The major preoccupation of the American Jewish community in 1987 was, by far, the State of Israel. Issue after issue came up related to the Jewish state, each in its own way calling into question old assumptions about the American Jewish-Israeli relationship. The fate of Jews in another foreign country—the Soviet Union—was also a high communal priority, as it had been for two decades. And developments within the religious movements, as well as relations between them, continued to attract interest.

Israel and American Jewry

In June of 1987 the American Jewish Committee released Ties and Tensions, a survey by Steven M. Cohen of American Jewish attitudes toward Israel and Israelis. It found that, by and large, American Jews continued to feel very close to Israel. Yet Cohen noted signs of distancing among the religiously less traditional and among the young. He suggested that certain Israeli policies over the preceding decade might have contributed to some disaffection among these groups. If this assessment was correct, events in 1987 could only have served to accelerate the trend. Though few American Jews went as far as Brown University professor Jacob Neusner, who declared, “It’s time to say that America is a better place to be a Jew than Jerusalem” (Washington Post, March 8, 1987), many were viewing Israel more critically than they had before.

The Pollard Affair

On March 4, Chief Judge Aubrey Robinson, Jr., of the U.S. district court for the District of Columbia, sentenced Jonathan Jay Pollard, an American Jew, to life imprisonment for espionage. Pollard had admitted to selling thousands of classified government documents to Israel while employed in naval counterintelligence. His wife, Anne Henderson Pollard, received a five-year sentence for being an accessory to the crime. The stiff jail terms reflected the recommendations of the Justice Department, which asserted that Jonathan Pollard’s “breach of trust” caused “ex-
exceptional” danger to American national security. According to a memorandum filed by federal prosecutors, “the breadth and volume of the U.S. classified information sold by defendant to Israel was enormous, as great as in any reported case involving espionage on behalf of any foreign nation.” Commented Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, “It is difficult for me . . . to conceive of a greater harm to national security.” (See “The United States, Israel, and the Middle East,” elsewhere in this volume.)

For American Jews, who were used to thinking of Israel as a natural ally and close friend of the United States, these revelations came as a shock. The organized Jewish community was virtually unanimous in condemning the Pollards and praising their conviction. Expressing this consensus, Morris Abram, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, asserted that “Pollard pleaded guilty in an American court to a serious crime. He received due process and a just punishment.”

The Pollards had been arrested in November of 1985, with Jonathan Pollard accused of having delivered secret scientific, technical, and military information to the Israeli embassy in Washington every two weeks in exchange for payments totaling around $50,000. Four Israeli officials in the United States who were named as conspirators quickly returned to Israel. In June 1986, in order to avoid standing trial, and with the agreement of federal prosecutors, Pollard pleaded guilty.

At the time of Pollard’s arrest, Israel, hoping to minimize the damage to American-Israeli relations, apologized, denied that the espionage had been authorized by its government, and promised full cooperation with American investigators. During 1986, however, the U.S. Justice Department came to believe that Israel was being less than forthcoming, and that, in fact, it was covering up the involvement of high-level officials. Indeed, Jonathan Pollard himself consistently said that his activities had Israeli government approval. The growing impression that the Israelis did not take this case as seriously as the Americans seemed confirmed when Aviem Sella and Rafael Eitan, two of the Israelis accused of conspiring with Pollard (Sella was about to be indicted by a federal grand jury), were appointed to prestigious new positions in Israel. And when Israel was called upon to return what had been stolen, it gave back just a small portion of the documents, and those were only copies of the originals.

American Jewish leaders warned that Israel’s apparent nonchalance could antagonize Americans and make them less willing to support Israel. Interviewed by the New York Times (March 7), Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, long active in Jewish communal affairs, expressed fear that this episode, coming amid allegations that Israel somehow instigated the Iran-contra fiasco, would add to the perception “that Israelis are so much at the center of the American agenda that they can do whatever they want.” Furthermore, the uncovering of an American Jewish spy for Israel, by possibly resurrecting the old suspicion of Jewish dual loyalty, posed a potential threat to the status of all American Jews. Hyman Bookbinder, the American Jewish Committee’s special representative in Washington, put the matter bluntly: “The fact that he's
Jewish could lead people to conclude erroneously that American Jews are less than 100 percent American citizens."

Jonathan Pollard's explanation of his acts reinforced this fear. Stung by allegations that he had spied for money, Pollard insisted that it was Zionist commitment that motivated him to spy on his own country to benefit the Jewish state. In letters from prison and in interviews, Pollard claimed that the information he provided Israel had to do with sophisticated new weaponry available to its enemies, information it was entitled to receive but which the United States was holding back. Since Israel's very existence was at stake, explained Pollard, he had reasoned that "ein breira"—he had no choice but to spy for Israel.

American Jewish leaders saw only one way to salvage American-Israeli ties and counter any perception of dual loyalty: convincing Israel to cooperate fully in uncovering the truth about the affair. "Israel is under a cloud," Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith told the Washington Post (March 12), "and it could have very serious consequences if the leadership doesn't come to grips with reality." American Jewish organizations vied with each other in sending delegations to Israel to convey this message. Indeed, the ADL and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations got into a nasty tiff over which body had the right to speak for American Jewry to the Israelis on this issue.

Most Israelis, however, even those who considered the Pollard escapade a mistake, could not understand the sense of urgency that the Americans projected. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir at first rejected calls for a special investigation on the ground that the running of Pollard was a "rogue operation" that would never happen again. In March, when he reversed himself and ordered a probe—but one with no judicial powers—Shamir let it be known that this was done just to satisfy American Jews and the American government. Pressure from American Jews also had much to do with forcing Aviem Sella, Pollard's indicted Israeli contact, out of his new job as commander of an important air base and his reassignment as a military instructor.

