Semitic discrimination during the war and
after it brought many Soviet Jews to a reawakened sense of their
nationality. Soviet support for the establishment of the State of
Israel in the years 1947 to 1948 greatly helped to channel this
awakening along Zionist lines, as was tangibly demonstrated when
Jews from all ranks of the people issued calls for action to help the
new State fighting for its existence; there was volunteering for army
service and organizing of Zionist activity. The thousands who
crowded into the Great Synagogue in Moscow were only an external
sign of the most secret sentiments in the hearts of Soviet Jewry.

Mordekhai Namir, a leading member and later the Minister
heading the Israeli Legation, relates in his memoirs:

We of course expected to attract attention, but what happened
was far beyond anything we could have imagined. When we
reached the street of the synagogue, we found . . . thousands of
people blocking the approach, but when they became aware of
our presence they burst into loud applause with cries of
‘Shalom’ and ‘hedad’ (hurrah!) that went on and on . . . When
prayers ended, Goida was among the first to go out into the
street and until all of us managed to get outside she was
already hemmed in by the huge crowd swarming round her
and shouting hurrahs, ‘Next Year in Jerusalem,’ and all sorts of
endearments . . . Some people would say it aloud and some
would whisper to us, ‘You’ve no idea how much Jewish pride
and joy you’ve brought us. For the love of God, take us to Israel
too – don’t desert us.’
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In 1951 a member of the Israeli Legation was given a note from an anonymous Soviet Jew, which said, ‘Shall we be there one day with our own kind? Do you think of us at all? ... Why do you never broadcast to us?’ Another report recounted, ‘I was already in the street, when a young man passed close to me and whispered, without turning his head, “Moadim lesimkha! [Happy Holiday] – Aliya, aliya!” and hurried away.’

At the end of 1955 a piece written by Barukh Weissman in Kiev reached Israel:

With trembling breath I whisper this short address and in my heart I ask myself – Is this the right address? The State of Israel – is this really and truly the right address? And my brother? Who knows my brother in the State of Israel? Each and every builder and defender of the new State with its many enemies – he is my brother. My words are addressed to him.

A broader, more general Zionist awakening with new Jewish circles entering the arena – including young Jews till then far away from any Jewish or Zionist interest – came about in 1956 and 1957 as a result of the 1956 Sinai campaign (Operation Kadesh) as in 1948; collections were made for a Defence Fund and there was a rising interest in the subject of Israel and possibilities of aliyah. Many Jews were influenced and moved to begin Zionist activity and seek contact with the State of Israel by the International Youth Festival which was held in Moscow in July and August 1957. Notes and postcards handed to members of the Israel delegation of Halutzim ('Pioneer Youth') said things like, ‘Do you know about us?’ ‘Do you know how we live here?’ ‘Tell them about us, tell about us ...’ ‘We have not forgotten the Land of our Fathers ... Israel, thou our motherland, our shield, be hard as rock of flint!’

In the many meetings that members of the Israeli Embassy, Israeli delegations and many tourists had with Soviet Jews, they were repeatedly appealed to and urged to have the State of Israel and world Jewry take energetic action on their behalf.

The Six Day War had a tremendous impact on Soviet Jewry in its swift transition from deep fear for the fate of Israel to boundless joy over the brilliant victory. Numerous were those who pressed Israel and world Jewry to mobilize in the fight for Soviet Jewry, and the pressures and appeals were reinforced with the arrival in Israel of the first Zionist activists from the Soviet Union in the years 1969 to 1971.

It is important to stress that the State of Israel became a symbol immediately on its establishment, representing the Soviet Jews’ hope of a speedy solution to their grave problems. The creation of the State and the fact of its existence were however outstandingly static elements, something in the nature of a beacon in the darkness by which to chart and guide hopes and dreams, its victories something to be proud of; but the only chance of success they could see in their unequal struggle with the powerful Soviet regime was real, practical activity by the State of Israel on their behalf in every sphere and with all the means at its disposal. Israel’s fight on their behalf in the international arena imbued them with the feeling that they were not entirely cut off and isolated in the field, that they had weighty support and backing.

How many Soviet Jews nurse Zionist or pro-Israel sentiments today it is hard to estimate, but in the 1970s they represented from a quarter to a third of the two million Jews in the Soviet Union, that is, all those who wanted to get exit permits for Israel even if they did not intend to settle in Israel.

We have no data at all on the attitude to the State of Israel and to world Jewry of the greater part of the Jews living in the Soviet Union, the ‘silent majority,’ and it is therefore difficult to know how that majority regards Israel’s activity on its behalf. In the first place, a Moscow activist in the Zionist movement, V. Meniker, thinks that there is no one who is indifferent to the State of Israel, ‘and that for all sorts of reasons – even for the simple reason that everyone reads the newspapers.’ At all events, clear distinctions can be drawn between a number of groups with different attitudes to their national identity and therewith to the State of Israel. The broadest group quantitatively is that of assimilated Jews who have already gone through the process of linguistic and cultural adjustment and aspire to cut themselves off completely from Jewry, but who are still tied to it by their umbilical cord, both because of the existence of their registration in their identity certificates and because of the fact that the hostile environment does not recognize them as an integral part of itself. The assimilated Jew would certainly prefer to completely ignore the very existence of the State of Israel if it were only possible, but in the majority of cases he is not hostile to it; sometimes he is even proud of it and benefits from its struggle on his behalf. A clear expression of this attitude is to be found in Semyon Lipkin’s poem, ‘The Ally’ (a play on the Russian ‘y’ and ‘and’, and ‘ally’ for ‘conjunction ’), which the censorship allowed to appear, apparently by mistake, in the literary periodical, Moskva, in December 1968. It reads:
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In it lies buried my fear, your fear! It's our ally and support the 'yud'./ In the Asian Sea, I'm told, there's a people known by the letter 'yud'. / Without conjunction, the dictionary would be silenced, / the world would go off the tracks. / There'd no longer be humanity / Without the people whose name reads - 'yud'.

The 'national Communist' formed the next biggest Jewish group, and it had the most hostile attitude to Zionism and the State of Israel, but its strength declined sharply and it is doubtful whether it has much influence in the Jewish public in the Soviet Union today. The third group, the traditional-religious one, even if it is not Zionist in the sense of wanting or aspiring to emigrate to Israel, without a doubt welcomed Israeli and world Jewry's activity on its behalf, since it enjoys limited religious rights today thanks to this fight.

2. THE STATE OF ISRAEL'S OBLIGATION TO SOVIET JEWRY

The State of Israel's obligation towards the Jews of the Soviet Union - and especially to Jews in dire straits who are persecuted because of their being Jews - is something many-sided. It draws sustenance from a variety of sources and of levels of legitimization. It is first of all the product of a very long history of the sufferings of the Jewish people in their dispersion, which engendered a constant need to rescue Jews persecuted for their faith and for their belonging to the people of Israel. The Holocaust of the Jews of Europe and the trauma it has bequeathed to world Jewry, which failed to render the assistance so urgently needed, have reinforced the perception of this need since the end of the Second World War.

