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## Fathom Journal

British Jewry and Israel - how is the relationship evolving? A symposium

TOBY GREENE

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Mick Davis**, the Former Chairman of the Jewish Leadership Council

**Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner**, Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism

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**Dr Toby Greene**, Contributing *Fathom* Editor, co-author of 'The Israelization of British Jewry: Between Home and Homeland'

**Hannah Weisfeld and Maya Ilany**, director and deputy director of Yachad – Together for Israel Together for Peace

**Robin Moss**, UJIA Director of Strategy (writing in a personal capacity)

**Simon Gordon**, who served as speechwriter to Israeli Ambassador Daniel Taub and Douglas Carswell MP

**Jonathan Hunter**, co-founder of the Pinsker Centre

**Tamara Berens**, former President of Kings College Israel Society and a Campus Associate with CAMERA on Campus (writing in a personal capacity)

# EDITORIAL

In July 2018, the *Jewish Chronicle* identified ‘fundamental questions which must now be urgently asked’ in light of what it termed the ‘potentially seismic change’ in relations between British Jews and Israel. The editorial cited as examples the open letter signed by 100 leaders and graduates of mainstream left-wing Zionist movements, asserting that ‘ending the occupation... is a principle of our Zionism’ and the group of young British Jews who said ‘Kaddish for Gaza’ in Parliament Square.

The *Fathom* editors believe that the journal can provide a useful platform for this ongoing debate. The ethos of *Fathom* is to provide a space for writers with very different views to make their case and stimulate further debate. In light of this, we invited contributors from a variety of backgrounds to assess if there is indeed a ‘potentially seismic change’ in the way British Jews feel about Israel and the manner in which they discuss Israel. We asked if there is a ‘centre ground’ for British Jews on Israel; what forms of criticism of and engagement with Israel is acceptable and effective; and if British Jews have a responsibility to avoid helping those who wish to demonise Israel. Our list of writers is not intended to be exhaustive, and though our contributors represent a range of views we do not claim to have represented all views. What we do hope is that those interested in this debate will read each essay carefully in order that they can better understand those with views very different from their own.

Relating to developments in the British Jewish Community, Mick Davis, the Former Chairman of the Jewish Leadership Council argues that the current communal discourse is ‘now so polarised, vicious and impoverished that it constitutes a long-term existential threat to the community’ and that “many young Jews today across the Diaspora are confronting a dichotomy between their own (Jewish) values and the rhetoric and actions out of Israel. The result is alienation and if this continues or worsens then we face a fracturing of the Jewish People.’

Jonathan Hunter, a co-founder of the Pinsker Centre identifies an ‘absence of a strong moral example from the Jewish community’s leadership’ which has left intellectually curious young people in the middle of a cross fire. ‘They are told to join one of two groups: either the growing ranks of the hard-left that is entirely devoted to constant criticism of Israeli policy, or alternatively to be a part of traditional Israeli advocacy which is totally averse to any criticism.’

Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, Senior Rabbi to Reform Judaism emphasises the importance of engaging with younger members of the community who, while possessing “a perspective which is relevant and important” are ‘increasingly wondering whether there is a place for them in this discussion’ and who are routinely ‘belittled, patronised and even verbally abused for expressing their views’.

Robin Moss, UJIA Director of Strategy (writing in a personal capacity) sets out how as the ‘Millennial’ generation takes on increasing positions of leadership within British Jewry, will see both seismic change and remarkable continuity. He points that on the one hand, young British Jews, are overwhelmingly visiting Israel more often and “Israeli culture – food, TV, films, celebrities – is increasingly normalised within British and British-Jewish society”. Yet on the other hand, “many younger people want to replace and revolutionise – rather than repair – Jewish communal organisations.

Dr Keith Kahn Harris, a senior lecturer at Leo Baeck College and Fellow of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research warns that the ability of often divided Diaspora communities to successfully manage their disagreements over Israel may soon end. ‘It is still possible to fight for a liberal Zionist future based on a two state solution, just as it is possible to fight for the expansion and/or annexation of the occupied territories. But we are reaching decision time and I myself believe that the chances of liberal Zionism remaining a realisable vision are now extremely unlikely.’ The contributors also presented a spectrum of views about effective engagement with and criticism of Israel.

Hannah Weisfeld and Maya Ilany, Director and Deputy Director of Yachad, discuss the importance of demonstrating that being pro-Israel does not automatically mean supporting government policy and that ‘It is because we are willing to criticise the occupation and anti-liberal trends in Israel, as opposed to ignoring them, that we are able to win the argument in favour of Israel.’

Simon Gordon, who served as speechwriter to Israeli Ambassador Daniel Taub and Douglas Carswell MP, believes that ‘if Jewish groups feel they must take issue with the Israeli government, they should at least do it behind closed doors’ adding that ‘if the government is really their intended audience, writing to the Israeli Ambassador privately should serve the same purpose as issuing a press release or saying kaddish in Parliament Square.’

Tamara Berens, former President of Kings College Israel Society and a Campus Associate with CAMERA on Campus (writing in a personal capacity) believes that while ‘engagement with Israel on issues pertaining to Israeli society and/or religious freedoms and treatment of non-ortho-

dox Jews is a legitimate area for critique' she thinks that 'those who have not served in the IDF cannot claim to have the insight or tangible experience necessary to comprehend the security challenges the state faces'.

Dr Toby Greene, *Fathom* Contributory Editor and co-author of 'The Israelization of British Jewry: Between Home and Homeland' believes that British Jews often have to walk a fine line. 'Jews who care about liberal values need, as far as possible, to oppose the entrenchment of the occupation as if there is no anti-Zionism and oppose anti-Zionism as if there is no entrenchment of the occupation.' He suggests that the right to engage critically comes with some provisos which include a deep and irrefutable commitment to Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, a sensitivity to finding the most appropriate partners in Israel, grasping the real concerns and feelings of the Israeli mainstream, and engaging in genuine dialogue with those parts of Israeli society with which one disagrees.

Fathom sees these contributions as part of what needs to be an ongoing discussion within Anglo-Jewry and between Israelis and Jews in the Diaspora as a whole. We hope the readers find the contributions of interest and we welcome any written responses to the arguments published here.

Calev Ben-Dor, on behalf of the editors



**BRITISH JEWS AND ISRAEL – HOW IS THE  
RELATIONSHIP EVOLVING? A SYMPOSIUM |  
SIR MICK DAVIS**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Mick Davis:** The British Jewish community’s discourse around Israel is now so polarised, vicious and impoverished that it constitutes a long-term existential threat to the community.

The centre ground for British Jews is under attack. An emergent Jewish hard-left, virtually indistinguishable from the anti-Zionist far-left in its animosity towards Israel, seeks to drive a wedge between the Jewish community and the Jewish state. An emergent Jewish hard-right, meanwhile, uses increasingly aggressive tactics to intimidate and censor those members of the community who recognise an urgent need to debate Israel’s current direction of travel and who worry about the effect this drift has on our community and our relationship with Israel.

The polarisation within the community is of course complicated by events both in Britain, particularly the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and with him the antisemitic anti-Zionism of the leadership of the British left, and in Israel, primarily through the increasingly right-wing actions and rhetoric of the [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu government, as exemplified by the Nation-State Law.

Despite the pressures on the community, however, from both its own fringes and from developments in both the UK and Israel, there are, I believe, certain values and attitudes that remain consensus positions for a majority of British Jews. It is three years since the Institute for Jewish Policy Research published its survey on the attitudes of British Jews towards Israel, which revealed that 93 per cent of British Jews considered Israel as playing a central role in their identity and 90 per cent supported its right to exist as a Jewish state. At the same time, 75 per cent identified settlement expansion as an obstacle to peace. Thus in 2015, for an overwhelming majority of Jews who felt a vital connection to Israel, that connection did not blunt their critical faculties.

The three years since have been turbulent ones both for British Jews and for the Israel-Diaspora relationship. Yet I would identify four key values that continue to underpin the community’s attitudes to Israel and must continue to underpin our engagement with it. These are:

- A strong belief in Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish state;
- A strong belief in Israel's need for security and in its right to defend itself, notwithstanding a wide spectrum of opinion on what constitutes a security issue;
- A strong belief that Israel must remain a democratic state that upholds democratic values;
- A strong belief that Israel should always seek a lasting solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Tensions certainly exist between those values; our unwavering belief in the legitimacy of Israel's Jewishness, and our commitment to its right to defend itself are often in a state of tension with our commitment to its democratic values, all the more so in the current situation in which Palestinians do not have self-determination. But any attempt we make, as a community, to express concern regarding threats to Israel's democracy from within, will be doomed to failure if we lose sight of our commitment to Israel's legitimacy – the battle for which has tragically and depressingly not yet been won, and to its right and need to defend itself from very real threats.

The majority of the community therefore faces an ongoing struggle to preserve all four of these values and place them at the heart of our engagement with Israel, even when they are in tension with each other. If we neglect one or other of those values, the community risks not only undermining its connection with Israel, a connection that is vital to the sustainability of a Jewish community, but losing its soul.

**FJ:** What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?

**MD:** Voicing concerns regarding Israel is not only acceptable, but vital for our consistency and integrity as Jews. It is vital for a dynamic, strong Diaspora community to maintain a robust and resilient Zionism and to be authentically and committedly engaged with Israel, but that is only possible if it is grounded in reality, intellectually honest and rooted in our values.

