



Foreword

It is hard to believe that the JPPI is publishing its 10th annual assessment of the situation and dynamics of the Jewish people. This flagship project began as an effort to create a baseline for establishing the status and well-being of different Jewish communities around the world. Its aim, however, was to use that baseline not just for comparative purposes but to be able to make recommendations for actions that could arrest decline in some communities and promote thriving in others. Each assessment offered judgments about how Israel was doing geopolitically, and where it faced challenges as well as opportunities. The relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, what was happening demographically in both, and the general direction of Jewish identity, all figured prominently in the earlier assessments.

A few years ago the Institute developed an interesting methodology for measuring how Israel and the Jewish world were doing. It sought to measure whether the trends were positive or negative in five dimensions: geopolitics, demography, identity, communal bonds, and material resources. Not surprisingly, this year's assessment offers a mixed picture. Some of these

are tending toward the slightly negative and some toward the slightly positive. Israeli demographics appear favorable because of higher birthrates and increased potential of Aliyah from Europe – which reflects negative pressures there. Jewish identity, especially in the United States, is tending somewhat negatively because of a weakening sense of “belonging and commitment to the Jewish people” among the younger demographic. Communal bonds are strengthening given stronger commitments to enhanced dialogues.

Geopolitically, the assessment also tends toward a more negative conclusion. We take the analysis that produces this conclusion seriously but also feel that it should be evaluated carefully. Israel faces increasing unknowns in the region. Egypt's future will take a long time to sort out. Whether the election of President Sisi will put Egypt on a more stable footing remains to be seen.

Syria will be a magnet for jihadis worldwide as long as Bashar al Assad is there – and his recent election and the all-out Iranian backing for him makes it likely that he can rule over western Syria for some time to come. The ongoing war in Syria, with its terrible humanitarian consequences,

will create new pressures on Jordan, and Jordan's stability remains critical to Israel's well-being. It also points to another reality in the region. Hezbollah is reluctant to challenge Israel when it is consumed in Syria – and this proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia will not end anytime soon.

Recent polling of 18-24 year olds throughout the region, the segment that drove the Arab Awakening three years ago, shows a very different mindset today. There is much less interest, than a few years ago in promoting regime change and much more interest in employment and their economic betterment.

With so much of the region internally consumed, there are two broad implications to keep in mind. First, Israel is not the preoccupation of most regional actors today. Most Arab leaders have their own needs and priorities and the Palestinians are currently not a priority of any in the region. True, the conflict with the Palestinians puts Israel on the defensive internationally, and, as the assessment points out, has an impact on the views of younger Jews toward Israel. But solving this conflict is not a game-changer in the region – and upheaval will be the norm for the foreseeable future.

Second, it is a fact that there is tension today between the American and Israeli positions on Iran and the peace issue and it must be managed. But it is also true that the prospects for a more comprehensive deal with the Iranians are not high – at least in the near term. Will the Obama administration and Israel diverge so clearly if

there is no deal? And, just because the current positions may be different on an acceptable deal, is it a given that if an agreement actually materializes, the differences cannot be managed? We are not so sure. Similarly, on the question of Israeli-Palestinian peace, the administration may well see the settlement issue as compounding the effort Secretary Kerry made, but it is neither indifferent to Abu Mazen's having not responded to the principles that were offered to him nor to the reconciliation deal he signed with Hamas. At this point, we don't know whether Palestinian elections will actually take place – and if they do, what the American reaction to them is likely to be. If Hamas does not alter any of its positions on recognition and violence, the American posture will be unlikely to differ from Israel's.

When taken with the prospects of continuing upheaval in the region and Israel being one country whose stability can be counted on, the potential for ongoing cooperation between the U.S. and Israel remains strong. None of this is to say that Israel can afford to be complacent or not attend to the Palestinian issue. Nor is it to say that if Israel's settlement policies remain unchanged they will not impose a high cost on Israel internationally. It is to say that all the regional turmoil gives Israel a real opportunity to position itself differently. Like it or not, the impediment to that is Israel's settlement policy. By the way, not its actual policy, meaning where it actually builds, but the impression that is left internationally that Israel is building in a way that rules out the possibility of a two-state solution. If Israel's leaders were to announce that they would build only in

what they think will be Israel and not build in what they consider will be part of the Palestinian state, that could create a big difference. While politically difficult for the Israeli government, it is important to weigh the political costs of such a changed posture publicly with the strategic benefits.



In the past year JPPI has played a significant role in strengthening the Diaspora-Israel dialogue. Minister of Justice Livni launched a legislative effort to strengthen Israel as both a Jewish and democratic state. She asked Prof. Ruth Gavison, a well-respected Israeli professor of law, to provide expert advice on this ambitious effort, and she, in turn, empowered JPPI to enlist the views of the Jewish Diaspora.