Next, the essence of Judaism from the earliest times, its deep-rooted traditions and consecrated laws governing personal conduct, all perpetuate the idea of the duty of rescue, aid to one's neighbour, redemption of prisoners, and enshrine the rule, 'Everyone of Israel stands surety for everyone else.'

Third, the Zionist ideology was built and exists purely and solely on the basis of the unity of the Jewish people, which can survive as a nation by the ingathering of the exiles in a Jewish State. Zionism, then, in essence is to find a speedy solution to the dichotomous existence of a Jewish State and a Jewish Diaspora, with a supreme common interest outweighing the particularist and temporary interests of each separate Diaspora.

Fourth, an explicit and binding legal commitment exists in con-

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stitutional enactments of the State of Israel in the years 1948 to 1952; the Declaration of Independence, the Law of the Return, and the Law on the Status of the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Agency for Palestine. In the debate on the Law on the Status of the Zionist Federation, David Ben-Gurion declared:

The proposed law that is being submitted to you is no ordinary law, but one of the basic central laws making this State specifically a State with a mission to serve as an instrument and a forge for the redemption of Israel. The Law therefore contains directives of principle without the formal content of a law that lays down punishments and penalties for this or that breach or contravention of its provisions; but these directives express the special historic significance of the State of Israel and they establish the link between the State and the people of Israel. They also endow the World Zionist Federation with State rights within the State of Israel.

Finally, there is a clear State obligation, affirmed in the programmes of the Zionist Parties in Israel and part of the basic line of all the successive governments, the obligation to assist persecuted Jews wherever they may be and bring them to Israel.

Israel sees itself, then, as responsible for the fate of Jews everywhere in the world and appears openly as the natural defender of Jews in distress and under duress. It is clear that there will always be a gap between the general obligation, even the most consecrated and confirmed in law, and current policy in practice on a specific issue. It is important, therefore, to go into how this obligation was conceived by the State of Israel's policy-makers.

In practice three central personalities laid down Israeli policy on Soviet Jewry in the years from 1948 to 1974: David Ben-Gurion, as leader of the largest political party, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, in the years 1948 to 1963; Golda Meir, by virtue of her closeness to Ben-Gurion, as the first Israeli Minister to Moscow, Foreign Minister and Prime Minister at different periods; and Shaul Avigur in direct, sole charge of everything concerning Soviet Jewry, officially until 1969, but in practice after that date as well. As against this, other foreign ministers at different times - Abba Eban and Yigal Allon - had little influence in this matter; Moshe Sharett, Foreign Minister from 1948 to 1956, did have some influence, mainly when he served as Prime Minister from 1954 to 1955.

The basic approach of Ben-Gurion to the subject of Israel-Diaspora relations was already essentially functional in the period
of the Mandate and even more strongly so after the establishment of the State. Declared Ben-Gurion:

The restoration of the State of Israel is the greatest event in Jewish history in the last three thousand years. The advantage of the State over the [Zionist] Federation is not only its State power and its international status and in the profound influence of all parts of the Jewish people wherever they may be; its advantage is one of substance and it existed before the establishment of the State.16

He did not deny that the State of Israel was in fact the creation of the Jewish people and created for its sake, he even accepted the premise that the State is not the final aim of Zionism – according to him, the final aim is the ingathering of exiles. All the same, he contended that the State is superior to the Exile functionally in virtue of its being a sovereign body with instruments and means that were never ready to hand for Jews in the Exile. 'A State is the greatest asset the Jewish people as a whole now has, apart from its being the individual hope of thousands of Jews who aspire to build up the State and be built by it.'17 Since the fate of the Jews in the Exile is closely bound up with the existence of Israel, they have to assist it financially, economically and politically, but only by personal fulfilment through aliya would they be acting as true Zionists. Ben-Gurion did not conceive of aliya as first and foremost a means of rescuing Jews but as a State of Israel enterprise for its own reinforcement, whence it followed that as long as the Exile continued to exist, it would have to serve as a reservoir of forces to meet the needs of the State.

From time to time in his public appearances and in articles, Ben-Gurion dealt specifically with the question of the Jews in the Soviet Union. Before the establishment of the State, he made various efforts to reach agreement with the Soviet leadership on creating ties with the Yishuv in Palestine and organizing aliya. For this purpose he went to the 1923 Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow, and in 1933 and 1934 he negotiated with Soviet representatives, all without result. He met the Soviet Ambassador to Britain, Ivan Maisky, in London and Palestine during the Second World War.

Ben-Gurion laid stress on the disturbing fact that only one national entity in the Soviet Union – the Jews – was 'sentenced to death nationally and spiritually, not because of any specially unfavourable attitude towards the Jews on the part of the Soviet regime, but because of the objective reality of a dispersed people

without a mother-country, a people that the foreign ruler takes no account of.'18 This is how he evaluated the situation in May 1951:

At this time, it's as though there's no prospect for aliya of the Jews of Russia, but we have no firm reason to abandon the hope that it will yet be granted this Jewry to play its part in the life of the State and of the entire Jewish people; and if the gates are opened in Russia and the Jews are allowed to emigrate, we can expect to have a Yishuv of four million within ten years – and even if we do reach that, it will be a minority of the Jewish people.19

In the 1950s however, the prospects for this aliya seemed to him feeble in the extreme:

We have not despaired and we do not despair of this tribe of Jews – let us hope that the day will come when Soviet Jews will be permitted to play their part in the restoration of their historic motherland, but at this day and hour – and there is no knowing how long this day and hour will last – it's as though Russian Jewry did not exist from the viewpoint of the State of Israel.20

Taking into account Ben-Gurion's pragmatic approach to politics, according to which one need not occupy oneself with something that is not yet ripe and therefore not on the cards, we can conclude that in the 1950s the question of Soviet Jewry was not yet on the order of the day in any immediate, clearly defined form. At the same time, Ben-Gurion felt for the Jews in the Soviet Union and saw their forced isolation from the State of Israel as the great tragedy of the Zionist movement. He encouraged the people who were occupied with the subject of Soviet Jewry, he decided on sending Golda Meir as Minister to the Soviet Union, and he was always on the alert in this matter.

Golda Meir was deeply affected by the unexpected and moving mass welcome that was accorded her by some 50,000 Jews at the Rosh HaShana High Holidays immediately after her arrival in Moscow.21 Lou Kadar, who served with Golda Meir in the Legation at the time, relates: 'At the sight of these Jews, tears streamed from my eyes. Golda didn't cry, but I could easily feel what was going on in her heart. . . She was bound to this Jewry with every bone in her body and all the days of her life – this renewed encounter with this Jewry was an ineffable experience for her.' However, Golda Meir confessed a score of years later: ‘Since then and till today I blame
myself for daring to think that from the Jewish point of view there were no longer any Jews in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{21} It appears then that the ‘Moscow experience’ did not directly influence Israel’s policy and did not even lead to a revision of the usual conception of the matter.