For criticism to be acceptable it needs to meet three criteria:

Firstly, it needs to take place within the framework of the values set out above. What is unacceptable is criticism that challenges the legitimacy of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people and the connection of the Jewish people to it, or that fails to acknowledge or empathise with Israel's obligations to defend its citizens.

Secondly, it needs to be based on facts, not on the lies propagated by Israel's enemies. We must remain alive to the reality that opponents of Israel continue to pump out lies, hatred and incitement about Israel's actions. And during a crisis, in the digital age, the lies can poison the discourse quicker than they can be refuted, which they often have been as hard evidence comes to light. Hence the 'Jenin massacre'. Hence the 'civilians' killed attempting to breach the Gaza border in May, only to be claimed by Hamas as mostly its own operatives two days later. It would be at best naïve, given the slew of hatred and deceit to which Israel is subjected, to always believe the worst. One of the notable aspects of the 'Kaddish for Gaza' debacle was not only the objectionable and provocative form it took, nor its location – which in Parliament Square appeared as an act of public disavowal of Israel rather than constructive engagement with it – but that it ignored the evidence presented by Hamas itself of the large number among the dead who were involved in terrorist groups.

Thirdly, our criticisms should not take place within environments that are fundamentally hostile to the basic premise of Zionism and the basic needs for legitimacy and security of the State of Israel. There is no point raising criticisms of Israeli policy – be it over settlement expansion, callous treatment of asylum seekers, home demolitions or attacks on the NGO sector – in arenas that are hostile not only to Israel's actions but to its existence. I would never, for example, urge the British government to vote against Israel at the UN even if the resolution on its own might merit such consideration, because the UN is a hotbed of delegitimisation where a strong diplomatic alliance between Israel and the UK is essential. There is no room for nuance in a snake-pit.

Yet within these parameters, British Jewish criticism of Israel's government is acceptable, essential and long overdue. We cannot simply park our values at the door when it comes to Israel.

The Jewish people might not be citizens of the State of Israel but we are stakeholders in it. Our Jewish identities are shaped in no small part through attachment to Israel. Decisions Israel takes have a direct impact on our community and its sustainability. When we see developments in Israel that affront our values – Zionist, Jewish and democratic – we undermine our integrity as Jews and as supporters of Israel if we remain silent. How, for example, could a community that values compassion to asylum seekers not be disturbed when asylum seekers in Israel are vilified by mainstream politicians? How could we not see alarm bells when Israel's senior politicians vilify the New Israel Fund and the entire NGO sector when in any other country in the world we would recognise that vilification as an attack on the civil society institutions that are fundamental to the fabric of any democracy?

And as Israel's most authentic advocates and supporters around the world, we have an obligation to point out when our talking points no longer make sense. Israel's demonstrable support for a



two-state solution was long the most effective tool in our advocacy arsenal. Yet, if in 2018 we're still relying on Netanyahu's Bar Ilan speech of 2009 to provide evidence of that support, then Israel's government has left us denuded. We have both a right and a duty to ask it for our clothes back.

There is, however, a much larger question regarding the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora. We need to look at what it is to be Jewish – at the foundations of Jewish identity itself. The connection between Israel and the Diaspora is crucial to the Jewishness of both. Living in Israel, for instance, doesn't make you Jewish – it makes you Israeli. But if Israel is not the Jewish state – if it acts with complacency in terms of its connection to the rest of the Jewish People – then what is it? Meanwhile, how can a Diaspora community be truly Jewish if it is disconnected from the greatest achievement of Jewish peoplehood for 2000 years, the State of Israel, now home to a plurality of the world's Jews in our eternal homeland? For the Diaspora Jew, connectivity to Israel keeps them Jewish. For the Israeli Jew, the same can be said of connectivity to the Diaspora. The relationship between Israel and the Diaspora is crucial to the survival of the Jewishness of both but the foundations of that relationship are rotting and need urgent repair.

At present, British and indeed all Diaspora Jews are receiving a mixed message from the government of Israel, which is relevant to any consideration of the effectiveness of British Jewish criticism of Israel. On the one hand, the prime minister presents himself as speaking on behalf of the Jewish people; on the other, he seems increasingly disinterested and disdainful towards the values that large sections of that people hold dear. In 2015, in France for instance, as the community came together following the terrorist atrocity at the Hyper Cache supermarket, the French Jewish response was a spontaneous rendition of *La Marseillaise*. Netanyahu's response was to tell them they had no future in France.

Similarly, in 2017, painstaking negotiations over prayer rights at the Kotel for non-Orthodox streams of Judaism were contemptuously swept aside. Some see this is the product of a line of thinking that envisages the disappearance of Diaspora communities beyond the strictly orthodox, and that considers evangelical Christian-Zionists a more reliable and less kvetching long-term partner. Such a calculation would be a tragic indictment of the commitment to the Jewish people of its self-professed leader and it would undermine Israel's automatic alliance with the Jewish Diaspora. Against this background of repeated displays of contempt for the Diaspora it begs the question: how can any criticism be effective when Israel's government is prepared simply to ignore us?

Yet we cannot hold our tongue indefinitely in the face of what constitutes an existential threat to the Jewish People – not from without, but from within. In Israel the politics of bigotry has overwhelmed the democratic ideals of the declaration of independence. The Knesset debates and passes racist laws while cabinet ministers malign communities and the vulnerable in their quest

for personal advancement.

Across the Jewish world the divide between Jews of different persuasions grows and each seeks to delegitimise the other with increasingly violent language. Words are potent weapons, and the language of the extremes threatens our future because it drives people away and the age old fear of assimilation becomes an ever larger reality.

It is incontestable that many young Jews today across the Diaspora are confronting a dichotomy between their own (Jewish) values and the rhetoric and actions out of Israel. The result is alienation and if this continues or worsens then we face a fracturing of the Jewish People. To say nothing would be an abrogation of our responsibilities to each other. This is an argument for the soul of the Jewish People and we need to be engaged in it.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**MD:** I approach this as someone who has previously been accused of ‘giving succour to our enemies’ from the moment in 2010 when I first voiced some criticism of the already apparent direction of travel of the Israeli government under Prime Minister Netanyahu. At that time, many other Jewish leaders would have privately recognised and shared my concerns but remained silent. After eight years of further deterioration and stagnation, others from within the Diaspora Zionist mainstream have started to speak up too.

Many would have held back, and indeed, I have often held back, because we don’t wish to ‘give a tail wind to those who demonise Israel’. The idea that many of us, who have engaged passionately through activism, philanthropy and dedicated support for Israeli and Zionist causes over decades, are somehow oblivious to this risk is not only derisory but false.

Criticism does not come out of the blue. It comes after years of Zionist leaders raising concerns in private but being ignored. It comes after years of seeing young Jews drifting away from Zionism in a way that places the unity and longevity of our communities at risk. When making our concerns public, the question to ask is this: what is more likely to give a tail wind to the demonisation of Israel – the criticism of a specific Israeli policy or action, or the policy or action itself?

What is more likely to further the nefarious goals of those who demonise Israel: a Nation-State Law that neglects the ethos of equality enshrined in Israel’s Declaration of Independence, or the President of the World Jewish Congress, Ronald Lauder, publishing restrained and thoughtful criticism of that law in the New York Times; the fact that Israel’s cabinet contains within it parties and

politicians actively promoting the annexation of the West Bank, or Charles Bronfman, who through Birthright has done as much as anyone to promote the bonds between Israel and the Diaspora, expressing his anguish as to what such a policy would mean for Israel's future as a Jewish and Democratic state?

I would suggest that it is the policies, rather than the criticisms of them, that empower Israel's enemies.

Criticism that takes place within a Zionist values framework, from Jews whose very heart and soul is enmeshed with Israel's existence, endurance and success as a Jewish and Democratic state will never hold much appeal for those who demonise Israel. Because within our criticisms, is a central premise that is repulsive to Israel's foes, which is a celebration of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish People and a concern for its future that is based on that premise.



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RABBI LAURA JANNER-KLAUSNER**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner:** The centre ground on Israel has been stable for some time. Within the mainstream Jewish community, the vast majority describe themselves as Zionists and even more consider Israel part of their core Jewish identity. A 2015 poll showed that 93 per cent of British Jews said Israel formed part of their identity as Jews, with 90 per cent supporting Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state – what would generally be accepted as the definition of Zionism.

Regarding their vision for the future, and for peace, British Jews also broadly agree: the same poll found that 71 per cent of British Jews believe a two-state solution is the only path to peace. The poll echoed the findings of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in 2010. Of course, British Jews with other opinions must not be delegitimised or excluded. Our challenge is to ensure that communication between those who both support these positions and those who do not is constructive.

**FJ:** *What kinds and forms of criticism of/engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable/most effective, and which are unacceptable/least effective?*

**LJ-K:** Communal leaders should not be policing the political viewpoints of those within our communities. The strength of Jewish tradition throughout the centuries has been our ability to hold a multitude of beliefs under one banner, even when conflict arose between us. The Talmudic concept of *eilu v’eilu* – that multiple narratives are all the words of our living God – is a central part of Judaism.

Members of our community must feel free to develop their own visions of what the Jewish State should look like and to seek to realise those visions. Modern political Zionism is the key expression of collective Jewish national liberation and self-determination whilst many different visions and ideologies have each shaped what Israel has become today. As the Israeli author Amos Oz famously said, ‘Zionism’ is not a first-name but a surname. At no point did the need for debate

and disagreement over the future direction of Israel end. At no point were the actions of the government of the State of Israel placed beyond criticism.