JPPI conducted a remarkable and unprecedented outreach effort in dozens of communities in the United States and Canada, but also in Europe and Latin America. Some 40 different seminars were held, along with questionnaires and analysis of other research. Diaspora Jews do not see a contradiction between Israel as a Jewish state and Israel as a democratic state. They see the two as complementary. As Israel ponders changes to its Basic Laws, it should consider carefully the views of the Diaspora to assure it does not compromise standards of equality and tolerance, which our study found crucial for Diaspora Jews. World Jewry fully appreciates the difficulties Israel faces in a hostile region with major security threats, but a majority of Diaspora Jews does not see this as a justification for Israel lowering its own principles of democracy and adherence to human rights.

In addition, the Diaspora feels increasingly comfortable with voicing objections to non-security issues relating to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, for example, with the monopoly of the Orthodox rabbinate in Israel over issues of marriage, divorce and conversion. Many non-Orthodox Jews feel disenfranchised religiously in the Jewish state they so strongly support. This criticism is often rooted in democratic, pluralistic values, which are essential for Jews in the Diaspora, living as minorities in their countries.

At bottom, Diaspora Jews are positive and optimistic about Israel, and see greater attachment of young Jews to Judaism as based, in part, on visits to Israel, such as through the Taglit-Birthright program.

Beginning this year, JPPI's annual assessments will focus deeply on one of the five dimensions described earlier. In 2014 we pay special attention to Jewish identity in the United States, by far the home of the largest Jewish Diaspora community. This largely results from the publication of the Pew Research Center's survey of U.S. Jews, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," the most important study of American Jewry in a decade, and the first by a major, respected, non-Jewish group. It has engendered great concern and controversy within the Jewish community. Some see it as showing a community in decline while others see reason for optimism in its findings.

According to Pew, there are about 6.7 million American Jews – consisting of 5.3 million adults (both "Jews by religion" and those who consider themselves "Jews of no religion") and 1.3 million

children in households with a Jewish adult who are being raised Jewish or partly Jewish. This is far higher than previous demographic studies have indicated.

But the Pew findings should be a wake-up call: the division of the American Jewish enterprise that is disengaging is growing at the expense of the engaged core. While it is a positive development that there are over a million more American Jews than previous surveys indicated a decade ago, the birthrates of the Jewish population are at best at simple replacement levels, compared to the more rapidly growing general population.

Further, the growth of a large population that considers themselves “Jews of no religion,” with a thin sense of belonging to the Jewish people and little attachment to the State of Israel represents a long-term challenge to the continued influence of American Jewry. While this group is 22% of adult Jews, compared to 78% who consider themselves “Jews by religion,” it represents almost a third of the younger group of Jews born after 1980.

The Pew survey should add urgency to the imperative to strengthen the core of engaged Jews, while reaching out to the periphery. For the core, that means emphasizing Jewish education, particularly full-time Jewish Day School education, but also improving after school, synagogue based programs. A major barrier to day schools is the very high cost.

The segment of the Jewish community most deeply engaged in Jewish life must make it a priority to reach out to the part that is drifting

away, or the entire Jewish enterprise in the U.S. will be progressively weakened over the course of the 21st century.

At the same time, we must adjust to the reality of out-marriage by reaching out to intermarried couples to make them part of the Jewish community. The Jewish communities and State of Israel should allocate a small amount of resources for pilot and experimental programs aimed at rebuilding the Jewish identity of this group.

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The 2014 JPPI Annual Assessment also highlights a growing problem: the rise of anti-Semitism in parts of Europe, 70 years after the end of World War II and the Shoah. In the May 24 European Union parliamentary elections, far-right populist and xenophobic political parties made considerable gains. Indeed, the National Front in France won more seats in the European parliament than any other party, surging from 6.3% in 2009 to 24.85% in 2014. Now headed by Marine Le Pen, who has avoided direct anti-Semitic statements, many in the party, including her father Jean-Marie La Pen, the National Front’s founder, hold anti-Semitic views.

There is an acute discomfort among the 500,000 Jews in France, the largest community in Western Europe. The French Jewish leadership sees unprecedented levels of anti-Semitism, with a combination of the far right, far left, and alienated young Muslim immigrants. They indicate that it is dangerous to wear a kippah on the Paris Metro.

Some 50 to 75% of French Jews envision possible emigration. In the coming years many would move to Israel if their diplomas and professional competencies were recognized in Israel as they are already in the EU, Canada, and Australia.



As always, we are confident that this assessment will spark a wide range of thought. It is our hope that it will also inspire action. We welcome your responses.

Stuart Eizenstat and Dennis Ross