Putting the best possible face on Israeli policy, American Jewish leaders hailed the decision to hold government and Knesset inquiries and Sella's resignation as indications that democracy was alive and well in Israel, and that the Jewish state intended to uncover the full story. But more bad news kept coming out of Israel. American correspondents stationed there reported overwhelming public sympathy for Pollard. While opinions varied over the wisdom of recruiting an American Jew as a spy, Israelis considered Pollard himself a Jewish hero who had sacrificed himself to save the Jewish state from destruction. A poll conducted by the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot in mid-March found that 90 percent of Israelis thought Israel had a responsibility to help the Pollards. A group calling itself Citizens in Support of the Pollards raised tens of thousands of dollars in Israel to help pay the couple's legal fees.

Simmering differences between American and Israeli Jews over the Pollard affair
burst into open conflict with the publication of an article in the Jerusalem Post (March 10) by Hebrew University political scientist Shlomo Avineri, a respected scholar long active in the Israeli Labor party. Avineri denounced the leaders of American Jewry as cowards, arguing that their excessively emotional response to the Pollard problem reflected their own sense of marginality and insecurity in America. If the United States was not a prejudiced country, why should the conviction of one Jewish spy alarm all the Jews? Why were American Jews so quick to distance themselves from Pollard and assert their own patriotism? Their disproportionate reaction proved, for Avineri, that American Jews felt just as vulnerable to anti-Semitism as all previous Diaspora communities, showing the truth of classical Zionist ideology: outside their own sovereign state, Jews will always be haunted by the specter of Jew-hatred. Contrary to the assumption of American Jewry, America was no exception.

American Jews were quick to respond. Abraham Foxman asserted angrily in an article in the Jerusalem Post (March 17): "If there is any collective neurosis among Jews over the Pollard affair, it exists in Israel, not the United States. It comes from the dissonance of declaring the Pollard scandal a 'rogue operation' and then rewarding the rogues. It's the sense of guilt over using, abusing, and then abandoning Pollard. It's you, not us, whose conscience is troubled by the moral cowardice of the Pollard affair."

Yet not all American Jews agreed with the views of the communal establishment. Prof. Alan M. Dershowitz of Harvard Law School was one of the first to call publicly for a reassessment of the case. In a New York Times op-ed piece (March 18), Dershowitz argued that Jonathan Pollard—who had, after all, confessed and cooperated with the government—should not have received a life sentence, especially since the espionage had been conducted for an ally, not an enemy, and the stolen documents had to do with Israel's regional security, not with global and strategic intelligence. Dershowitz added that "all countries spy on friends and foes alike. Certainly the United States spies on Israel . . . and Israel spies on us. The big news in the Pollard case is that the Israelis got caught." Like Avineri, he attributed American Jewish overreaction to fear of the dual-loyalty charge.

The influential columnist Charles Krauthammer seconded Dershowitz in the pages of the Washington Post (March 20). While allowing that American Jewish leaders acted properly in warning Israel of the potential danger of the Pollard affair for American-Israeli relations, he felt that "the rush of 65 Jewish leaders to Israel bears the sign of more than just an informational visit. There is about it an air of defensiveness bordering on panic." Krauthammer cited approvingly the words of Sen. Daniel Inouye (D., Hawaii): "To suggest that the act of one Jew should be borne by all Jews is an insult."

An April New York Times/CBS poll indicated that 40 percent of American Jews agreed with Dershowitz that Pollard's sentence was too harsh. Yet there was relatively little sympathy for him: 34 percent of American Jews were angry, and 27 percent embarrassed, at what he had done. As if to substantiate the Avineri thesis
about American Jewish anxieties, fully 54 percent of American Jews surveyed feared a rise in anti-Semitism as a result of the affair. But the poll suggested that their concern was ill-founded: just 18 percent of non-Jews even knew that Pollard had spied for Israel, and, when informed of the fact, only 36 percent felt it would cause a rise in anti-Semitism. The percentage of non-Jews who believed that Jews had too much power in the United States registered at 21 percent, just about where it had been before Pollard.

PHILANTHROPY AND ZIONISM

Severe tensions emerged during 1987 between Israel and the American Jewish organizations that help defend and support it. The specific points of conflict—how to allocate American Jewish philanthropy in Israel, the composition and operation of the Jewish Agency, and elections to the World Zionist Congress—reflected a fundamental reassertion by American Jewry of its own values and priorities in relation to the Jewish state.

Over the years, local Jewish federations and individual contributors had become increasingly uneasy about their lack of control over distribution of the money they gave Israel through the United Jewish Appeal–Federation campaign. The money was distributed by the Jewish Agency, a body operating in Israel under the direction of an international governing board, whose activities include immigrant absorption, economic development, and education. Jewish leaders in the United States complained that the allocation process, controlled by Israeli political parties, was not only inefficient and possibly corrupt, but also unfair, since it divided the funds on a partisan basis and ignored worthy causes outside the political mainstream. Especially galling to many non-Orthodox activists was the dearth of funding for Reform and Conservative projects in Israel, which they attributed to an Orthodox stranglehold on allocations for religious institutions. Reflecting the growing mood of disaffection was the mounting popularity of the New Israel Fund, which granted money to Israeli causes not tied into the political system, and the well-publicized decision of the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation in December 1986 to earmark $100,000 directly to projects of its choice in Israel.

The United Jewish Appeal and the American Zionist movement viewed these developments with alarm, fearing that they could undermine the unified approach to providing aid to Israel. Stanley Horowitz, national president of the UJA, called the action of the San Francisco federation "a deviation from a process that has worked on a scale and with a degree of success few human enterprises can match." In January the American Zionist Federation, meeting in Philadelphia, denounced "any action by which public campaign funds of the community are disbursed outside the normal UJA–Federation allocations process, since it tends to divide the community and the unity of the combined campaign."

In March the powerful New York UJA–Federation—which raised fully one-fifth of all American contributions distributed by the Jewish Agency—released a report
on how the Jewish Agency allocated funds to the Jewish religious movements in Israel. The result of a two-month investigation by a committee representing all the movements, the report found that, whereas at least 70 percent of donations in New York came from non-Orthodox sources, non-Orthodox movements in Israel received far less money than the Orthodox. The investigators stopped short of accusing the Jewish Agency of outright discrimination, attributing the situation instead to bureaucratic inertia and the relative indifference of donors about how their money was spent. On the basis of these findings, New York UJA–Federation called for a thorough overhaul and depoliticization of the Jewish Agency.