We must accept the widest range as possible of ways in which members of our communities engage with Israel. However, we must be clear that there are limits to how we engage in communal discourse. Over recent months, the most shocking development has been the willingness of Jews to use violently abusive language towards other Jews who don't share their perspectives. This aligns with a worldwide trend away from civility and respect and towards abuse, trolling and hate speech. We must never hesitate to say that this is beyond the pale and is totally unacceptable within our community. There have been threats of violence, calls for people to kill themselves and comparisons to Nazism and the Shoah. We cannot and must not allow this disgusting, anti-halachic behaviour to become normalised.

We are all free to use our right to free speech, but we should also pause to consider whether it is productive if our advocacy – from whatever political persuasion – opens up wounds, causes division and generates tension. Just because we can say it, doesn't mean we should say it. I have spoken out against the BDS movement in part because it builds up the 'fortress Israel' mind-set, erecting another barrier to the very progress those who support it wish to see. Too many people are too quick to draw dividing lines and declare that you are either with them or against them. Nothing has been gained from this attitude.

For all of us who care deeply about Israel and its future, we have to realise that we are in need of difficult conversations with those whom we don't necessarily agree with. We all hold our opinions in good faith, even if they may initially seem unacceptable to others. Without understanding where others come from, what motivates them and the anxieties driving their analysis of the situation, there is no hope of an understanding. We must break down barriers and find common ground – there is far more than most people imagine.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**LJ-K:** The primary lesson to internalise is that Jews are not responsible for antisemitism, including antisemitism which comes in the form of the demonisation of the State of Israel. To put this responsibility on Jews who have been critical of Israeli government policy amounts to victim-blaming and relieves antisemites of their responsibility for their antisemitism.

British Jewish communities need to have confidence in our ability to hold a positive and vibrant discussion about Israel. It is clear to any reasonable observer that nuance is required in our

analysis of the complex situation and of the decisions taken by the various actors. The way to fight those who choose a path of demonisation is to model the honest and open conversations required for progress. This will include reasonable criticism and the expression of differences in narrative and viewpoint. It also requires us to model how demonisation, and positions which ignore well-established facts, should be challenged effectively.

Some propose that British Jewry ought to be homogeneously positive towards all actions of the Israeli government, fearful of what those who wish to demonise Israel may gain should anyone do otherwise. This is an untenable position. We not only harm ourselves in silencing our community, but it is a wholly unconvincing strategy and actually gives those who wish to demonise Israel a basis to claim dishonesty and bad faith on our part.

The real enemy of those people who wish to demonise Israel is an open and honest conversation based in reality and truth. We push back against those people by making this kind of conversation our new normal.

**FJ:** *To what extent do you agree with the assertion that there is a ‘potentially seismic change’ in the way that British Jewry discusses and feels about Israel?*

**LJ-K:** There has not been a seismic change in how British Jews feel about Israel, but there has been a seismic change in how those feelings are displayed in public discourse. Differences which have always existed have manifested themselves in openly vicious attacks, often online. Some younger members of our community are increasingly wondering whether there is a place for them in this discussion. Routinely, they are belittled, patronised and even verbally abused for expressing their views. For disagreeing with older members of the community, a number of young people I know have simply been told to ‘grow up’. Our young people – our young leaders, must not be side-lined in this way.

Those of us who are older should remember that we grew up in a different world. For many young people, their entire experience is of post-Oslo Israel, an on/off peace process with the Palestinians and an Israel with superior military strength and control. They are not so directly scarred by the memory of the Shoah. Moreover, political reality is changing, with narratives often focusing on ‘oppressors’ vs ‘the oppressed’, a lens through which the Israel-Palestine conflict is often viewed. New technologies allow instant – and often incessant – access to these narratives. All this gives our young people an outlook on Israel which may not always match that of older members of our communities. That difference should be cherished.

Our young people want to be contributors to the discussion. They have a perspective which is

relevant and important. They deserve to be heard and not belittled. Young people have been driving Zionism forward since the very start, where the chalutzim – the pioneers – were the ones who truly built the foundations of a Jewish state. Today, our young people remain our pioneers. Their passion and their contributions must be respected by our whole community.



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KEITH KHAN-HARRIS**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Keith Kahn-Harris:** I’m not sure it makes sense to talk of a ‘centre ground’ in a diverse community. Are we talking about the centre ground amongst non-orthodox Jews, modern orthodox Jews, progressive Jews, secular Jews, Haredi Jews, or any of the other segments of British Jewry? It is certainly possible though to speak of majorities and minorities, some of which pertain across British Jewry and others that pertain to a segment of it.

Opinion surveys over the last few decades appear to show a large majority in favour of the principle of Israel being a Jewish state at the very least. Beyond that, the majority of British Jews appear to be cautiously supportive of the principle of a two-state solution, to not always be happy about the decisions of the Israeli government, but certainly supportive of Israel in the most basic sense.

It is possible that the size of these majorities may have shifted somewhat very recently, but really, whether they have or have not is not what is significant. In fact, measuring the attitudes towards Israel amongst British Jews may tell us less than we might think.

One of the key transformations that the internet and social media have wrought is to ‘flatten’ the distinction between majorities and minorities. Now that everyone has a platform, it is almost impossible to marginalise and render certain Jews and their opinions inconsequential. In this context, we are no longer in a situation where a ‘centre ground,’ should it even exist, can exercise any sort of hegemony (assuming you would wish that, and I personally would not).

Instead we have a cacophony of voices, where all compete to be heard and assert their legitimacy, but where none can fully dominate. That some of these voices may be from relatively small proportions of British Jewry is true, but not really relevant. What matters is analysing the claims they make, on whose behalf they speak and who is persuaded by them.

**FJ:** *What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy*



*and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?*

**KK-H:** Attempts to draw ‘red lines’ over what kind of criticism and engagement with Israel are acceptable are, these days at least, rarely successful. As I have said, I don’t think marginalisation can really work anymore, regardless of whether you believe it necessary or not. Of course, individual institutions and communal spaces can and do exclude, but there is always another platform available and, if not, someone will create it.

My own feeling is that Jewish communities – and, in fact, most political spaces – should be as pluralist as possible and that the process of pluralism should be a painful one: if it doesn’t make you grind your teeth in frustration to have to tolerate the presence of ‘those people’ (whoever they are) then you’re not doing it right. I would ideally like an engagement with British Jews and Israel that includes everything from the Israeli pro-settlement right to the anti-Zionist Diaspora left. I do understand though, that I am very much a minority in holding that view. Maybe I like the pains of pluralism too much.

That isn’t to say however that I don’t think some people are unacceptable and cannot be assimilated into most pluralist conversations. It’s just I don’t define unacceptability primarily by the views people hold. Much more important to me is how views are expressed. There are certain people across the spectrum who abuse, who cannot relate to others who disagree with them and make any kind of conversation unbearable. They exist across the spectrum, although they congregate disproportionately on the harder right and left. The point is though that such people cannot be identified by their views alone and can only be rendered unacceptable as individuals, not as representatives of a particular viewpoint.

The question of effectiveness is related to this. Angry, abusive people rarely convince anyone. It’s in everyone’s best interests to try and develop modes of communication with others that maintain the possibility of relationship building and the changes which can flow from this. In this sense, my definition of acceptability is the same as my definition of effectiveness.

All that said, things are complicated. One could argue that Kaddish for Gaza caused immense hurt to the point that it should be defined as unacceptable under my framework. Yet it’s important to somehow make space for the expression of anguish – which Kaddish for Gaza was – and for provocation and challenge. So how can that circle be squared? Here it’s important to distinguish between the hurt caused by direct attacks and abusiveness towards others and the hurt caused by the existence of people, viewpoints and ways of expressing them that are so shocking as to be unbearable to others. For some, Kaddish for Gaza fell into the second category, but it

never fell into the first. People may have to live with unacceptable views and actions; no one should have to live with abuse.

Still, Kaddish for Gaza was certainly not effective in any simple way. Whether or not one agrees with the action (and I'm keeping my opinions on this private), it is hard to pin down how it might have helped the situation other than providing an outlet for feelings and, perhaps, a limited sense among some Palestinians that they were being supported. Of course, that judgement could be applied to many kinds of Israel-Palestine-related activity across the spectrum and, indeed, to many forms of campaigning. The effectiveness of most political activity is extremely difficult to pin down beyond the realms of government and diplomacy.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**KK-H:** It's important to interrogate what 'demonising Israel' might mean. It is often used as a euphemism for the harshest forms of criticism and for almost any kind of anti-Zionism. As someone who is an implacable opponent of the direction Israel is currently on and even (and here I may lose some readers) has time for some criticisms of Zionism, I obviously do not see myself as a demoniser. I'd argue however, that similar to my argument about pluralism, it's a good idea for any of us to develop those muscles which allow us to hear political criticism as political criticism, rather than live in fear of the demonic. Just because you're hurting, doesn't necessary mean you're being demonised.

Having said all that, I think there are some extremely disturbing tendencies within the pro-Palestinian movement that amount to something more than simply vociferous campaigning. Too often Israel isn't simply an oppressor, it is the oppressor; Israeli violence isn't simply violence, it is the bloodiest violence imaginable; the Palestinian cause is not a cause but the cause. Some of this stems from the need to get their voice out in a world crowded with causes and campaigns (others do it too – look at how animal rights campaigners behave). But it also leads inevitably to antisemitism – if Palestine is the cause, then Jews inevitably become the villains.