Shaoul Avigur, Russian in origin, like Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir, was already active in the affairs of Soviet Jewry in the early 1920s when he volunteered to go to the Soviet Union as a Zionist emissary. His initiative was rejected by Beri Katzenelson. During the Second World War, Shaoul Avigur was posted to Teheran; from his base there he was active in the affairs of Soviet Jewry, and after the war he was responsible for the organized undertaking of the bricha (escape) from Eastern Europe.

Avigur’s views on the situation of the Soviet Jews after the war and his assessment of their national and Zionist identification did not differ basically from what Ben-Gurion said: ‘The Soviets have already succeeded in getting the younger generation away from the Jewish people. But we have to do what we can. Whether anything will come of it or not, no one can foresee.’ Avigur defined the policy to adopt regarding Soviet Jewry as one of ‘Cast your bread upon the waters’ and ‘Keep the lamp burning.’\textsuperscript{22} He noted that ‘Even if there weren’t any immediate results or any results at all, we couldn’t stand aside – we had to use every means at our disposal to strengthen the national consciousness of the Soviet Jews.’\textsuperscript{23} In 1977, in one of his rare interviews with the Press, Shaoul Avigur said:

People today are wise after the event. When we – my friends and I – began the fight on behalf of Soviet Jewry after the establishment of the State, we knew that the story did not begin with us, that there were others before us in the fight, but the circumstances were such that for a long time it seemed ‘a lost battle.’ We tackled the problems empirically, cautiously, and we don’t have to be ashamed of this caution.\textsuperscript{24}

Dr. Nahum Goldmann did not, it is true, have any official role in the State of Israel, but by virtue of his two positions, head of the Zionist movement and President of the World Jewish Congress, he was in close contact with the people in Israel who were concerned with the cause of Soviet Jewry. In the 1950s he was in entire harmony with them, but from the beginning of the 1960s there was increasingly wide disagreement between them, and it is therefore important to explain his stand.

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Dr. Goldmann was already active in the early 1930s in making contact with the Soviet Union. In Geneva, where he lived, he met high-ranking Soviet diplomats and came away from these contacts in an optimistic frame of mind. Already then Dr. Goldmann favoured quiet diplomacy and he was not prepared to change this position of his later on. He wrote:

Many Jewish extremists hold the view that there is no prospect of securing any alleviations for the Jews living in Russia. They conclude that we must renounce all efforts to maintain this community and concentrate on immigrants. I rebel against this analysis that signifies, after the Nazi tragedy, giving up at one go more than a fifth of the Jewish people. I have always believed that there can be Jewish life even under the communist regime.\textsuperscript{25}

Dr. Goldmann aimed at reaching an agreement with the Soviet authorities under which Jews would be granted the same conditions as in a number of East European States: cultural and religious institutions and the possibility of representation on an international Jewish body like the World Jewish Congress. According to Goldmann, one had to beware of exerting pressures on the Soviet Union: ‘There should be no use of these damaging political pressures – it is impossible to compel the Russians to do something, but mostly it is possible to persuade them. There has been a great deal of exaggeration in accusation of anti-Semitism against the Soviet Union . . . . The Senator Jackson business was fine proof that the Russians mean to remain masters of the situation.’\textsuperscript{26} We shall see later how this stand of Dr. Goldmann’s affected his cooperation with the Israeli administration in activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

Right-wing opposition parties in Israel condemned this official conception and categorically called for a determined, energetic activist policy on behalf of Soviet Jewry, but when they took office in 1977 they in fact went on with the same old policy of the Alignment governments. Furthermore they left untouched the ‘Liaison Office’ headed by Nehemia Levanon, whom they had so vigorously attacked earlier on.

It appears that the change in the accepted conception has taken place only recently; it was expressed by Shimon Peres when he declared that if he had to choose between diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union or aliya, he would choose the latter. Moreover, he appears prepared to link a solution to the problems of Soviet Jewry with
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a general political Middle East settlement that would involve cooperation with the Soviet Union.

3. PRACTICAL POLICY IN STATE OF ISRAEL ACTIVITY ON BEHALF OF SOVIET JEWRY

The term 'State of Israel' is used here to indicate the central institutions of the regime, such as the Knesseth, the Government and the Presidency, the political parties and the public organizations acting in the matter of Soviet Jewry, as well as the mass media, whether public or private, with their importance in shaping public opinion.

We shall briefly review the various sub-periods in the State of Israel activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry and describe the changes that occurred in these periods.

A. 1948 to 1952 – the period of diplomatic activity

In the years 1948 to 1952, when the 'aliya B' operation ended and the organization stopped functioning, no other State institution was created in its place which could have organized activity for Soviet and East European Jewry. Such an institution was sorely needed, given the special situations of the Jews in these countries and the need to deal with the matter in special, unconventional ways and methods. The policy on Soviet Jewry was formed by the government on the strength of information and proposals brought from Moscow and elaborated in the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem. The policy was a cautious one in the fullest sense. In the frequent contact that the Legation people had with high-ranking Soviet officials, including the Foreign Minister, the question of the Jews in the Soviet Union was never brought up openly or clearly. The central issue from Israel's point of view – the possibility of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union – was generally on the lines, 'The State of Israel is in need of manpower and it would be fine if those who wanted to were enabled to emigrate to Israel from the countries of Eastern Europe as well.' The first time that the question of aliya was raised more openly was when Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett met Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky at the UN Assembly in Paris in 1950.

Furthermore, a great deal was already known of the mass arrests in the Jewish population, the extreme anti-Semitic campaign waged on the pretext of combating nationalists and cosmopolitans, and the total liquidation of all the institutions of Jewish culture, but this shocking news was not published clearly and emphatically in Israel and the world. No action at all was taken against Stalin's anti-Jewish policy. Until November 1952 the desperate situation of Soviet Jewry was brought up only two or three times in the Knesseth. In April 1949, Knesseth Member Ben-Eliezer of 'Herut' asked the Finance Minister: 'Is it true that the Government has vetoed sending parcels to Russia?' In August 1950, Knesseth Member Hillel Kook (also of 'Herut') asked for a debate for the first time on the subject of Soviet Jewry. He said:

I want to bring up a very painful and tragic question for discussion – especially tragic because in our public reality it has been designated 'a sensitive question.' It is, in fact, very sensitive but a tragic question will not be solved by the traditional methods of going to eminent persons with solicitations, for in this area the government is conducting its business in the best traditional Galut lines of appeals etc. – and with the same results.