Under pressure from the Americans, the Jewish Agency took steps to deal with the criticism. Its board of governors recommended that chairman Arye Dulzin—whose reputation had been tarnished in a bank scandal—not serve beyond his current term, which would expire at the end of 1987. It also voted a $1.64-million allocation to the Reform movement in Israel, a step it hoped would end talk of a Reform boycott of the unified fund-raising system.

At the June meeting of the Jewish Agency Assembly in Jerusalem, American Jews pressed for a series of fundamental reforms drawn up by a “Committee of Twelve” prominent figures from the Zionist and philanthropic organizations. These suggestions included the removal of partisan considerations from the Agency, equal partnership between the Zionist movement and Diaspora philanthropists, accountability of officers to the board, and a clear distinction between the staff responsibilities of the Jewish Agency, on the one hand, and the World Zionist Organization, on the other. (The activities of the latter, composed of the national Zionist movements, overlapped in some areas with those of the Agency.)

The Americans got most of what they wanted, losing outright only on the issue of Jewish Agency–WZO staff duplication. The power and determination of the non-Orthodox religious movements achieved passage of two important resolutions: one reiterating a 1986 decision barring Agency funding for non-Zionist—i.e., ultra-Orthodox—religious schools, the other cutting off allocations to any Israeli body that refused to accept Ethiopian immigrants as Jews—a clear slap at the Orthodox rabbis and institutions that questioned the Jewishness of these immigrants.

The same American assertiveness came into play in connection with the World Zionist Congress, which meets once very five years, primarily to allocate its budget and choose half the members of the Jewish Agency’s governing board. Since delegates to the 1982 congress had been appointed, it was now ten years since there had been an election to choose American representatives to what is the only semblance of a worldwide Jewish “parliament.” On May 15 ballots were mailed out to the members of 16 American Zionist organizations; the voters would have until June 30 to select the 152 people who would constitute the American contingent within the 500-member congress. The election system was modeled on that used for the Israeli Knesset: the various movements presented lists of nominees, and each slate would be assigned delegates in proportion to its electoral strength.

Since most of the American Zionist organizations kept less-than-formal records
of membership, a computing firm was hired to match each body's claim of membership against evidence of actual dues-paying members. It was agreed that any organization found to have overstated its membership by more than 7 percent would be penalized by losing delegates in proportion to the magnitude of the discrepancy. Even so, charges filled the air that one or another organization was inflating its membership lists, giving out unsolicited "guest memberships" to induce people to support a particular movement, or using the names and pictures of well-known personalities in its campaign literature without their permission.

These allegations were less important in the long run than the emergence of two relatively new Zionist movements in this election, both of which stressed the issue of religious pluralism. Arza, representing Reform Judaism, won 33 seats, the largest single contingent in the American delegation, and Mercaz, founded by the Conservative movement, won 20. It was clear that many American Jews who had in the past identified with mainstream Zionist movements like Hadassah and the Zionist Organization of America now felt so strongly about the need to combat the Orthodox monopoly in Israel that they opted for the explicitly denominational slates.

Several parties were stripped of delegates for having overstated their membership. The Religious Zionist Movement, made up of the Religious Zionists of America and allied organizations—the only group in the election that explicitly supported the religious status quo in Israel—was the biggest loser in this regard, sacrificing 13 of its 27 delegates. Rabbi Louis Bernstein, RZA board chairman, called the penalty "the greatest fraud since the Great Train Robbery" and warned that the election could mean "a reading of Orthodox Jews out of the American Zionist movement."

The American delegates proceeded to make their voices heard at the congress, which took place in Jerusalem in December. Alllying themselves with other liberal Zionist movements and with the Israeli Labor party, they elected Labor's Simcha Dinitz as the new chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and the WZO, and received important positions in the new administration in return. The importance of the religious pluralism issue to the non-Orthodox members of the American delegation was dramatically illustrated on the final night of the congress, when a proposal was passed favoring "complete equality of rights for all streams of Judaism," although when the Orthodox threatened to secede, the chairman asserted that the resolution did not bind the sovereign State of Israel.

When the congress adjourned in pandemonium, with delegates throwing flower pots at each other, one result was undeniable: American Jews would henceforth have considerably more influence in the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization than in the past.

WHO IS A JEW?

The issue of religious pluralism bedeviled American Jewish-Israeli relations in other spheres besides the World Zionist Congress.

The great gap between the assumptions of Israeli Orthodoxy, on the one hand,
and the attitudes of the majority of American Jews, on the other, was illuminated in an interview with Israel’s chief rabbis—something of a journalistic coup—published in the March issue of *Moment* magazine. Much of the article focused on the question of the Orthodox monopoly over Judaism in Israel, with the two rabbis, Avraham Shapiro (Ashkenazic) and Mordechai Eliahu (Sephardic), making it clear that Reform and Conservative Judaism had no legitimacy in their eyes. To be sure, both men insisted that non-Orthodox Jews were authentically Jewish, and urged them to settle in Israel. But Shapiro said that such “new” forms of Judaism constituted new religions, and that Reform was a “way-station to Christianity.” Eliahu was even more hostile, comparing Reform rabbis to witch doctors and declaring that secular Jews were far preferable to non-Orthodox religious Jews, since the former, unlike the latter, recognized that Orthodoxy was the authentic version of Judaism.

American reaction came quickly. Rabbi Jack Stern, president of Reform’s Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), charged that the chief rabbis were “weakening the Jewish people” by rejecting pluralism. Another Reform leader, Rabbi Daniel Syme, claimed that the rabbis’ “bigotry” reflected an underlying loss of confidence and a realization that “their base of support is crumbling.” Rabbi Benjamin Kreitman, executive vice-president of the United Synagogue of America (Conservative), commented that Shapiro and Eliahu understood neither Jewish law nor talmudic philosophy. Even Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of the Agudath Israel of America (Orthodox), who supported the chief rabbis’ position, considered some of their remarks extreme and uncalled for.