Sections, at least, of the Jewish anti-Zionist left have failed to resist or even stoked these tendencies. It is ridiculous though, to argue – as some pro-Israel campaigners have – that liberal-left groups like Yachad and the New Israel Fund are complicit in this 'demonisation' process. The contempt in which much of the pro-Palestinian movement holds the Jewish liberal-left knows no bounds.

Ironically though, there is a case for arguing that some forms of pro-Israel activity have fuelled the tendencies I have described. It isn't just supporters of Palestine who see the conflict as the

conflict, advocates for Israel often do the same, particularly on the right. They are also implicated in raising the stakes so that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is not just a case of nasty regional violence (perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians according to taste) but a war between good and evil whose victory or loss will reverberate far beyond the region itself.

Stopping this process is a task for anyone who cares about Israelis or Palestinians or both. It helps no one. How to do it though? How do you fight for a cause while simultaneously insisting that it should be seen as one cause amongst others? This is not an easy thing to do given the generally hysterical mode of contemporary public discourse.

A place to start might be to focus on the everyday lives of Israelis and/or Palestinians themselves, on seeing them as people and not as heroes/villains. The projects that I respect the most across the spectrum of opinion of Israel/Palestine are those that work on the ground on things that make a difference.

**FJ:** *To what extent do you agree with the assertion that there is a ‘potentially seismic change’ in the way that British Jewry discusses and feels about Israel?*

**KK-H:** I would agree with that assertion, but I think that such change may not go in one direction and is likely to have multiple drivers.

I have argued for some years that Diaspora Jewish communities, while increasingly divided over Israel, manage to keep the resulting conflict just about manageable through the ‘ambiguity’ of Israel. Until such time that Israel irrevocably fixes its borders, its constitution and its ‘final’ form, multiple different visions of what Israel should be are still (barely) in play. It is still possible to fight for a liberal Zionist future based on a two-state solution, just as it is possible to fight for the expansion and/or annexation of the occupied territories. But we are reaching decision time and I myself believe that the chances of liberal Zionism remaining a realisable vision are now extremely unlikely.

When Israel turns its back on ambiguity (or if, like me, one feels that it may already have done so) then a decision will have to be made by those whose vision has ‘lost’. There will probably be a range of approaches: swallowing doubts and remaining a supporter, focusing on sources of hope (however unlikely) or maybe asserting the principle of Zionism while rejecting what Zionism became. Certainly this latter strategy seems to be gaining ground amongst some younger Jewish activists.

Yet there are also countervailing tendencies. There is no doubt that antisemitism in Corbyn’s Labour Party has caused anguish even amongst many on the Jewish left. To even believe that

Zionism was once a viable idea is to be alienated from a rising political force and to face abuse from the anti-Zionist Left. That may lead to a feeling that even if today's Israel is antithetical to one's beliefs, it still offers a sanctuary that may be needed at some point (particularly once escape routes to the EU are cut off).

It may also be that Corbyn's Labour Party is driving or will drive Jews into the arms of the right. That may mean a concomitant rise in support for the Israeli right amongst British Jews. While active support for the settlement enterprise has been fairly limited in the UK historically, that could well change.

So yes we might well be on the cusp of seismic changes in the relationship between British Jews and Israel, but its result is likely to be as confusing and conflictual as the present.



**BRITISH JEWS AND ISRAEL – HOW IS THE  
RELATIONSHIP EVOLVING? A SYMPOSIUM |  
TOBY GREENE**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Toby Greene:** In short, the centre-ground consensus is a clear commitment to Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, but beyond that British Jews are increasingly polarised, and their divisions reflect deep tensions and sharp dilemmas within Israeli politics and society. The evidence is clear that the overwhelming majority of British Jews are ideologically committed and personally connected to Israel. A 2015 survey showed that 90 per cent support Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and 93 per cent say it forms some part of their identity as Jews. There is also a clear correlation between active engagement in Jewish life and attachment to Israel.

More than that, Jewish life in Britain is increasingly ‘Israelised’ – shaped by Israel – and this trend will continue. In demographic terms, Israel has already overtaken the US as the world’s largest Jewish community and in time will become home to a majority of the world’s Jews. Aside from being the historical and biblical homeland of the Jewish people, Israel is a phenomenally vibrant and exciting society. British Jews visit Israel ever more frequently thanks to cheap air travel, and Israel Tour and Birthright have made spending time in Israel a key resource for deepening Jewish identity. Meanwhile the reinvigoration of British Jewish life in recent decades (exemplified by Limmud, JW3, the Jewish Film Festival and Jewish Book Week) have created new venues for British Jews to absorb Israel’s cultural richness. Religiously, Israeli educational institutions are increasingly influential, especially for the dominant Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox streams, which are growing further as a proportion of the British Jewish community. Though some European Jewish intellectuals, and some grass roots groups would like to de-Israelise European Jewish identity, they are a tiny minority and will remain so.

However, Israelisation of British Jewish life has two problematic consequences. First, antisemitism has also been Israelised, with anti-Zionism now a mask for anti-Jewish prejudice, illustrated most tragically in the British Labour Party. Anti-Zionist views once marginal in the UK, have been given a tailwind by the transnational BDS movement, coupled with the illiberal shift in Israel, growing political activism among British Muslims, and now the far-left capture of Labour.

Second, the increasing polarisation within Israel over fundamental issues – including the Palestinian question, the balance between Israel’s Jewish and democratic character, and the status of different streams of Judaism – exacerbates divisions within British Jewry. On the Palestinian question, survey data suggest British Jews overall are marginally to the left of Israeli Jews (e.g. approximately 60-70 per cent of British Jews supporting a two-state solution compared to 50-60 per cent in Israel), but those more engaged in Jewish life, and more religiously observant, tend to be more to the right. Because of the existential character of these questions for Israel, and the centrality of Israel in the ethnic identity of British Jews, these divisions are highly sensitive and very explosive.

**FJ:** *What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?*

**TG:** British Jews need to find effective ways to promote their values in Israel through deep engagement with Israeli society, whilst official representative bodies (the BoD and JLC) need to clarify and depoliticise their important Israel role.

Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people. Diaspora Jews give important political and financial support to Israel, and what happens in Israel increasingly affects Jews everywhere, on issues ranging from the status of ‘who is a Jew’ to the physical security of Diaspora communities. As such, British Jews, like other Diaspora Jews, have a right to have their concerns and views listened to with respect in Israel. Without such an opportunity, there is a risk of frustration turning to anger, apathy and disengagement.

A central challenge, therefore, is to find meaningful and appropriate ways for British Jews to express their views and promote their values directly within Israeli society. This includes ways to make their views known directly to Israeli decision makers and representatives, and working with partners in Israel.

However, the right to engage critically comes with some provisos. First, a critical engagement with Israeli society is only relevant if it is based on a deep and irrefutable commitment to Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people.

Second, Diaspora Jews keen to promote and defend liberal values and concerns, need to be careful and sensitive when it comes to finding the most appropriate partners in Israel and the right approaches. This is a difficult issue, because political debate in Israel, as in other democracies, is becoming ever more polarised and acrimonious, and because of the weakness and disarray

of the Israeli Left. Diaspora Jews need to ensure they grasp the real concerns and feelings of the Israeli mainstream. Partnering with marginal groups who are not trusted by the mainstream can be counterproductive. They also need to make sure they are engaging in genuine dialogue with, and seeking to better understand, those parts of Israeli society with which they do not agree, including the national religious, settlers and haredim.

Third, Diaspora Jews need to tread especially carefully on issues relating to Israel's security. It is Israelis who are confronted by the immediate consequences of security-related decisions. They face the threat of rockets or other terror attacks on the home front, and they send their children to the army. Diaspora Jews should keep this in the forefront of their minds when they want to voice opinions about Israeli military activity, or potential territorial compromises with major security implications.

Where left-leaning British Jews also need to be more careful is in reacting to what is happening in Israel by campaigning for British political leaders to put pressure on Israel. (I would argue that here the UK is different from the very specific circumstances in the US.) Taking this approach opens groups up to the accusation of disloyalty within the community and from Israelis, which undermines their right to be heard as a respected voice within the tent. It is also unlikely to have a net positive effect, since external pressure on Israel, unless very carefully calibrated, can be utilised politically by the populist-nationalists (represented in the current government) as much as by liberals.

Another risk for Jews engaged in campaigns against Israeli policies in the UK political space, is giving the impression that their real priority is to publicly cleanse themselves of the guilt of association. The Kaddish in Parliament Square was an extreme but illustrative example. Though many participants had good intentions and reasonable concerns, the nature of their protest gave the impression that they wanted – most of all – to publically disassociate from Israel and other Jews, like the ASHamed Jews satirised in Howard Jacobson's novel *The Finkler Question*. Those who act as though they are out of the tent, especially with the bitter winds of anti-Zionism blowing from the Left, risk finding their voices rejected within it – a mistake to be avoided.

However, there is a flip side to this equation. Communal bodies whose mission is to represent the community as a whole (the Board of Deputies and Jewish Leadership Council), can help by depoliticising their organisational role regarding Israel. They should reflect the pride and commitment that the community has for Israel, and the deep role that Israel plays in Jewish identity and culture. This includes playing a leading role in the fight against anti-Zionism and BDS. But they should be very cautious about taking a stance on particular Israeli decisions or laws unless they directly impinge on the status of British Jews, or unless they are very confident that they represent an overwhelming communal consensus. Instead, they should seek a language reflecting the

broad based commitment of British Jews to Israel, without taking a stance on the political questions that divide both Israeli and Diaspora Jews, whether they be actions by the Israel Defense Forces, or controversial legislation such as the Nation-State Law.