The stormy debates on the question of accepting restitution payments from Germany also involved the subject of Soviet Jewry. Golda Meir, then Labour Minister, speaking in this debate, said:

Every time Knesseth member Rikit or one of his fellow party members comes up to this dais to speak on a political issue, I wait for it. All the compliments and all the right and privileges go to the Soviet Union, but why is it forbidden, why do you restrain yourselves and refrain from saying a single word, one very weak and moderate word, about the millions of Jews who live there and who cannot say a single word on the matter before us? ... Perhaps in the middle of all they've got there, and all the heartache they've got there, perhaps there's one more thing they have – their belief that we have not forgotten.

Zalman Aranne, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, replied to the debate:

The aliya of Soviet Jewry is a large question, one bound up with the fate of Russian Jewry, and for over thirty years now, ever since the Revolution, this Jewry and its fate have been the crux of Hebrew history, not on account of any discrimination or anti-Semitic tendencies [sic!]. A few months ago, we heard 'Let my people go!' from the lips of the Prime Minister of Israel, when he spoke at Afi\im and raised the demand for aliya of the Jews of the Soviet Union.
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In the Knesseth on 27 February 1952, David Ben-Gurion read out an important Government of Israel Note in response to a Soviet missive of 8 December 1951. Paragraph 8 of the Israeli Note stated, 'As is well-known to the Government of the Soviet Union, the Return of the Jews to their historic homeland represents the central objective of the State of Israel. ... In this connection, the Government of Israel calls on the Soviet Union to enable Jews of the Soviet Union who wish to do so to emigrate to Israel.'

In the wake of this communication, there was a stormy debate in the Knesseth between the Minister for Education and Culture, Ben-Zion Dinaburg (Dinur) and Knesseth Member Arieh Altman of 'Herut.' Dinur said, 'I must express astonishment and stupefaction over Knesseth Member Altman's manner of speech, his irresponsibility and the abounding arrogance with which he permitted himself to speak of the Jews of the Soviet Union. This is no way to serve the cause of Soviet Jews' aliyah to Israel and to promote the cause of the people of Israel.' Altman answered:

I did not say that the Government was not demanding aliyah for Soviet Jewry. ... I know that people talk about it all the time – that was not what I complained about. What I said was that it was time we understood that all direct, polite appeals for decades have brought no results. ... The Jews here are surprised at the fact that we here in the free countries do not raise our voices frankly and constantly in order to raise the problem of their emigration ... I know this psychology of yours and this tradition that it is forbidden to speak out aloud because it can do harm. This damaging system has not borne fruit in this area nor in any other.

In this period, three basic attitudes crystallized in the Knesseth and in the public sphere on what policy ought to be adopted regarding the Soviet Union. The attitude of the extreme left (at that date MAKI and MAPAM) was one of adamant opposition to all discussion of the subject of Soviet Jewry. The right wing, mainly the 'Herut' movement, insistently demanded debate and action. The midway approach was that of MAPAI and the religious parties, who remained content with the official policy that was being carried out.

It is important to note that in these years, 1948 to 1952, the question of the Jews of the Soviet Union was not even raised in the international arena, including the UN bodies. Nor was any special activity undertaken in these years by public organizations in Israel

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concerned with the affairs of Soviet Jewry. One such association had been in existence since 1929; this was Magen, a company headed by B. West and Sh. Aharonov set up to aid Jews persecuted on account of their being Jews or for their Zionism and to deal with everything pertaining to the Jews in Soviet Russia. Another was the Organization of Jews from Russia. One of the main activities of Magen was its appeal to the 1951 Zionist Congress to include a clause in its decisions calling for aliya from Russia and the release of 'prisoners of conscience.' Magen even published a news-sheet devoted to Soviet Jewry, poor in content and appearing only irregularly.

The main reasons for this lack of deeds lay in the objective circumstances of the State of Israel immediately on its foundation, when the main battle front was military and economic, and the active Soviet policy favourable to Israel and the Soviet support for Israel in the international arena rendered it difficult to tackle the matter of Soviet Jewry because of Soviet sensibilities on this issue. Finally the pessimistic conception entertained by Israeli leaders, which we have already described, set the pattern of activity. Thus we see that there was a clear contradiction in this period between the immediate interests of the State of Israel and those of Soviet Jewry, and what was decisive in the end was the need to 'maintain the State of Israel,' as Golda Meir put it.

B. 1953–1959 – forging the tools and shaping policy

At the beginning of 1953 a special body was set up of people from the former organization for 'Aliya B' headed by Shaul Avigur, for the purpose of concentrating all the activities connected with aliya of Jews from Eastern Europe. Up to 1955 this body worked alongside the Prime Minister's Office. In 1954 Shaul Avigur was posted to Europe to be closer to the area concerned. He established two focal points for action on behalf of the Jews of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, one in Zurich and the other in Vienna.

Soviet foreign policy veered around sharply with regard to Israel in 1955 and it was as a result of this and not, it would seem, by chance that there was a significant turning-point in Israeli State organization with regard to Soviet Jewry. A new body named 'Bar' was established with a double aim: (a) to carry out a continuing information campaign in Israel and abroad to keep the world reminded of the existence of the problem of Soviet Jewry; and (b) to handle material coming from the Jews in the Soviet Union via the
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Israeli Embassy in Moscow and otherwise. This body operated jointly with the security forces, but after a year Shaul Avigur was appointed to head the body and made responsible solely to the Prime Minister. Information activity in the West was put in the charge of Dr. Binyamin Eliav. After much discussion, the body dealing with Soviet Jews was attached formally to the Foreign Ministry, with the title 'Liaison Office.' Because of the unnecessary and sometimes excessive secrecy around the activity of this office, it was called variously in the press: 'the nameless office,' 'Avigur's office,' 'Lébanon's office,' and the like. It is worth noting in this connection that West Germany, which also dealt with immigration of its nationals from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, put activities for this purpose in the hands of a public organization like the Red Cross and dealt with the matter officially in the Interior Ministry, without any veil of secrecy like that in Israel.

The top people working in this body had generally been connected with 'Aliya B' and the Bricha ('escape'); they included people who had been released from Soviet imprisonment and had emigrated to Israel, as well as Foreign Ministry officials. Jews from Israel, the USA, France and England - journalists, authors, scientists - were mobilized for information activity abroad, in full and close cooperation with Jewish institutions - the Zionist movement, the Jewish Agency, the World Jewish Congress and others.

The policy laid down for the information campaign covered the following points:

1. To make the problem of Soviet Jewry an international moral and legal problem by stressing the demands for cultural and religious rights for Soviet Jews and the right of family reunion. (The right to 'repatriation' was not brought up at all before the early 1980s.)
2. To separate the problem of Soviet Jewry from the 'cold war' between the Power blocs.
3. To maintain absolute secrecy on the connection between Israel and the people active on behalf of Soviet Jewry.
4. To supervise the material published so as not to leave an opening for accusations of falsification, unreliability or misleading propaganda.
5. To operate indirectly through leading Western figures, scientists, men of letters and statesmen.