This dispute was not taking place in a vacuum. The Shoshana Miller case that had inflamed passions during 1986 dragged on into 1987. In January Israel’s interior minister Yitzhak Peretz, of the Orthodox Shas party, quit his cabinet post rather than obey the Israeli Supreme Court and register Miller, an American Reform convert to Judaism, as a Jew for the purposes of the Law of Return. At the same time, other Reform and Conservative converts in Israel began to take legal steps to have themselves denoted as Jews on their identity cards.

The Orthodox parties in the Knesset brought up their perennial demand for a change in the procedure for accepting foreign converts as Jews. One type of proposal, which had come up many times in the past, was for an amendment to the Law of Return that would require conversions to be “according to Halakhah” in order to gain acceptance. Another, seemingly more moderate, suggestion was to grant the Israeli chief rabbinate—controlled by the Orthodox—the authority to determine which foreign conversions were valid. In May, 23 national American Jewish organizations protested both ideas vehemently, and in July the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, the umbrella organization for all local federations in the United States, sent a delegation to Israel to lobby against any change. The Knesset defeated the proposals, although one bill to give the rabbinate jurisdiction over conversions came within four votes of passage.

One by-product of the Knesset’s action was a split within American Orthodoxy. The Religious Zionists of America, a modern Orthodox group affiliated with the
National Religious party in Israel, pointed out that nothing was gained by continu-
ally bringing up the "Who is a Jew?" issue when there was no chance of winning.
On the contrary, said the organization's chairman, Rabbi Louis Bernstein, the battle 
had given an incentive to Reform and Conservative Jews to mount an aggressive 
anti-Orthodox campaign. However, the Agudath Israel of America and the Luba-
vitch movement remained firmly committed to a change in the law.

Another outcome of the controversy was a decision by the Council of Jewish 
Federations to circulate a six-point proposal suggesting a program to educate Israe-
lis about the realities of American Jewish religious pluralism and to make American 
Jews more familiar with the Israeli political factors that influence the country's 
approach to religious matters.

In November, at the CJF's General Assembly in Miami, the organization's out-
going president, Shoshana Cardin, made this the primary topic of her address, 
warning that "deep divisiveness and widespread disaffection" would result from any 
change in the Israeli definition of Jewishness. A forum at the General Assembly that 
was devoted to the subject of religious pluralism attracted hundreds of delegates. 
Two of the featured speakers challenged Cardin's position from different perspec-
tives: Rabbi Yedidyah Atlas, spokesman for the Israeli chief rabbis, insisted that 
only Orthodox conversion procedures, by providing a common denominator, could 
keep all Jews unified. Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, a modern Orthodox rabbi from New 
York City opposed to changing the Law of Return, nevertheless criticized the 
involvement of nondenominational American fund-raising agencies in Israel's intern-
al politics.

CONTENTION OVER SOVIET JEWS

The question of what the Israelis called "neshirah," the accelerating tendency of 
Soviet Jewish emigrants who had been given visas by Israel to "drop out" in Vienna 
and come to the United States as refugees, generated open conflict between Israel 
and American Jewry during the year.

With the Soviet government allowing more Jews out, and with good reason to 
believe that the numbers would go even higher, the over-80-percent drop-out rate 
was unacceptable to Israelis of all parties. For them, this was a matter of classical 
Zionist ideology: Israel was the only legitimate homeland for Jews. In addition, beleaguered Israel needed the demographic help and technical expertise that these 
refugees could provide.

The Israelis did not mince words. Moshe Arens, the cabinet minister in charge 
of Soviet Jewry issues, told a gathering of American Jews in March that "a strong 
Israel is synonymous with Jewish survival," and "if there were to be a large-scale 
emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union and the majority were not to go to Israel, 
it would be a tragedy of historic proportions for the Jewish people." He went so far 
as to accuse American Jews of securing refugee status for the Soviet Jews in order 
to "entice Jews from all over the world to come to the U.S." instead of to Israel.
Minister of Absorption Yaacov Tzur warned that the continued misuse of Israeli visas for travel to America could lead the Soviets to clamp down once again on emigration.

Prime Minister Shamir met with President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz in an effort to have them withdraw the "refugee" designation from Soviet Jews (and thus make it harder for them to enter the United States). He argued that the existence of a Jewish state ready and willing to welcome any Jew made it absurd to call Jews who had gotten out of the USSR refugees. But the American officials turned him down, largely because the American Jewish community was virtually united against him.

American Jewish leaders saw the situation very differently from the Israelis. To be sure, they wanted as many Soviet Jews as possible to go to Israel. But they felt that refugees should be able to choose freely where they wanted to live and not be coerced to settle in Israel, even if they had Israeli visas. Restriction of entry to the United States conjured up painful memories of an earlier period when desperate Jews were turned away from American shores.

One Israeli proposal for resolving the impasse was to convince the Soviet Union to allow flights from its territory to Israel, with a stopover in Eastern Europe, where tighter controls would eliminate the possibility of neshirah. American Jews objected, arguing that the lack of the drop-out option could dissuade many Soviet Jews from leaving altogether. The Americans favored a two-track system, with flights directly to the West and flights to Israel. However, even assuming that the Soviets would allow this, there were complications. Would the United States permit Soviet Jews who went straight to Israel to claim refugee status later, if they changed their minds and opted for America? The Israelis vehemently opposed such an arrangement. And what of those Soviet Jews in Israel who had close relatives in the United States? Should the principle of family reunification override Zionist sensibilities, enabling these Jews, at least, to retain the refugee designation? There were no easy answers.

By year's end, complicated negotiations involving Israel, the United States, the Soviet Union, and other parties resulted in an agreement in principle to route flights from the USSR through Romania to Israel, with the actual details still to be worked out. The underlying difference in outlook between Israelis and American Jews remained unresolved.