This balancing act is challenging, but vital for organisations or leaders who wish to represent the community as a whole, and not make particular sections feel they need to articulate their own distinct positions to the British government. I have attended one of the regular meetings where Foreign Office officials invite representatives of British Jewish organisations in for a roundtable. The cacophony of conflicting voices is not a very edifying sight, and no-one seems able to represent a consensus view.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**TG:** Jews who care about liberal values need, as far as possible, to oppose the entrenchment of the occupation as if there is no anti-Zionism and oppose anti-Zionism as if there is no entrenchment of the occupation.

I say, 'as far as possible,' because in reality these two issues cannot be completely separated. The entrenchment of the occupation fuels (though is not the cause of) anti-Zionism, and in turn anti-Zionism (and the BDS campaign) undermines those who would like to work for a two-state solution. But from the perspective of the liberal Jew in the Diaspora, it is critical to recognise that both anti-Zionism, and the illiberal policies of populist-nationalists in Israel, are both significant threats to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and both must be opposed.

Again, to confront anti-Zionism – indeed to be able to recognise the lies that suffuse its version of the history and the present reality – Diaspora Jews need to be deeply informed about, and engaged with Israel. This is not easy. It is much simpler to propagate lies and myths than to have the knowledge to debunk them. But too often it is apparent that Diaspora Jews on the Left are misinformed by the same simplistic or inaccurate sources as non-Jewish political activists. Unfortunately, the discourse in Israel is also suffused with politically motivated disinformation on Left and Right. Even nationally respected Jewish journalists with regular JC columns seem to frequently misread and misrepresent the situation. The way to confront the propaganda of the Israeli Right (and its significant influence on British Jews) is not to embrace the propaganda of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, or the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, or even the Israeli radical-left.

British Jewish liberals need to show a nuanced view of Israel, including on the Israeli-Palestinian question. Yes, ending the occupation is necessary for ending the conflict, and Palestinian self-de-



termination is necessary for Israel to remain Jewish and democratic. But ending the occupation is not sufficient for ending the conflict, as the recent experience of the Gaza Strip demonstrated to every Israeli who has had rockets fired at their town or city. Anyone talking about the Israeli-Palestinian question needs to take seriously the fact that armed Islamists have entered every weakly governed space in the Middle East. British Jews with liberal values, if they are deeply engaged with Israeli society, can play a special role in explaining the real dilemmas and justified concerns of Israeli Jews, to non-Jewish counterparts in the UK. This in turn will make efforts by British activists to promote peace more likely to have a positive impact.

What is absolutely unacceptable is using demonising language about Israel (e.g. 'Israel is itself a steaming pile of sewage which needs to be properly disposed of') or denigrating other Jews who associate with Israel, or the Jewish community as a whole. This might be seen as harmless self-gratification for a tiny minority, but it gives legitimacy for non-Jews to then engage in similar denigration.

In sum, the Talmudic aphorism, 'Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh' ('All of Israel is responsible for one another') is not just a moral assertion, but a statement of fact. Israeli leaders need to internalise how their actions impact on the lives of Jewish in the Diaspora. Similarly, British Jews need to internalise how their actions affect one another.



**BRITISH JEWS AND ISRAEL – HOW IS THE  
RELATIONSHIP EVOLVING? A SYMPOSIUM |  
HANNAH WEISFELD AND MAYA ILANY**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Hanna Weisfeld and Maya Ilany:** For the overwhelming body of British Jews, the ‘centre-ground’ is a deep commitment to Israel and its centrality to Jewish identity. Beyond that, concern for Israel’s safety and security, support for the two-state solution, pride in its democratic foundations and liberal traditions, and an opposition to the settlement project in the occupied Palestinian territories forms the basis of opinions on Israel.

In 2015 Yachad funded a piece of research into British Jewish attitudes to Israel. Carried out by a group of academics under the auspices of City University, with field work conducted by Ipsos Mori, it is the most detailed and up-to-date analysis that exists of the British Jewish community’s attitudes towards Israel. The research shows our community is supportive of Israel, while the attitudes towards specific government policies are far more diverse. The vast majority of British Jews support Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state (90 per cent). There is a small minority in our community who believes that Palestinians do not have a right to a land of their own (14 per cent), or that settlements are not an obstacle to peace (14 per cent), but these are marginal views. The majority of British Jews (75 per cent) believe the expansion of settlements are an obstacle to peace.

While the data demonstrates where the majority of the community stands on Israel, some of our communal organisations may give the impression that when it comes to the Jewish homeland, the community holds more hawkish, right-wing views. This is because these views, which are held by a smaller minority, have traditionally dominated the agenda of some communal institutions. This may provide some explanation as to why the research revealed that those with more hawkish attitudes overestimated the prevalence of their own views two-fold, whilst those with more dovish views about Israel underestimated the prevalence of their own views by 10 per cent.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**HW & MI:** First of all, British Jews do not have an obligation to defend Israel by default. As the IHRA working definition of antisemitism makes clear: Jews are not collectively responsible for the actions of the Israeli government and therefore they do not have a responsibility to defend policy decisions of the Israeli government.

There is often a misconception that in order to ‘win’ friends for Israel, it is important to present Israel solely in a positive light when speaking to non-Jewish audiences, regardless of what our own opinions are. Yet, not only does that allow those that are not friends of Israel to define our relationship as Jews to Israel, it also presents Israel, and supporters of Israel, being entirely monolithic in their opinions.

In Yachad’s case, as a Zionist, pro-Israel organisation, we have made it our mission to stand up for the Israel we believe in regardless of whether it is a Jewish or non-Jewish audience we are engaging with. At times that might mean defending Israel and Zionism, and in other circumstances being critical of policies of the Israeli government – past and present.

In our experience, the best way to beat those who wish to demonise Israel is not by ignoring the issues they present – it is by winning the argument. And we win the argument by showing that Liberalism and Zionism are perfectly compatible. We are able to demonstrate that being pro-Israel does not mean supporting the occupation of the Palestinian territories or the Nation-State Law, and that current policies of the Israeli government are not the definition of Zionism. It is because we are willing to criticise the occupation and anti-liberal trends in Israel, as opposed to ignoring them, that we are able to win the argument in favour of Israel.

**FJ:** *What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?*

**HW & MI:** It is important to note that there is a significant difference in being acceptable and effective. In a society governed by laws of free speech, whilst we may fundamentally disagree with the way in which others express their support for or frustrations with Israel, unless there is incitement or racial hatred at the heart of what is being said or done, it is not ‘unacceptable,’ even if we are offended. There is a part of the community, for example, that resorts on a relatively frequent basis to calling those with whom they disagree ‘Kapos’. This choice of language would fall into the category of unacceptable. Were this a non-Jew directing this language towards a Jew, this would be deemed to be antisemitic and demeaning of the memory of the holocaust. The same should apply to the way in which Jews talk to other Jews when it comes to discussions about Israel.

When it comes to the question of effectiveness, this is a judgement call as to whether your choice of 'action' or 'language' is likely to have the desired impact. Whilst actions or use of language that offends large numbers of people might not be 'unacceptable,' they are most likely to be ineffective as significant numbers of people will be deterred from engaging with the point you are trying to make. Likewise, displaying a lack of empathy towards others' concerns is unlikely to be effective.

**FJ:** *To what extent do you agree with the assertion that there is a 'potentially seismic change' in the way that British Jewry discusses and feels about Israel?*

**HW & MI:** The narrative of the community, has for some time, been framed around the idea of 'being in the tent' when it comes to Israel i.e. that there are a set of opinions that are considered to be acceptable, if not vastly different, that are all within communal red lines on discourse on Israel. Those that hold views beyond those red lines are 'out the tent'. These lines broadly are, on the Left of the community, support for BDS i.e. those that support the BDS movement are not in the tent, and on the Right, support for a two-state solution i.e. those that support a single state where non-Jews are second class citizens are out of the tent. Yet these lines, which have been somewhat arbitrarily defined, are becoming harder to maintain.

Previously, it was assumed that those that engaged in the more 'critical' end of anti-occupation activism were outside the mainstream of the community. However, if the events of the past six or so months are anything to go by, quite the opposite is true. Those that are most engaged, most knowledgeable and most switched on, are frustrated by what they see taking place in Israel and are looking for ways to express their concerns and frustrations. It is no longer possible to dismiss those engaging in this type of activism as being disengaged Jews. Likewise, when high profile members of the Israeli government express views that do not support a two-state solution, and are at times deeply racist, it is becoming harder to suggest that anti-occupation activists are out of the 'tent' or beyond the red line. Consequently, it seems that the element of 'control' that once existed over community discourse on Israel, is simply no longer present in the debate. It is only a matter of time before this will result in a 'seismic change'.