The central aim was to get material on Soviet Jewry into the mass media by every possible means, through journalists and through independent newspapers and by publishing periodicals such as News-Letter, Jews in Eastern Europe, The Jews and the Jewish People. All three appeared in England from the end of the 1950s. Another method was to give material to journalists for them to publish in their own name. In order to keep the issue in the public eye, questions on Soviet Jewry were put to Soviet representatives all over the world and in UN bodies.

In February 1953 as soon as the Soviet accusations against Jewish doctors were published and relations were broken off between the Soviet Union and Israel, the Israeli Government made its first important open move. Berl Locker, Chairman of the World Zionist Movement, called a conference of leaders of the Israeli medical profession, members of the Medical Association executive, so as to start a series of protests from international medical organizations. Locker went to the US to get a conference of world Jewry convened in Switzerland in the first half of March to 'protest against the false accusations in Prague and Moscow' and to arouse world opinion on the grave dangers involved in these false charges. The conference was cancelled with the death of Stalin and the consequent hopes for a change in Soviet policy, but the very fact that there had been this idea of a conference of world Jewry and preparations had begun was of great importance.36

On 30 August 1953 a meeting was held in the home of Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett to discuss policy on Eastern Europe. It was decided that the major part of the activities connected with the Soviet Union should be carried on in the Western capitals and in the UN.37 In spite of this, Israeli activity in the UN in the 1950s was limited. Special importance attached to the appearance of Golda Meir in 1953 at the debate on racial and religious discrimination, when she harshly criticized the policies of the Soviet Union and the East European countries towards the Jewish minorities in their midst.38

In the international arena the main activity undertaken was mobilizing intellectual circles in the West, including Communist Parties there, to bring their influence to bear on the Soviet Union. What can be seen as a striking success in this field was the concern displayed by the leaders of the French Socialist Party when they raised the subject of Soviet Jewry at length during their meeting with Soviet leaders in May 1956.39 So too, the meeting between the heads of the American Jewish Committee and the Soviet Deputy Premier in New York in January 1959,40 as we see, showed that policy in these important fields developed very slowly and was limited enough.
Without any mobilization of large financial means or any real, energetic drive, it was not possible to get better results.

The first full, proper Knesseth debate on Soviet Jewry took place only at the beginning of 1953 in the wake of the Slansky trial and the 'doctors' affair.' This time the majority of the House was in agreement, except for MAPAM, which was trapped in a very difficult and embarrassing situation, and MAKI, which simply stuck to the line of total defence of Soviet policy. In May 1954, Moshe Sharett, both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister at the time, admitted, 'We are not prolix with declarations on aliyah of Jews from the Soviet Union,' but in November of the same year he was saying, 'The demand for aliyah of Jews from the Soviet Union and its allies is on the order of the day all the time. For the moment we can only point to a small alleviation that has taken place this year regarding aliyah of elderly parents of Israeli citizens.'

No less significant than activity in Israel and in the international arena on behalf of Soviet Jewry was the direct assistance Israel extended to Jews in the Soviet Union. One of the important areas was providing information that Soviet Jews lacked about Israel and the Jewish people. Embassy activity in disseminating knowledge about Israel had been nil even in the 'finest hour' of Soviet-Israeli relations and it was certainly limited in the 1950s. It was clear then that ways and means had to be found to remedy this, such as utilizing Jewish delegations and tourists. One of the main means at Israel's disposal was radio broadcasting, but owing to the cautious official policy there were no foreign Russian-language broadcasts on the Voice of Israel. Early in 1957 Yosef Avidar, Israeli Ambassador to Moscow, proposed a one-off broadcast in Russian on Israel's Day of Independence. The policy was described in the following terms: 'You have to appear slowly, slowly, like a mouse poking its nose out of its hole slowly so as not to frighten people by appearing suddenly... Israel must be especially cautious if it wants to reach the Jews in the Soviet Union.' The primary aim was to impart knowledge about Israel and the Jewish people and certainly not to bring up questions touching the existence of Soviet Jewry or the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. Until the end of 1961 there were broadcasts only on the Sabbath Eve, on the Sabbath and the end of the Sabbath; only in the early 1960s was this expanded to four times a week. A periodical in Russian for distribution in the Soviet Union, Israel Herald, began to appear in May 1959.

In sum, the official Israeli activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry in this period can be described as preparatory organizing, without any wide echo or any spectacular success.

In the public field, the Magen association continued with its current activities. A new 'league' was founded in December 1958 called Ma'oz (Fortress) with the aim of alerting Jewish and world opinion to the tragic situation of Soviet Jewry. The organs of this association were a general conference, a national committee (representing the association publicly and conducting its affairs between conferences) and a national secretariat. Its first chairman was Shabtai Beit-Zvi. In 1959 the association published its first news sheet. In March of that year, Ma'az organized its first mass meeting in Tel Aviv.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, institutes for research and documentation on Soviet Jewry were set up on Shaul Avigur's initiative and with financial support from his office. The Israeli Historical Society, headed by Professor Ben-Zion Dinur and Israel Halpern, began to concern itself with this subject. An Association for Research on East European Jewry was founded to gather material, disseminate information and conduct research on Soviet Jewry; it was directed in the 1960s by Shmuel Ettinger, Mordechai Altschuler and Benjamin Pinkus. Abroad, information centres were set up in the USA, Britain, Italy and the Argentine which distributed the material on Soviet Jewry sent to them from Israel.

C. 1960–1968 – transition to organized international activity

The turning-point for the policy of the State of Israel and some of the world Jewish organizations in the fight in the international arena on behalf of Soviet Jewry came in 1960, with the convening of an international conference on the situation of Soviet Jewry in Paris on 15 September of that year. Among the 40 personalities who took part in the conference were Daniel Mayer, a former French Government minister and President of the international League for the Defence of Human Rights, who was chosen chairman of the conference, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, André Blumel, Martin Buber, and others. People who gave their support, though they did not take part in the conference, included Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertrand Russell and the Italian Communist Senator Umberto Teraccini. Preparations for this conference began early in 1960; there was close cooperation between Shaul Avigur's Office and Dr. Nahum Goldmann's World Jewish Congress, with assistance from André Blumel, one of the leaders of the French Zionist movement. While
preparations were going on, the Soviet Union brought increasing pressure to bear both on the organizers and on the prospective participants in order to prevent its being held. This pressure, in the form of both promises and threats, had its effect on some leaders of American Jewish organizations who had even before then contended that Israel was creating an artificial problem about Jews in the Soviet Union in order to get increased *aliya* to Israel. Dr. Goldmann changed his mind and was ready to cancel the conference or postpone it, and it was only with the intervention of Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion at a meeting in Sede-Boker with everyone concerned that the decision was made final to hold the conference on the date set.64 Similar conferences, though with more limited representation and in national settings, were held in October 1963 in Italy, in October 1964 in France, and in 1965 in Sweden with the cooperation of men of learning from all the Scandinavian countries.65 These conferences evoked a wide response, particularly in intellectual circles of the European left-wing parties.