Defending Israeli Policies

At least since 1967, the organized American Jewish community had made the support of Israeli foreign and defense policies in the court of American public opinion a central priority. In 1987 that became an increasingly difficult task.
IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR

Fallout from the Iran-contra affair threatened Israel's reputation throughout the year. (See "The United States, Israel, and the Middle East," elsewhere in this volume.) Certain people involved in the scandal and a number of politicians insinuated that Israelis had not only acted as facilitators for the American sale of arms to Iran—which no one denied—but had masterminded the scheme to funnel proceeds of the sales to the Nicaraguan contras, in defiance of the American Congress. While the airing of such allegations raised fears in Jewish circles that Israel might be made a scapegoat for the bungled operation, in the end there was no clear evidence linking Israel to contra funding, and American Jewish organizations did not have to confront the issue publicly.

SOUTH AFRICA

American Jewry was not as fortunate in regard to Israel's ties with South Africa. For some time, Israel had been criticized for its heavy trade and military cooperation with the apartheid regime, the latter in contravention of a UN boycott on the supply of arms to South Africa. Although Israel justified these ties by citing similar South African relationships with other Western democracies, as well as continuing black African hostility toward the Jewish state, American Jews felt morally uneasy, especially since black Americans brought it up when Jews complained about anti-Semitism in their community.

The Israel-South Africa connection gained prominence when Congress required the administration to report by April 1987 on recipients of American aid who supplied military matériel to Pretoria; those nations deemed to have done so would have their aid cut off. Hoping to avert such a fate, Israel announced in March that it would not enter into any new military contracts with South Africa. It said nothing about the status of existing contracts.

Leaders of the congregational bodies of Reform and Conservative Judaism in America urged the Israelis to go further and cut all military links. Albert Vorspan, director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Commission on Social Action, warned that American support for Israel was already declining because of the Jewish state's implication in the perpetuation of apartheid. "I think Israel has to look beyond tomorrow," he added, "because the present South African regime is not going to last beyond tomorrow." Benjamin Kreitman, executive vice-president of the United Synagogue of America, declared that "for Israel to be an armaments manufacturer and trader is mind-boggling. And certainly to send it to South Africa is a fearsome thing and gives the wrong signal."

Other American Jewish communal agencies took a more nuanced position. While arguing on pragmatic grounds for an end to Israeli military cooperation with the South Africans, Allan Kagedan, an American Jewish Committee policy analyst, noted that Israel was being singled out unfairly by pro-PLO elements eager to
discredit its moral standing. Said the Committee’s Washington representative, Hyman Bookbinder, “If we have to disagree with Israeli policy, we’ll disagree. But we want to still put it in context, in perspective.”

After Jewish pledges to support increased aid to black Africa induced black members of Congress to tone down the congressional apartheid report’s language about Israel, Jews turned their attention to their own South African dilemma—whether Americans should divest holdings in South Africa as a way of striking at the apartheid system. On this issue, moral abhorrence at racism and the desire to maintain good relations with American blacks conflicted with the overwhelming opposition of the South African Jewish community to divestment.

Once again, the UAHC took a far-reaching stand, supporting not only divestment but also American trade sanctions against South Africa; indeed, the Reform movement’s Central Conference of American Rabbis sold off the assets in its members’ pension fund that had been invested in South Africa. To be sure, neither these organizations nor the New Jewish Agenda, which also backed divestment, believed that this approach would necessarily succeed in overturning apartheid. Rather, as Albert Vorspan put it, “We are at a moment of truth. Constructive engagement did not work, and now international pressures and economic pressures are being attempted. They have a chance of working.”

The major nondenominational Jewish organizations again staked out a more moderate position. The Anti-Defamation League opposed divestment on the ground it could hurt most the very blacks in whose name it was advocated. The AJCommittee agreed with this assessment, although it did back limited economic sanctions against South Africa. It also urged American companies operating there to adhere to the so-called Sullivan Principles of equal employment practices and special training programs for nonwhites.

Interest in Israel’s policy toward South Africa peaked again in June, when the Israeli government decided to follow the advice of a specially appointed committee and honor existing military contracts with Pretoria, a step that embarrassed liberal Jewish members of Congress eager to maintain a close working relationship with black colleagues. In July the UAHC issued a highly critical report on Israel-South Africa ties, which, it claimed, were far more extensive than South Africa’s relations with other nations—an assertion that other Jewish organizations disputed.

American Jewry became a battleground in 1987 for the conflicting approaches to the peace process of the two major components of Israel’s “unity” government, Labor and Likud. Since most American Jews were used to backing the Israeli government whatever its point of view, the spectacle of a divided Israel, with each side seeking American Jewish support, led to considerable confusion.

On September 21 the American Jewish Congress announced its backing for an international peace conference on the Middle East, a decision that made the front
The outcome of a visit by a 17-member task force to Israel during the summer, this statement set the organization squarely on the side of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of the Labor party, and against Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Likud, who opposed such a conference. Reactions to the AJCongress’s statement varied. The Herut Zionists of America, affiliated with Shamir’s party, blasted “this so-called Congress, who was elected by no one” for trying “to dictate Israeli foreign policy.” Morris Abram was more circumspect, noting that it was ultimately up to the people of Israel to decide policy for themselves. Albert Chernin, executive director of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), argued that the AJCongress ought to have conveyed its views privately to Israeli officials rather than broadcast them in the Times.

Congress president Theodore Mann explained that the task-force members had become convinced in Israel that the Jewish state simply could not go on ruling a large, hostile Arab minority and remain a democratic state. “I don’t see AJCongress as being at war with the Israeli government,” he said. “There is no official stance in Israel. The Israeli government has no position on an international conference.” Both Mann and the group’s executive director, Henry Siegman, claimed to be surprised at how little criticism their statement had evoked, and drew the conclusion that the other major Jewish organizations, though afraid to admit it publicly, really agreed with them. Emboldened by the the AJCongress move, Shimon Peres started to campaign openly for additional American Jewish support for an international peace conference. Addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations in New York on the night of October 1, he urged his audience to shed its traditional reluctance to intervene and to “decide for yourselves” on a peace strategy. If American Jewry felt justified in intervening on “Who is a Jew?” asked Peres, why the reticence about the peace process?