**BRITISH JEWS AND ISRAEL – HOW IS THE  
RELATIONSHIP EVOLVING? A SYMPOSIUM |  
ROBIN MOSS**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Robin Moss:** From the best research we have, as far as I can see the ‘centre ground’ is, approximately, the following collection of views:

- 1) A belief in the basic justice of the Zionist cause – i.e. the legitimacy of Jewish statehood in the Land of Israel.
- 2) A deep connectedness to Israel as part of British Jewish identity and an instinctive protectiveness towards it.
- 3) A personal connection to Israel created by meaningful, memory-making time spent in Israel, combined for many British Jews with a family connection.
- 4) An unease at some government policies, for instance concerning settlement expansion and the inequalities between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, but also a feeling that ultimately only Israelis can be responsible for Israeli policy.
- 5) A willingness to hear and engage with a range of views on Israel within the community, but an unwillingness to broach major dissent over how the community/communal leadership defends Israel to the wider British public.
- 6) A sense that Israel is judged unfairly in the court of public opinion, however no illusion that Israel is somehow a perfect, ideal society.
- 7) Theoretical support for a two-state solution, but without much clarity as to what this might actually demand of Israeli or Palestinian leaderships or publics in practice; coupled with a non-negotiable concern for Israel’s security.
- 8) A pride in Israel’s accomplishments.

Of course, there are Jews to the ‘right’ and the ‘left’ of all of these positions, but I would imagine that the above represents ‘middle Anglo-Jewry’.

**FJ:** *What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?*

**RB:** I think that questions of (un)acceptability and (in)effectiveness are linked but separate, so I will take each in turn.

My view is that there is a distinction between what individuals choose to do and what happens when they are either part of a broader organisation or claim to represent ‘the community’. I would have a quite wide tolerance for individuals protesting against Israeli government policy. No government is above reproach and no policy is beyond critique. Jews, as stakeholders in the project that is Israel, have a right to have their voices heard. Note that I use the term ‘stakeholder’. We are not shareholders – we don’t have a vote at the AGM (elections), elect the board (government) etc. We do, however, have a stake in Israel, wherever we live, and so whilst we don’t have a veto or a vote, we absolutely should have a voice. I think that such criticism should be framed in a positive, constructive way rather than simply being a chance to pour vitriol on Israel. Makom, the Israel Engagement think/do-tank within the Jewish Agency describes this as ‘bettering, not battering’ Israel.

The challenge comes when one decides to engage in activism on behalf of other people. If you are part of an organisation, then you have to be mindful of the values and interests of the organisation as well as your own. All organisations should be internally pluralistic, of course – otherwise they are cults. But when one acts in the name of an organisation without a full consideration of what that really implies, I think that can be unacceptable. The obvious example here is if an organisation self-defines as ‘Zionist’. What does that mean? There are a wide range of meanings of the term ‘Zionist’. But not an infinite range. It is for Zionist organisations to have nuanced conversations internally, and to engage with the broader Zionist community, to determine what it might mean. I’m not the ultimate arbiter of Zionism however I am uncomfortable when some British Jews use the fact that they are part of a Zionist organisation to, for instance, justify hateful personal abuse of others. I don’t care if you are the greatest Zionist with the most memberships of Zionist organisations in the world. Abuse is wrong. Full stop.

In terms of efficacy, I have to say, I’m probably more cynical than most. The Israeli government of course has in the past changed course because of conversations with Diaspora Jewish communities. But in the main, the Israeli government has little concrete record of responding to Diaspora Jewish concerns – from the left or from the right. I went to a fascinating educational session at Limmud Conference a few years ago about why, in the view of the presenter, it was a scandal that Jews could not pray on the Temple Mount. A number of the people in the audience described how they had raised this issue again and again with their Israeli friends and in some cases with Israeli governmental contacts they happened to have. And all for naught.

Israel will do what Israel sees as in Israel’s interests. That doesn’t mean that protest or campaigning are not worthwhile, especially if they are partnered in a meaningful way with Israelis who believe

the same things. In general, I don't think that critique of the Israeli government by British Jews is very effective.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**RB:** This is of course a tough question. A principled, nuanced position can easily be taken wildly out of context and we can all think of examples when people who mean Israel nothing but harm have twisted Jewish criticism of Israel that comes from a place of love and concern, for their own ends.

I certainly think that the idea that we have no responsibility is wrong. Jewish terms such as *klal Yisrael* [community of Israel / the Jewish people] and *ahavat Yisrael* [love of Israel / the Jewish people] are important and meaningful values and in practical terms. It is unreasonable to claim that one couldn't possibly have known how one's words might be used. In this day and age, what one says and to whom are equally important.

I think the key distinction is between what one means and what one says. I don't think Jews should be self-censoring their basic positions on matters of controversy, be that about Zionism or Israeli government policy. But I do think Jews should be careful how they say it.

For instance, within most (though not all) Jewish-only spaces, a certain set of presumptions are implicit and norms are shared. One doesn't need, for example, to continually say why after the Shoah, Jews felt so vulnerable and powerless. This is taken for granted. So one might frame a critique of Israeli security policy without explicitly stating that. Having said that, Jewish Israelis absolutely have a well-founded historical traumatic fear of violent attack and ultimately annihilation. Making the same critique in a non-Jewish-majority space without any reference to, and therefore acknowledgement of, Israeli Jewish existential fears, to me, however, would be mistaken.

Finally, if it is discovered that true enemies of Israel are using one's views in a manipulative way (particularly as cover for hatred – that appalling way that 'look, even the Jews are saying it, so it's fine' discourse often plays out), I think one has a responsibility to make it clear that you have been misunderstood and taken out of context. I'm thinking, for instance, about when Natalie Portman turned down the Genesis Prize in April 2018. BDS activists jumped upon her decision as justification for their campaign. Portman very quickly, and very publicly, made it absolutely clear that what she was doing had nothing whatsoever to do with BDS. British Jews may reasonably agree or disagree with her decision to not accept the Prize; but the important thing is that she decisively drew a line between her actions and the BDS movement.

**FJ:** *To what extent do you agree with the assertion that there is a ‘potentially seismic change’ in the way that British Jewry discusses and feels about Israel?*

**RB:** I think that the coming years, as the ‘Millennial’ generation takes on increasing positions of leadership within British Jewry, will see both seismic change and remarkable continuity.

I was born in 1986. I went on my first youth movement summer camp when I was 13, just after my Bar Mitzvah. It was July 2000. I have a clear memory of sitting on the grass at the camp in the sun, with the shlichah (Israeli educator from the Jewish Agency) telling us some very exciting news. ‘At this very moment,’ she told us, ‘in a place called Camp David in the USA, the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships are talking directly about how to end the conflict. And like many Israelis, I’m both excited and confident that very soon – possibly by the end of this very camp – they might succeed. The conflict might end. Peace might come’.

I believe that I am quite literally the last generation of young British Jews whose formative Israel education could in all good faith be framed in that way, at least for the foreseeable future. I’m not getting into a blame game, but my point is this: the Israel conversation has changed. Its starting point is different. What it means to be an ‘optimist’ about Israel is different than it once was. And as more and more people my age and younger take control of the discourse (accelerated, of course, by social media), change is inevitable. Today’s young British Jews are, on the whole, more politically ‘left-wing’ (in Israeli terms) than their parents and grandparents. This, combined with the current lack of a substantive peace process with the Palestinians, will definitely affect communal discourse around Israel. The ‘boundaries of the tent’ have already shifted. That shift will only accelerate as the years go by.

Of course, the generation below me is different again. When I speak to today’s teenage British Jews, there does seem to be polarisation going on. Some are angry – they are angry about anti-semitism within elements of British society, angry that (as they see it) our communal organisations are too meek and timid and angry at what they see as an unwarranted left/liberal consensus amongst the communal leadership. This may or may not be fair. But it is how they feel.

Others are angry – they are angry about the seemingly-ever-deepening entrenchment of Israeli control of the West Bank, of settlement expansion, of discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel, of illiberal legislation passed by the Knesset and of what they see as the British Jewish establishment’s tacit support or supine lack of opposition to all of this. This may or may not be fair. But it is how they feel.

Much more attention is paid to second group than to the first, but both exist and are growing all

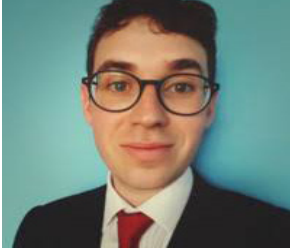


the time. Whilst they would probably have little else in common, both are united by a profound and (if we are not careful) extremely damaging anti-institutionalism. They don't want to reform or rejuvenate the communal organisations that for 100 years have mediated (in my view quite effectively, all things considered) the relationship between British Jews and Israel and facilitated (again, in my view quite effectively, all things considered) the internal communal dialogue about Israel. They want to tear us down. Replacement and revolution, not repair or evolution, are their watchwords.

And yet – in other ways, things aren't actually changing very much at all.

Young British Jews, overwhelmingly, are spending time in Israel. They are going more often and in an ever-widening variety of frameworks. Easyjet and Wizzair have made Israel more accessible than ever. Aliyah is basically steady (far more a trickle than a flood). Israeli culture – food, TV, films, celebrities – is increasingly normalised within British and British-Jewish society. The outpouring of joy at Neta's victory in the 2018 Eurovision Song Contest was nearly universal amongst young British Jews – there are still many things for them to celebrate. 1100 British Jews went to Israel through our wonderful youth movements this summer. How many went in 2005? 1100. In 1997? 1100. The 'Israel Experience,' a framework operated by the Jewish Agency that UJIA has been proud to support and sustain for many years, is one of our community's flagship projects. Long may it continue.

So both continuity and change. Maybe, in this age of polarisation and either/or, British Jews' connection to Israel will buck that particular baleful trend.