An equally important field of action was the United States. The first attempt to influence the administration and get it involved in the issue of Soviet Jewry was made during this presidency of Kennedy. Israeli representatives were greatly assisted in this by American Jewish personalities like Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg and Senators Jacob Javits and Abraham Ribicoff. Judge Goldberg was even an outstanding supporter of a change-over from quiet diplomacy to broad public activity properly controlled.66 In October 1963 a conference of Jewish activists in the cause of Soviet Jewry met in New York, and in December the idea was born of creating an American League for Soviet Jewry. The activity of the general Jewish organizations and of those set up for the express purpose of handling assistance to Soviet Jewry received an impetus in 1964 and 1965, in spite of opposition from various quarters--the institutionalized Jewish organizations on the one hand and the circles of the Lubavitcher Rabbi on the other. Dispute focused mainly on the best tactics to adopt towards the Soviet Union--quiet diplomacy, controlled public activity or open mass action with all the means available to Israel and world Jewry. Differences between Shaul Avigur's Office and some Americans active in the cause of Soviet Jewry had already emerged in 1966 and they grew wider after the Six Day War. They concerned questions of tactics, of financing activities and American Jews' independence of action.

Official Israeli activity in the 1960s was on a number of levels and in general along the same lines as before. Important work was done in maintaining secret contacts with activists in the Zionist movement in the Soviet Union, both by direct links with the help of the Israeli Embassy up to 1967 and through Jewish delegations visiting the Soviet Union. Levi Eshkol's new policy of trying to improve relations with the Soviet Union did not immediately affect these contacts because of Shaul Avigur's increasingly strong position in the party in this period of the Eshkol/Ben-Gurion rivalry.

In 1968 a change was made in the Russian language broadcasts to the Soviet Union. This important additional step was decided on after the 1967 rupture of relations with the Soviet Union. Daily broadcasts at fixed times now gave programmes on specific themes such as Jewish history, life in Israel, and developments in the Diaspora. However, the request of Zionist activists in the Soviet Union that the broadcasts over the Voice of Israel serve as an instrument in the fight for *aliya* was not acceded to until 1969.

In the years 1960 to 1968 the Knesseth dealt with the subject of Soviet Jewry more intensively than in the previous period. The arrests and trials of Jewish community heads in Leningrad (Petchorsky, Dinkin and Kaganov) led Knesseth Member Menahem Begin to call for a debate in the Knesseth, "now that leaders of the Jewish community have been arrested in Leningrad and accused of spying."67 Foreign Minister Golda Meir, as usual in such cases, had the Knesseth refer the discussion to its Foreign Affairs and Defence committee, which declared that the arrests 'increased the deep concern for the fate of the Jewish collectivity in that State and for their rights as a people. . . . Israel calls on all States and the Soviet Union among them to ensure Jewish collectivities freedom of collective national life and to grant every Jew the right to leave if he wishes to do so in order to join his family and his people in the State of Israel.'68

Activity by Israeli representatives in UN bodies on behalf of Soviet Jewry (such as the appearances of Judge Haim Cohen and Moshe Avidor) was attacked in the Knesseth by communist members (MAKI).69 Prime Minister Levi Eshkol defined the government's policy on the subject of Soviet Jewry in May 1965: 'I say right out and I'm not saying it just for the sake of controversy that "real steps of goodwill" towards the people of Israel means, first of all, allowing the Jews in the Soviet Union to live their lives as a national collectivity like the rest of the peoples of the Soviet Union, and enabling everyone who wants to to join us in building the Jewish State.'70

Among the public associations, *Ma'oz* was especially active: in December 1964 it published and distributed manifestos headed,
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‘Let My People Go,’ sent memoranda on the situation of Soviet Jewry to international institutions and organizations, such as the one to the Socialist International (23 April 1960). From 1964 on, Ma'oz initiated the ‘Empty Chair’ at the Passover Seder, a project aimed at the public and at schools in Israel and Diaspora Jewish communities, to stimulate and signify identification with Soviet Jewry. This project was criticized by Israeli left-wing parties; on 4 April 1967 Knesset Member M. Erem wrote to Ma'oz, ‘I feel I owe it to myself as a duty to tell you with complete frankness – I do not like your activity, especially not this year. Indeed I see it as harmful and liable to sabotage the small quantity of aliya that has opened up from the Soviet Union.’ At the beginning of 1965, Ma’oz succeeded in signing up 100,000 people on a petition to present to the Knesset. In 1968 the association put forward the proposal to establish a ‘Higher Committee for the rescue of Soviet Jewry.’ As the government had so far contented itself with indirect representations and the use of personal contacts, a policy that had brought no results, the general feeling in 1968 was that even if this policy was not basically mistaken, it had lost its usefulness and that new activities and new ways of carrying on the fight must be devised.


The turning-point in official Israeli policy on public activity for Soviet Jewry came late in 1969, when Golda Meir told the country in an address at the Knesset about a petition from 18 Georgian families to the Human Rights Commission of the UN. The Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Yosef Tekoa, simultaneously published the contents of the petition at a press conference in New York.

A number of factors led to this turning-point. In the first place, there was the effect of pressure from the Zionist activists in the Soviet Union and those of them who had emigrated to Israel – they were threatening the Liaison Office that unless there was an immediate change in the policy of Israeli officialdom they would start independent action. Second, there was disappointment over the unfulfilled Soviet promises to permit emigration under the programme for ‘Reunion of Families.’ Third, there was a general feeling that the policy of ‘quiet diplomacy’ had not produced the hoped-for results and was in fact bankrupt. Finally, there was a sort of ‘tactical retreat’ on the part of those responsible for activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry in order to calm things down and not lose control.

In 1969 the international conference on the situation of Soviet

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Jewry held its third session in Paris under the presidency of Daniel Mayer and with the participation of men of letters, Jewish and non-Jewish, many of them from France. This activity in a framework of limited though influential circles no longer seemed adequate in the new situation that was coming into being in the Soviet Union itself and in the West with the change-over to wider public action. At the beginning of 1970 the idea took form of calling a world-wide conference for Soviet Jewry. A decision to this effect was taken on 12 April by representatives of Jewish communities in Europe, and the preparations were speeded up when the news became known on 15 June of arrests of Jewish activists in the Soviet Union. The first Leningrad trial took place in 1970 and the death sentences that were passed came as a shock; it was decided to hold the conference forthwith. (The storm of public protest in the world led to the sentences being commuted to 15 years imprisonment.) Until then Shaul Avigur had opposed participation by official Israeli personalities in meetings with Soviet Jewry. As he put it, he wanted to give the movement ‘the tone of a fight of the whole Jewish people and not only of the State of Israel.’ He now decided that a first rank personality must be brought in and settled on Ben-Gurion, though old and ill and out of office.