UAHC president Alexander Schindler was the only person in the room who announced support for the Peres plan. Abraham Foxman of the ADL warned that American Jewish intervention in the formation of Israel’s foreign policy might “create discord within the American Jewish community and destroy the effectiveness of the united Jewish community on behalf of Israel.” Bert Gold of the AJCommittee remarked, “I would be a little more cautious than Peres. American Jews have developed a nose about where and when it is proper to intervene. It is pretty much sacrosanct that the Israeli government has to make the decisions on basic security issues.” Yet shortly thereafter, Gold’s own organization endorsed the idea of an international conference, as did the UAHC, and both denied that they were interfering in Israel’s affairs.

Prime Minister Shamir did not stand idly by as his rival sought the support of American Jewry. Immediately after Peres’s appearance at the presidents’ conference, Shamir called it a “dangerous precedent” for American Jews to dissent from Israel’s foreign policy. When the prime minister visited the United States in November, he gave a series of speeches that drew large and enthusiastic crowds. Making light of the demographic argument for ceding territory, he said in New York,
"When the first pioneers came to Eretz Israel at the end of the last century, the Jewish population was but a handful. We were still a minority when the State was declared in 1948. . . . Throughout our long history, our strength lay in our faith in ourselves, in our strong conviction in the justice of our cause, and not in our numbers or our political power." Before returning to Israel, Shamir told the presidents' conference, "The sooner the international conference is removed from the agenda, the closer we'll be to peace."

The international conference was indeed removed from the agenda—by the outbreak of Palestinian violence in Gaza and the West Bank early in December. As Israeli efforts to quell the disturbances produced a rising toll of casualties and no prospect of calm, Israel's image in the United States suffered, especially in the media, and many American Jews agonized over the situation.

American Jewish groups that had sympathized with the Peres approach to peace now tended to criticize the Israeli response to the uprising and to urge talks over the status of the territories. Alexander Schindler of the UAHC urged Israel to "act to defuse the violence, to restore order and to actively seek and find appropriate partners for the process of negotiation." AJCongress's Henry Siegman said that, while Israel was justified in putting down the violence, "it is not at all clear that the deadly force used by the Israeli army was in every instance an appropriate response," and he reiterated his organization's view that only an international conference could bring peace. The American Committee for Israel Peace Center, an affiliate of an Israel-based organization, went further, calling on Israel to refrain "from acts of force that will aggravate the present situation and increase friction with the local population." Signing this statement were such well-known American Jews as author Leonard Fein, former cabinet member Philip M. Klutznick, and noted feminist Letty Cottin Pogrebin.

American Jewish organizations that had not previously endorsed an international peace conference put the onus for the bloodshed on the Arabs. Chairman of the presidents' conference Morris Abram charged that the uprising had been "planned, instigated and incited by Palestinian terrorists led by the PLO and Moslem fundamentalist groups," although he did call for talks between the Jewish state and "Palestinian representatives who are prepared to live in peace with Israel." As far as the ADL was concerned, "peace in the Middle East would be better served if those who are condemning the violence would also press the Arab states and the PLO to recognize Israel's existence." When the U.S. State Department criticized the Palestinian rioters and the Israeli steps against them in equal measure, mainstream Jewish leaders rushed to Israel's defense. B'nai B'rith president Seymour Reich suggested that the United States "learn to tell the difference between those who want to burn the house down and those who are seeking to protect it."

On December 27 more than 25 Jewish groups sent representatives to meet with State Department officials about the Palestinian uprising. After the session, Abram told reporters that its purpose had been to convince the administration that the Palestinians "are not college campus protestors. They come with Molotov cocktails.
and gasoline bombs." He did grant that Israel had an "image problem" and that "it would be better if Israel had better equipment for dealing with the riots."

Indeed, since the beginning of the uprising, the presidents' conference and other American Jewish organizations that publicly defended Israel's role had also been sending urgent private messages to Israeli leaders, urging them to moderate their military response and come to grips with the larger task of settling the Palestine problem. While these private communications played a role in the Israeli decision to minimize the use of live ammunition, the American Jewish leaders were not satisfied. Though few of them were willing to be quoted on the subject, as 1987 drew to an end, many told reporters, off the record, that the Likud policy of maintaining the status quo in the territories had reached a dead end. Alexander Schindler, who had never hidden his dovish sentiments, commented, "The explosion Shimon Peres has been talking about has finally happened. This situation cannot continue long."

**Soviet Jewry**

Concern for the welfare of Jews in the Soviet Union had long been second only to the security of Israel on the public agenda of the American Jewish community. Still, there were divisions within the community over strategy. The National Conference on Soviet Jewry tended to take a comparatively moderate line toward the Soviet regime, while the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews and the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry were more outspoken and confrontational. The major national Jewish organizations usually took positions somewhere between the two poles.

At the beginning of 1987, Soviet Jewry activists were pessimistic. Despite the emigration of Natan Sharansky and several other well-known Soviet Jews in 1986, the total number of Jews who had been allowed to leave during the year was a meager 914, the lowest in a long time. Furthermore, there was considerable fear that the growing rapprochement between the two superpowers could lead the United States to subordinate the issue of human rights in order to further its ties with the Soviets.

When Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldridge announced the lifting of a ban on exports of oil- and gas-drilling equipment to the Soviet Union, in January, the divisions in the organized Jewish community came to the fore. Both the AJCommittee and the AJCongress commented that a pledge of freer emigration should have been extracted in return for this concession. But the National Conference on Soviet Jewry declined to make it an issue. Instead, it urged that American companies doing business in the USSR exert their influence on behalf of human rights there.

Rumors began circulating in February of a fundamental change in Soviet policy. In March, Morris Abram and World Jewish Congress president Edgar Bronfman returned from a trip to Moscow and confirmed the news. Soviet officials told them that they would allow the emigration of 10,000-12,000 Jews and ease restrictions on Jewish life within the country. In addition, according to Abram, the Soviets promised that "substantially all refuseniks and their families will be free to go to
Israel within the year with the exception of cases in which national security claims may be legitimately made."