**BRITISH JEWS AND ISRAEL – HOW IS THE  
RELATIONSHIP EVOLVING? A SYMPOSIUM |  
SIMON GORDON**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Simon Gordon:** The JC inferred from an open letter by leaders of progressive youth movements criticising the communal leadership that the ‘centre-ground’ for Anglo-Jewry on Israel has moved to the left. That inference is suspect.

The available data does not indicate a leftward shift. Yachad’s own survey of the attitudes of British Jews towards Israel, conducted by Ipsos Mori in 2015, found that 60 per cent agreed that there is no Palestinian partner for peace, that 70 per cent said Palestinians must recognise Israel as a Jewish state if they want peace, and that 93 per cent thought Israel was entitled to take military action to combat Hamas rockets and tunnels. Such views are hardly out of step with those of the Israeli government. This may explain why the JC’s poll of British Jews prior to the 2015 Israeli elections, conducted by Survation, found that 67 per cent would vote Likud, with just 22 per cent backing the Zionist Union.

British politics paints a similar picture. Since the 2014 Gaza War, Israel has become a polarising issue,, which has only intensified since Jeremy Corbyn replaced Ed Miliband as Labour leader. The ongoing Labour anti-Semitism scandal is inseparable from the anti-Zionist sympathies of the fringe figures who now control the party – as evidenced by the dispute over whether to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism in full or to modify the provisions relating to Israel. Per Corbyn, ‘to assert that ‘anti-Zionism is racism’ now is wrong’. By contrast, the Conservatives have taken pains to show the Jewish community their (relative) support for Israel. Over recent years, B’nei Akiva’s Yom Ha’atzmaut service at Kinloss has been addressed by senior government ministers including Gavin Williamson, Sajid Javid, Stephen Crabb, and, in 2015, Theresa May.

The Jewish community’s response, in successive elections, has been clear. In the 2015 and 2017 general elections and 2018 local elections, constituencies with a high proportion of Jewish residents, in both London and Manchester, have formed blue islands in a sea of red. Even as the Conservatives lost other Remain voters in major cities, Jewish support has held firm. As the two

major parties have moved on Israel, the political affiliations of British Jews have clearly shifted too. However the shift is to the right, not the left.

If communal leaders are out of step with the Jewish community on Israel, the misalignment is not of that suggested in the open letter. Far from marginalising the New Israel Fund (NIF) and progressive youth groups, as the open letter alleges, the institutions of Anglo-Jewry have been all too receptive. The Board of Deputies's (BOD) limp defence of Israel during the 2014 Gaza War prompted a furious backlash from Jews at a townhall event, who felt the BOD should have adopted a much more muscular stance. Jonathan Arkush, who succeeded Vivian Wineman as president of the BOD, delivered the Israel policy the town hall audience demanded. In so doing, he moved the BOD back onto the 'centre-ground'.

Misalignment between Jewish institutions and the Jewish community occurs when the leadership mistakes the views of a vocal minority for those of the silent majority. The available evidence suggests that mainstream Anglo-Jewry supports Israel, her government, and the actions of her military, much as it has for decades. The 'centre-ground' is staying put. Our leaders should follow suit.

**FJ:** *What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?*

**SG:** Diaspora Jews who want to influence Israeli policy and practice have the means to do so. They can exercise their right of return, become Israeli citizens, and participate in Israeli democracy. Democratic rights do not extend to those who choose not to make aliyah. If Israel is to remain a democracy, her government must be solely beholden to her citizens. Diaspora Jews should not expect to influence Israeli policy simply by dint of being Jewish.

Lack of political participation does not preclude Diaspora Jews from involvement in Israeli society. There is no shortage of charitable projects to contribute towards, whether by donating financially, sharing expertise, or volunteering on the ground.

Beyond the project in question, there is no doubt that such initiatives strengthen ties between Israel and the Diaspora. When I was working for the Israeli ambassador, I lost count of the number of messages we sent to British charities thanking them for their work in Israel.

Attempts to influence Israeli politics from the outside, however, provoke the opposite response. The problem is moral hazard. Israelis are liable to resent political interventions by people who will not bear the cost of the policies they promote. It's a lot easier to call for an end to occupation

when your house is out of range of Hamas rockets. The effect of such advocacy is not to change policy, but merely to damage the relationship between Israel and the rest of the Jewish world. British groups that criticise Israel for being unreceptive to their concerns display a profound lack of self-awareness. Perhaps the problem isn't that Israel hasn't been listening to us. Maybe we haven't been listening carefully enough to the Israeli public.

At the party BICOM hosted for the last Israeli elections, I was struck by the despondency in the room when it became clear that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had pulled off a surprise victory. One prominent pro-Israel activist said to me: 'Don't they realise how difficult this makes life for us?' Did he realise, I wondered, how difficult many Israeli voters clearly felt the alternative would make life for them?

Effective engagement with Israel requires empathy. If Israelis are voting for different parties from those some British Jews would support, the response should not be to berate them for their choice but to understand why they made it. Criticism is counterproductive.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**SG:** Demonisation, or delegitimisation of Israel – that is, denying the State of Israel rights that other countries are assumed to hold or the Jewish people the right to national self-determination – is by definition racist. British Jews, no less than anyone else, should not fuel racist ideology.

This requires strategic awareness. Those who delegitimise Israel will always seek to cite support from Jews to demonstrate that they are not racist. When community leaders or Jewish NGOs condemn a particular Israeli policy, they should expect their statement to be used to legitimise anti-Zionism. Corbyn's claim that the BOD shared his concerns about the Nation-State Law, which he falsely accused of 'relegating Palestinian citizens to second-class status,' is a case in point.

The solution is not to criticise Israel publicly. If Jewish groups feel they must take issue with the Israeli government, they should at least do it behind closed doors. If the government is really their intended audience, writing to the Israeli ambassador privately should serve the same purpose as issuing a press release or saying kaddish in Parliament Square. Assuming, that is, that the purpose of seeking publicity is not precisely to create a tail wind.

Self-professed Zionists – whether individuals or organisations – should be especially sensitive to the consequences of their public pronouncements. Groups that repeatedly rebuke the Israeli government in the full knowledge that their words will be co-opted by anti-Zionists are responsible

for the damage caused. Zionism entails more than subscribing to a set of principles. It means acting in a way that supports, rather than undermines, the state.

Indeed, neglecting to give succour to delegitimisers is not enough. Jews should be proactive in exposing the racism underlying anti-Zionism. It is incumbent on us to unmask racism masquerading as legitimate criticism of Israel. We can't expect others to put their heads above the parapet on our behalf if we're too timid to do so ourselves.



**BRITISH JEWS AND ISRAEL – HOW IS THE  
RELATIONSHIP EVOLVING? A SYMPOSIUM |  
JONATHAN HUNTER**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Jonathan Hunter:** The term ‘centrism’ evokes images of reason and pragmatism and when it comes to defining the Israel debate, is a call for a rational and tolerant discussion of the issues in order to arrive at pragmatic, thoughtful conclusions. The notion of arriving at a ‘middle ground’ is very old, found in both Rabbinical tradition and classical philosophy alike. One of the most famous Delphic maxims was ‘nothing in excess’ – an ideal most poetically expressed by Euripides’s elderly nurse in his play *Medea*: ‘The middle way, neither great nor mean, / Is best by far, in name and practice.’ Between the heartless character of Jason, totally devoid of human emotion, and *Medea*, driven insane by her fanatical dependence on emotions of the most extreme kind, Euripides’s un-named nurse stands as one of western literature’s most profound reminders that in the absence of moderation, human judgment is rendered both self-destructive and harmful to others.

As far as the Israel discussion is concerned, that ‘middle way’ has been elusive. Hysterical discourse that is entirely critical of Israel or unthinking partisanship which allows no room for deep reflection – the Jewish community’s very own Jason and *Medea* – are where the centre ground should not be. Each tend to speak in abusive or propagandistic tones while the Jewish community needs respectful and reasoned dialogue.

Discourse focused entirely on the hysterical signalling of moral virtue is self-destructive to the Jewish community. It sets an example whereby young people are encouraged to demonise those with whom they disagree (or have been told to disagree with), prompting disputes which cannot be settled by rational debate. Such discourse totally discourages critical thinking and does a great disservice to the cause of Jewish education. Our youth are taught simply to believe what they are told by one authority or another, not to question it or to pursue their own enquiries. This is the opposite of the essence of Rabbinical tradition, which is to question everything.

The rational endpoint of this frame of debate is the scene we witnessed in Parliament Square: a group of far-left activists deliberately reciting a Jewish mourning prayer for terrorists in order to provoke a reaction, and another group of activists reacting hysterically in exactly the manner

predicted.

In the absence of a strong moral example from the Jewish community's leadership, intellectually curious young people are left in the middle of this cross fire. They are told to join one of two groups: either the growing ranks of the hard-left that is entirely devoted to constant criticism of Israeli policy, or alternatively to be a part of traditional Israeli advocacy which is totally averse to any criticism.

We founded The Pinsker Centre in 2016 to break this paradigm. We wanted to provide a forum for young people to openly debate – where difference is tolerated and censorship is challenged. We wanted to find the centre – but we also wanted to defend the principles we believe in.

Over two years, we've hosted contentious debates on topics ranging from counter-terrorism and civil liberties to whether it was right for the United States Embassy to be moved to Jerusalem. Attracting diverse crowds of students from across the world, we've tried to maintain the balance between being staunchly committed to Israel's legitimacy whilst being able to freely voice opinions critical of aspects of Israeli policy. That is where we think the centre is.