I told my people, ‘You have to see the difference between a conference that Ben-Gurion appears at and one where Ben-Gurion doesn’t appear; everything possible must be done to have him take part in the Brussels Conference.’ My people accepted my view and I went to see Ben-Gurion and appealed to him to go to Brussels, but he refused. He said he was with us wholeheartedly, but it was beyond his strength. So I forgot all the rivalry and tensions – and very hard things had passed between us over the Eshkol affair – and I said to him, ‘Ben-Gurion, I think you have to go,’ and he accepted my opinion and he went.

The Soviet authorities launched unrestrained attacks on the organizers of the Brussels Conference, using every means available to persuade the Belgian Government to reverse its agreement to the holding of the Conference. In the Soviet Union itself they drummed up widespread, frenzied propaganda against the Conference with active help from the ‘Jewish public’ – that is to say, from personalities like General David Dragunsky, Aharon Vergelis, the editor of Sovietish Heimland, and the like. All this activity undoubtedly produced the opposite result from what the
Soviet authorities wanted to achieve, for it aroused wide international interest in the Conference.

The Brussels Conference was held on 22 to 25 February 1971 with the participation of 760 delegates from 38 countries, representing all the main communities in the world that were active in the cause of Soviet Jewry. There were also 250 newsmen and broadcasters from all over the world. A message was read from Prime Minister Golda Meir, saying *inter alia*: ‘Your Conference is the outcome of a widespread public volunteer effort. It takes place at a time when a great Jewish national revival is stirring throughout Soviet Jewry, particularly among the youth. Your Conference is a conference of Jewish unity.’ Testimony heard at the Conference from Zionist activists from the Soviet Union made a deep impression: Grisha Feigin, Vitaly Svechnsky, Mendel Gordin, and Kraine Shur (sister of Hillel Shur, prisoner of conscience). The Declaration of the Brussels Conference ended: ‘We will not rest until the Jews of the Soviet Union are free to choose their own destiny. Let my people go!’ On his return from the Conference, Ben-Gurion recorded in his diary:

This Conference of world Jewry that came together in the last days of February 1971 in Brussels (Belgium) was unique in Jewish history. It was not a conference of a party or organization or community or sect but a meeting of world Jewry from the whole Diaspora and the State of Israel, from every continent and country. The writer of these lines was also sent to this Conference, delegated by Israeli Jewry. My doctors permitted me to be present at this Conference for ten minutes only and to say a few parting words. It seems to me that never before has there been a coming together of world Jewry like this. I am not sure that the Conference will change Russia’s policy towards her Jews but without doubt it will strengthen Russian Jewry and reinforce its Judaism and its aspiration for aliya to Israel.

Repercussions of the Conference were strong, not only in the Western communications media, but also - and largely thanks to the Soviet campaign against it - among the Jews in the Soviet Union, to whom it brought the tidings that they were not alone in the battle. Conferences also took place in more limited circles of people dealing with special aspects of the situation of Soviet Jewry; two international Jurists’ conferences were held, one in December 1972 in Rome and one in September 1974 in London. The second World Conference for Soviet Jewry (17 February 1976) was also convened in Brussels, with the participation of some 1,400 delegates and 400 newsmen from all over the world. The final Conference declaration stated:

The delegates to the World Conference for Soviet Jewry in Brussels, representing Jewish communities from the four corners of the world, hereby affirm before our brethren in the Soviet Union: We are with you in your faith, we appreciate your courage, be assured that you are not alone in the battle ... We declare that the Jewish people, which draws strength from the State of Israel, the embodiment of its spirit, will stand fast and will overcome all those who want to stifle its aspirations.

The third World Conference for Soviet Jewry was held in Jerusalem on 15 to 17 March 1983 in the presence of 1,500 delegates from 31 countries, at a time when there was practically a complete standstill of Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union. There were differences of opinion over the choice of the site for the Conference, whether it would not have been wiser to hold it outside Israel so as to reach a wider public. The Conference called for reopening the gates for *aliya*, release of prisoners of conscience and an end to the persecution of Jews who wish to live according to the faith of their fathers, preserve their people’s culture, and learn and teach the Hebrew language.

The Knesset dealt repeatedly with the Jewish question in the Soviet Union in its debates in the years 1969 to 1985. We have already referred to the dramatic occasion when Golda Meir read the letter of the 18 families from Georgia to the Knesset, an occasion which opened a new era in the official Israeli policy on action for Soviet Jewry. The Knesset allocated time for energetic protests over arrests of Zionists and it discussed all the aspects of *aliya*, including ‘drop-out’ and the integration of Soviet Jews in Israel. The main initiators of all the discussion in the Knesset on this subject were Likud Knesset Members Menahem Begin, Geula Cohen and Shneur Zalman Abramov. It is of interest that Knesset Member Geula Cohen kept up her attacks on the Foreign Ministry’s ‘Liaison Office’ even when there was a Likud government. Thus, for example, in a debate on 11 July 1979 she declared, ‘Minister Shostak, you are permitted to read the minutes—I can give you the minutes—you’ll read what Nehemia Levanon said, representing the Office. I think all this secrecy around this ought to end for once. Read what was said to us at the Conference by that Foreign Office..."
representative, and it's the same things he whispers in the Prime Minister's ears, and the Prime Minister accepts his testimony.'

The public campaign for the cause of Soviet Jewry reached its peak in Israel in the 1970s. The Mapo'ez movement had its ranks strengthened by Zionist activists from the Soviet Union and it criticized official Israeli policy. In December 1970 a new association, an 'Action Committee of Soviet Immigrants,' was founded on the initiative of Leah Slovina, a Zionist activist from Riga. In the same month the semi-official 'Public Council on behalf of Soviet Jewry' was founded on the initiative of Golda Meir and Shaul Avigur with government financial support; it was headed by Avraham Harman, Sh. Z. Abramov, Dov Yosef and Ruth Bar-On. The Council has been extremely active in organizing and coordinating Israeli public moves on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

4. STATE OF ISRAEL ACTIVITY - RESULTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

To what extent State of Israel activity was effective on behalf of Soviet Jewry is very hard to assess. The State of Israel's obligation to act is certainly unequivocal, as we have shown, an obligation to manifest solidarity with the Jews of the Soviet Union, even if it seemed clear that it would not have any effective influence. We have seen, nevertheless, that even if the State of Israel's activity came late in the day and was not always very adequate, it did have an important effect on Zionist activists in the Soviet Union on the one hand and on organization and coordination of Western Jewish bodies on the other. Moreover, without Israel's involvement there is no certainty that the American administration would have been prepared to take action as it did on behalf of the Soviet Jewry. The real question remains, therefore, of how one can influence the government of the Soviet Union to change its policy regarding Soviet Jews in general and the question of Jewish emigration in particular. The Soviet Union has succeeded -- and in fair measure with the help of various circles in the West and persons like Dr. Nahum Goldmann in creating an image for itself of being impervious to influence by any external factor regarding any issue it sees as vital. This image is not however supported by the facts. Pressures and influences that are brought to bear can produce favourable results if there is a constellation of favourable factors present together or at least in partial combination on both the internal and the external planes. On the *internal Soviet plane*, the

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best constellation for securing favourable results on the Jewish question is as follows:

1. The existence of a *transition period* in the regime, as in the years 1953 to 1955, 1965 to 1966 and 1983 to 1984, when a struggle for power was going on and policy was not yet set finally.
2. The existence of *circles* with their own interests and with influence in the Soviet administration that press for a solution of the Jewish problem by emigration.
3. The existence of at least *partial positive/positive correlation*, that is to say, a favourable attitude to Israel accompanied by a favourable attitude to Soviet Jews, as was the case in the years 1947 to 1948, exceptional years in the history of the Soviet Union.
4. The existence among Soviet Jews of an ardent aspiration to emigrate and readiness to fight to achieve this aim, as emerged clearly in the years 1969 to 1971.

The following circumstances are particularly important on the *external plane*:

1. The existence of a policy of compromise or détente in international relations and a desire common to both super-Powers to reach agreement in various spheres.
2. The desire of the US Administration to fit the problem of Soviet Jewry into its global policy.

The situation that came into being in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1980s was not conducive to a renewal of Jewish emigration. The period of transition for the regime in the years 1983 to 1984 ended without a new policy being settled on regarding Jewish emigration. The war was intensified on dissident movements in the Soviet Union, including the Zionist movement, which was already declining from the end of the 1970s on. A significant change also occurred in the tendencies current among Soviet Jews themselves under the influence of a number of factors that weakened the urge to emigrate. The serious worsening in international relations from 1979 on, as a result of the Afghanistan and Polish affairs, lessened the bargaining strength of the USA. Then, too, there was a certain measure of fatigue among Israeli and Jewish activists on behalf of Soviet Jewry, resulting from an accumulation of factors --
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the slow pace of emigration with its high ‘fall-out’ rate and the tension this caused in Israel–US relations.

As for the future, the matter will depend largely on changes in the
ensemble of factors described above.

NOTES


2. These sources are: interviews with Zionist activists from the Soviet Union and with people in Israel and the Diaspora concerned with Soviet Jews; material published or issued for publication by institutions and organizations concerned with Soviet Jews in Israel; memoirs; Soviet and Western newspapers and literature, both publicistic and scientific. Surveys of great importance have been carried out in the Soviet Union, in Western countries and in Israel and these have also been utilized; see my article (Note 1 above), ‘National Identity…’ pp.3–19.

3. No research at all has hitherto been published on the subject of Israeli activity on behalf of Soviet Jewry. The subject has been approached, usually very critically regarding the people in Israel concerned with the matter and based on one-sided material, in the following publications: L. Schroeter, The Last Exodus, Jerusalem, 1974; R. Sass, M. Brafman, From Moscow to Jerusalem, New York, 1976; G. Cohen, Ezhan she-Hefer et ha-Omana – Ezhan shel Yasha Kazakov [One who Broke the Silence – the Testimony of Yasha Kazakov], Jerusalem, 1976. As against this, research has been published on the activity of American Jewish organizations on behalf of Soviet Jewry: W. Orbach, The American Movement to Aid Soviet Jews, Amherst, 1979. See too, D. Bland-Spitz, Die Juden und die Jüdische Opposition in der Sowjet-Union, Diessenhofen, 1980.


6. Ibid., p.62.

7. State of Israel Archives, Foreign Ministry, letter to Ehud Avriel, Director-General of the Prime Minister’s Office, 24 October 1951, to be handed to David Ben-Gurion.


10. Album monost ve-tesudos; ha-mishlah ha-tsionit ha-feliot be-Moskva [Album of Pictures and Documents of the Zionist Halutz Delegation to the Moscow Festival], Tel Aviv, 1957. See too, N. Shaham, Pesqhot be-Moskva [Moscow Meeting], Merhavia, 1957.


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18. Ibid., p.197.


21. Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Interview with Golda Meir, Film No. 1349, 22 April 1968 to 10 July 1968.


23. Ibid.


32. Ibid., p.1,826.

33. Ibid., p.1,828.

34. Interview with Shaul Avigur (Note 22, above).


37. State of Israel Archives, Foreign Ministry, Summing up of meeting held at the home of the Foreign Minister, 2 Sept. 1953.


40. See Doh al ha-Piqsha bein Mar A. Mikoian le-Veit Roshevi ha-Vaad ha-Yehudi ha-Amerikai [Report on meeting of Mr. A. Mikoian and heads of the American Jewish Committee], Tel Aviv, 1959.

41. Knesseth Member Moshe Sneh, who had not yet joined MAKI, appeared in the Knesseth as representing a left-wing faction and made a fierce attack on the idea of holding a world conference on Soviet Jewry. See Divrei ha-Knesset, Vol. 15, 1953, pp.820–1.


44. Interview with Binyamin Eliav (see Note 35, above).


46. Dr. Goldmann presents himself as the organizer of the conference and its chairman and in his memoirs he does not mention the fact of his having opposed the idea of the conference. Interview with Binyamin Eliav.


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World Jewish solidarity, encompassing Jews living in Ethiopia, echoes back to antiquity. In spite of some scholarly disagreements, a strong case can be made that the names Cush (Genesis 2:13; 10:16ff; Is. 43:3), Sheba (Genesis 10:7, 28; Kings I 10:1ff; Ez. 27:22ff.), and Havilah (Genesis 2:11; 10:7, 29; 25:18) refer to parts of northern and western ethnic Jews, and indicate ancient Jewish contacts with these lands. Ethiopian legends claim that Jews settled in Ethiopia in King Solomon’s time. According to a midrash based on the intriguing Biblical reference to Moses’ Ethiopian wife (Numbers 12:1) Moses found refuge in Ethiopia after he fled from Pharaoh’s palace. According to Josephus, Moses fought for the Egyptians against the Ethiopians, but conspired with the king’s daughter, whom he later married.

Whatever the veracity of these legends, Jews did migrate to Ethiopia from early times and lived within the borders of the Ethiopian Empire, which included pre-Islamic Yemen during much of the first six Christian centuries. The discovery in Ethiopia of such lost, important Jewish literary works as The Book of Enoch and The Book of Jubilees, the strong Jewish theological flavour of the Ge’ez language, and the overall Jewish moulding of Ethiopian culture attest, as the great German philologist August Dillman asserted already in the nineteenth century, to the unquestionably strong Jewish presence in Ethiopia by early Christian times.¹

Although Jewish presence in Ethiopia began to be eclipsed in the sixth century with the suppression of the Jewish revolt in Yemen by King Kaleb (527–547 C.E.), and before the Talmud had reached all of Jewry, some contact did persist. Some time in the ninth century, a special sense of world Jewish spiritual solidarity emerged as a direct result of the activity of Eldad ha-Dani, a Jew from...