The prospect of a mass exodus of Soviet Jews had two immediate ramifications. For one, it increased tensions between Israelis and American Jews over the drop-out issue (see the discussion above). For the Americans, it also reopened the controversy over the Jackson-Vanik Amendment that barred most-favored-nation trading status for the Soviet Union: how high would the emigration rate have to go to merit revocation or waiver of the relevant provision—a step that would be of enormous help to the Soviet economy. While some American Jewish leaders suggested a carefully calibrated lifting of trade restrictions to match Soviet performance on emigration, the more militant groups, as well as a number of prominent former refuseniks, insisted that no concessions be made until the yearly emigration rate reached 50,000.

The rift within the Soviet Jewry movement was dramatically displayed in May at the Solidarity Sunday rally for Soviet Jewry in New York City. Natan Sharansky, a scheduled speaker, charged that Abram and Bronfman had been taken in by the Kremlin; once Jackson-Vanik was lifted, he predicted, the Soviets would clamp down once again on Jewish emigration. Former prisoner-of-conscience Yosef Mendelevich then grabbed the microphone, uninvited, and shouted to the crowd, "I know you have your leaders. You elected them. But don't send them anymore to Moscow. They don't know how to deal with the Russians." He called for an American trade embargo on the Soviet Union until freedom of emigration was a reality.

By June, Abram, and, to a lesser extent, Bronfman, expressed disappointment that the Soviet regime had not yet begun to carry out its earlier assurances. Abram charged that the Soviets "are trying to buy respectability at a bargain rate. They want to be praised for letting some of the high visibility cases out, for emptying the jails, except the big jail that is the Soviet Union." Bronfman commented, "I don't know what we can do except keep on talking, pushing and struggling," though he did feel that "things are a bit better than they were."

Things continued to get better. In September the last Jew still in prison for Jewish activity was released from Siberia, and reports from the Soviet Union indicated a decline in government interference with Jewish cultural and educational activity. Nevertheless, Morris Abram cautioned an AJCommittee audience that "the total emigration figures for this year will be only one-seventh of those under Brezhnev in 1979."

WASHINGTON MOBILIZATION

Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev was scheduled to arrive in Washington on December 7 for meetings with President Reagan. In a rare display of unity, 50 national Jewish organizations and 300 local federations and community councils joined forces to organize a mobilization in the nation's capital on the day before the
summit meeting that, its sponsors hoped, would focus attention on the USSR's human-rights and emigration policies. Only certain Orthodox elements refused to join in. A key to the success of this project was the choice of David Harris, the AJCommittee's Washington representative, as mobilization coordinator. Harris, who was not publicly identified with either the National Council or its critics, yet had been closely involved with the Soviet Jewry agenda, enjoyed the confidence of both camps.

As the day of the mobilization approached, its fragile unity was threatened when Morris Abram told a New York Times reporter: "The demonstration will be in support of American policy. . . .I have nothing but respect for the way they've been handling this." Glenn Richter, head of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, reacted strongly: "It is incomprehensible to me that a man of intelligence and political acumen like Morris Abram is signaling this position of weakness to the Soviets and the Administration." Richter said that while his group would not do anything to disrupt the harmony required for the mobilization, it might "stage peaceful arrests" of its members on the following day "to get our point across."

The mobilization was strikingly successful and unmarred by ideological conflict. With local federations stimulating grass-roots participation and footing part of the bill, and Washington staffers of national organizations handling the logistics, over 200,000 demonstrators from all over the country turned up in Washington to see and hear former refuseniks, American Jewish leaders, prominent politicians, and popular entertainers. Stephen Solender, executive vice-president of the New York UJA-Federation, said, "It was beyond my expectations. I can't tell you how many calls I've been getting from people who participated and felt that this was one of the most extraordinary Jewish experiences in their lives."

After this high point, the actual Gorbachev-Reagan talks were a letdown, accomplishing virtually nothing to help Soviet Jews. Again the American Soviet Jewry movement had to wrestle with the question of whether to advocate linkage of closer American-Soviet economic ties to the human-rights issue. The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews decided to back the proposed Kemp-Roth bill barring private bank loans to the Soviet Union until it eased internal repression; the National Council for Soviet Jewry remained uncommitted on the measure, and the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry went so far as to urge a boycott of American companies doing business with Moscow.

The Religious Movements

Recrimination and invective among the various streams of religious Judaism in the United States abated noticeably in 1987. To an extent, the struggle over religious pluralism in Israel functioned as a lightning rod, diverting interdenominational animosities away from the American setting. But there was also a palpable cooling of rhetoric on the part of all the groups, a conscious stepping-back from confrontation.
This mood was captured in a joint statement issued by the presidents of the Rabbinical Council of America (Orthodox), the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative), and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform). Released in early April, so that it might be read from pulpits on the Sabbath before Passover, this message asserted that, whatever the issues dividing Jews, "we have a common past, shared experiences. We have suffered together at the hands of tyrants from Pharaoh to Hitler, who made no distinction between Jews whether they were Orthodox, Conservative or Reform, whether religious or secular, whether Zionist, non-Zionist or anti-Zionist, whether committed or assimilated." And, the rabbis emphasized, "There is nothing that prevents us from dialogue and cooperation on matters of mutual concern."

The spirit of cooperation brought concrete progress in the nation's largest Jewish community on an intermovement issue of great importance—religious divorce. On May 13 the New York Board of Rabbis, its membership encompassing rabbis of all the movements, agreed on a program to deal with the problem of civilly divorced Jews who failed to obtain a get (religious divorce) and whose subsequent marriages were thus considered adulterous, and their children illegitimate, according to traditional Jewish law. The board called on rabbis to counsel congregants going through a divorce to arrange a get as well, suggested that synagogues enact sanctions against members who refuse to participate in get proceedings, and urged the use of prenuptial agreements in which both spouses promise that, in the event the marriage breaks up, they will go through a Jewish divorce. Board president Haskel Lookstein, an Orthodox rabbi, praised his non-Orthodox colleagues for subordinating their own theological preferences to the cause of Jewish unity. "Because our commitment to the Jewish people as a whole transcends whatever adjective may be prefixed to our interpretation of Judaism, we acted as one," he said.