**FJ:** *What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?*

**JH:** The notion of certain kinds of speech being 'acceptable' can be discomfiting at best – Orwellian at worst. The assumption that some speech is 'unacceptable' and therefore should not be heard leads to the eventual question: who is to determine what is, and what isn't, 'acceptable'? Someone with a certain ideological bias could simply determine that anyone with an opposing view was 'unacceptable'.

It is not for anyone to say what kind of idea is or isn't 'acceptable.' Rather, it is up to anyone with strongly held views to advocate for them, to publicly debate them, and to convince others of them.

By creating a marketplace for ideas and a forum for debate, members of the Jewish community can see which arguments are strong and convincing and which are extreme or devoid of reason. The latter kind of discourse is objectively identifiable by any reasonable observer. It entails the kind of extreme ideological criticism of Israel which purposefully ignores facts, which often resorts to abuse, and works day and night to delegitimise the very existence of Israel.

However there is a more prevalent kind of unbalanced engagement with Israel, of a more worrying (albeit less extreme) character. Various Jewish communal institutions increasingly ignore the extremely colourful and vibrant diversity of Israeli civil society and disproportionately focus on exclusively engaging with groups hailing from one side of the political spectrum.

There is nothing wrong with engaging with any controversial group or individual, but by constantly presenting only one side of the political spectrum, the message is sent that there is only one side worth engaging with. The result is social marginalisation on the basis of what people believe.

Less important than the political positions of educators is the quality of the discourse they contribute. As well as being respectful to others the educator must also be genuinely qualified to make informed and rational assessments of Israel and its culture, history and society.

The term 'Israel engagement' is essentially a phrase coined by corporate PR to 'hygienically' refer to an extremely controversial form of education. For such education to be profound, effective and genuinely impactful, educators must be at the top of their fields, and professionally qualified in the areas they comment on.

In other words, educators must know what they're talking about. In contrast, the sort of armchair punditry coming from self-styled experts does indescribable harm to the cause of education. If someone is not in a position to answer tough questions because they do not have the requisite experience and knowledge, it is guaranteed that they will misinform their audience.

On campus, this was all too common. Students were not being educated on policy from experienced policymakers, or on history from trained historians. Rather than hear repetitive soundbites about 'Palestinian rejectionism' taken from a leaflet for an American audience, we wanted to hear from the negotiators themselves. So we made it happen. We hosted discussions with Ehud Olmert and Dan Meridor across the country; the individuals who actually led the negotiations at Annapolis and Camp David respectively. This is only one example of the quality of discussion we should be facilitating: the point being, for education to be effective, we need to set the bar much higher.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**JH:** The cliché sourced variously to Winston Churchill and Spiderman is 'with great power comes great responsibility.' True, though so is its inversion. For a community such as ours, with limited power comes even greater responsibility. Anglo-Jewry lacks the numbers to wield much electoral power. Our words are our strength, and we have a responsibility to use them wisely. If a member



of the Jewish community is in a position of public recognition, the Jewish community need them to speak out against antisemitism, especially the kind which masquerades under the guise of 'merely' boycotting the Jewish state.

In this context, we should worry less about 'policing' what British Jews say about contemporary Israeli policy and be more concerned by the fact that there are dozens of prominent British Jews who have nothing to say at all. We should have little concern about personal opinions giving 'tail wind' to anti-Israeli extremism compared to the fact that there are not enough leaders speaking against such extremism in the first place.

There is a rising climate of antisemitism on the political left. It is nearly entirely linked to a brand of extreme anti-Zionism which apologises for 9/11 conspiracy theorists, Hamas terrorists and Holocaust 'revisionists.' If the British Jewish communal leadership wishes to weigh in on the conflict, it needs to prioritise challenging the threats it faces from those who obsessively seek to dismantle the only Jewish-majority member state of the United Nations. The increasing normalisation of antisemitic discourse in public life is the greatest threat facing the Jewish community today. Yes, the communal debate about Israeli policy is important and criticism of Israeli policy can be an important and healthy part of this debate. Yes, the Jewish community have a responsibility to be honest, to tolerate all reasonable differences of opinion and to foster a vibrant communal discourse. However British Jews have a far greater responsibility to speak out publicly against the rising intolerance, threats, and hatred faced by British Jews.



**BRITISH JEWS AND ISRAEL – HOW IS THE  
RELATIONSHIP EVOLVING? A SYMPOSIUM |  
TAMARA BERENS**

**Fathom Journal:** *The Jewish Chronicle (JC) posed the question ‘what exactly is the centre ground for British Jews on Israel now?’ How would you answer that question?*

**Tamara Berens:** Most of the community would agree that the state has a right to exist as a homeland for the Jewish people. However, views on the character of the state differ vastly. This is fitting if we consider the wide variety of views that currently exist within Israel in response to the social and political challenges the state faces.

**FJ:** What kinds and forms of criticism of / engagement by British Jews with Israel and Israeli policy and practice do you consider acceptable / most effective, and which are unacceptable / least effective?

**TB:** The least effective criticism and engagement by British Jews with Israel is when critical opinions are voiced within the wider British political sphere, including attempts to lobby the British government to put pressure on the Israeli government. Those who engage with Israel through the British political sphere instead of the Israeli one are hypocritically bypassing a relationship that could be easily developed within the Israeli political sphere, where British-Jewry can pursue their critiques and alternative policy proposals with a greater likelihood of success. For example, Yachad’s recent student campaign against Israeli housing demolitions has been directed specifically at Middle East Minister Alistair Burt. The reality is that British government policy has very little clout when it comes to influencing Israel’s national security. When British Jews direct their criticisms of Israel at the British government, it often comes across as a self-serving cry for attention, rather than a legitimate tactic for bringing about change in Israeli politics. Yachad do appear to have directed some of the campaign at Israeli officials, but in order to enact the policy changes they want, solely focusing on Israeli officials would be both more effective and more ethical.

Unacceptable criticisms of Israel by British Jews include those that relate to Israel’s national security or defence policy, which are areas where the Jewish diaspora should not have a role in influencing. Those who have not served in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) cannot claim to have the insight or tangible experience necessary to comprehend the security challenges the state faces.

A small regional power, Israel's grand strategy is largely defined by the existential threats it faces from its neighbours. This means that its policies are nowhere near as much a consequence of the actions of some British Jews, as one might be led to believe. Israel does not pose a significant threat to the Palestinians, especially in comparison to the perilous and sometimes genocidal conflicts erupting across the rest of the Middle East. It is clear that for the moment, Israel seeks to perpetuate the 'status quo' and is not considering launching into a consequential war which might involve significant loss of life. There is therefore no reason why British Jews who have not served in the IDF, and are not experts in wider military affairs, should feel that their opinions on Israeli national security merit attention from either the Israeli or British political sphere.

In addition, when lobbying the British government or attempting to influence the public, British Jews often seem to misguidedly take cues from leftist Israeli organisations such as B'Tselem, which focus on Israeli human rights issues. Left-wing Israeli organisations have a right to focus their attention solely on Israeli shortcomings because they are critiquing the actions of their own government, with the aim of bringing about change in Israeli policy. However, British-Jewish organisations, who are lobbying the British government to take action against Israel, would be more ethical if they focused their attention on bringing a more balanced perspective on Israeli-Palestinian human rights abuses to the fore.

Acceptable engagement with Israel by British-Jews includes engaging with aspects of Israeli society and/or government policy pertaining to religious freedoms and the treatment of non-orthodox Jews. The best practice for engaging with such policies would be spending time in Israel, or engaging with other Israeli institutions, to influence policy within an Israeli forum.

**FJ:** *What responsibilities do British Jews have – if any – to not give a tail wind to those who would demonise Israel, and how should they avoid doing so in practice?*

**TB:** Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party poses an existential threat to British Jewry. His attitude towards antisemitism stems directly from his foreign policy outlook and beliefs about Israel. In this current environment, British Jews have a responsibility to avoid giving the Labour party any excuse to brush off their culpability in antisemitism. British Jews who demonise Israel in a public forum often – either purposefully or accidentally – provide the hard-left with easy justifications for antisemitic attacks against Israel or British Jews. The definition of demonise, according to the Cambridge dictionary is: 'to try to make someone or a group of people seem completely evil'. Demonisation, with regards to Israel, occurs where disproportionate focus is made on Israeli actions as an obstruction to peace and justice. This leaves the impression that Israel is solely responsible for the Arab-Israeli conflict and can lead many to believe that it must therefore be an evil entity. British Jews have a responsibility to uphold a proportional, rational perspective on where

culpability lies with regards to the conflict.

**FJ:** *To what extent do you agree with the assertion that there is a 'potentially seismic change' in the way that British Jewry discusses and feels about Israel?*

**TB:** At this point in time, I don't feel there has yet been a seismic change. However, such a change may come if our communal institutions do not continue to take a firm stance against events such as 'Kaddish for Gaza'. Jews should be able to speak freely in public about any issue they choose. Nonetheless, it is the proper role of communal leadership to take a moral stance and condemn actions that it deems normatively problematic. They could do so both by issuing statements and by barring figures involved with events such as 'Kaddish for Gaza' from taking on communal leadership roles. It is important for Jewish leadership figures and organisations to set an example for the rest of the community and affirm that Israel is an integral part of Jewish identity, and a place that should command respect from Jews worldwide.