Another straw in the wind augured well for the future of cooperation between the movements. Although Reform Judaism did not consider traditional Halakhah binding and stood for personal autonomy in matters of observance, its rabbis voted 91 to 61 to invite the other denominations to explore the creation of a joint bet din (rabbinical court) that might settle intermovement controversies over matters of personal status in Jewish law.

DENOMINATIONAL ISSUES

Each of the Jewish religious denominations went through its own internal strains during 1987.

For the Orthodox, differences between moderates and the so-called right wing continued to center on whether, and to what extent, there should be relations with non-Orthodox forms of Judaism, and with other religions. For extreme traditionalists, the other movements constituted illegitimate forms of Judaism that could not
be legitimized. Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik expressed this point of view at the annual convention, in May, of the Rabbinical Council of America, an organization associated with "modern" or "centrist" Orthodoxy. He attacked the pre-Passover unity statement: "What kind of common dialogue can there be between Jews of authentic faith and Conservative and Reform rabbis?" He carefully differentiated between non-Orthodox Jews and their form of religion: "I'm willing to risk my life to save the lives of Reform and Conservative leaders as individuals. But should the movements be entitled to recognition?"

Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, in contrast, cited the example of the New York Board of Rabbis' resolution on get to show that cooperative efforts with the other movements could be fruitful. He condemned Orthodox isolationism, urging joint action with the other movements on conversion and other religious matters. "We're not doing anything," he complained, "we can't just sit back."

A similar debate arose over the question of Orthodox participation in meetings with Pope John Paul II in Rome and Miami (see "Intergroup Relations," elsewhere in this volume). Gilbert Klaperman, an Orthodox rabbi, attended the Rome meeting in late August and was slated to be the Jewish spokesman when the pope came to Miami in September. But the Rabbinical Council of America, influenced by rabbis ideologically opposed to religious dialogue, vetoed his participation. Angry and bitter, Klaperman charged that his organization had been "maneuvered by some extremist people. . . . To have an Orthodox rabbi make the presentation would have raised the position of the Orthodox 100 percent. But they just couldn't do it."

In the Conservative movement, the issue of female cantors was resolved when the Jewish Theological Seminary announced that it would grant cantorial diplomas to women. Although a similar decision had previously been taken for rabbis, the traditional role of the cantor as representative of the congregation in prayer had created greater halakhic difficulties for those seeking equality of the sexes.

The decision came in for heavy criticism from the Union for Traditional Conservatism, a group that had been established in 1983 in opposition to what it saw as a drift away from tradition within Conservatism. Rabbi Ronald Price, the union's executive director, charged that the step could not be reconciled with Jewish law. "Before we begin tampering with tradition," he added, "let us all look inward carefully and make sure that what we are asking of the tradition is a result of our commitment to living it."

It was not an issue of Jewish law, but one of power, that exercised Conservative leaders at the biennial convention of the United Synagogue of America in November. Franklin Kreutzer, the organization's president, publicly criticized his movement for failing to allocate sufficient authority to lay leadership. The rabbis were not doing enough, he said. "Being a rabbi doesn't make one a deity. We don't want rabbis to lower their halakhic standards, but rabbis need to come down from the bimah and deal with the real human problems that exist in the community. . . ."

Focusing on two issues of particular concern to the laity, the delegates followed Kreutzer's lead and passed resolutions providing for binding arbitration in cases of
disputes between rabbis and congregations, and calling for greater lay representation on joint lay-rabbinic commissions.

The Reform movement continued its ongoing internal debate over how to balance a modernist theology with the traditional teachings and practices of Judaism. Its leaders continued to advocate support for progressive social causes, such as help for AIDS victims, alleviating poverty, and banning nuclear weapons. Its Central Conference of American Rabbis even debated, but deferred action on, a proposal to ordain gay rabbis. At the same time, many in the movement called for a return to greater traditionalism. The 1983 resolution on patrilineal descent, recognizing as Jews—even without conversion—individuals with one Jewish parent, father or mother, so long as they identified publicly with the Jewish community, was still opposed by a significant minority of Reform rabbis. One of them, Eugene Lipman, newly elected president of the CCAR, said in January, "Where children of mixed marriages are concerned, I want them to be Jews for the whole world. Since the traditional community is never going to accept patrilineality, this means conversion, not just changing the definitions." Indeed, Lipman always had three Orthodox colleagues sign the certificates of his own converts, ensuring their universal acceptance as Jews.

Even among those satisfied with the patrilineal rule, there was widespread unhappiness over a lack of religious seriousness in the movement. Alexander Schindler put the matter bluntly: "As liberal Jews, we assert our autonomy and the right to choose. But all too often we choose nothing, or observe haphazardly. Because we make no demands on our congregants and constituents, except financial, we give substance to the perception by some that Reform Judaism is a religion of convenience." He advocated greater ritual observance as the way for Reform Jews to live lives of holiness.

A similar problem plagued the Reform educational system. With few committed Reform Jews as teachers, complained Rabbi Bernard Zlotowitz of the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues, "we have teachers who don't believe. We have Orthodox teachers in our schools who are opposed to what we teach." The Reform movement, he said, should strive to produce "people who can transmit love of the sacred word."

To some extent, these concerns reflected two disturbing findings of a survey of Reform lay leaders, issued in November. Even though patterns of ritual observance had risen—except for observance of kashrut—there had been a fall off in "associational" Jewishness: fewer Reform Jews lived in Jewish neighborhoods, had many Jewish friends, or were concerned with Jewish communal issues. An apparent gap between attitudes toward intermarriage and behavior also challenged the movement. Even though most of those surveyed said they opposed intermarriage, only 4 percent did not allow their children to date non-Jews.

The small Reconstructionist movement appeared to be redefining itself with the selection of Rabbi Arthur Green as president of its rabbinical college in Philadelphia. Green, a product of the 1960s Jewish counterculture and an eminent scholar
of Jewish mysticism, seemed to many observers far removed from the scientifically oriented rationalism that had animated the movement's founder and chief ideologist, Mordecai Kaplan. At his inauguration in November, Green called for greater attention to ritual practice, Jewish study, and knowledge of the Hebrew language within Reconstructionism.

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN