



J Street, the Lobby of the “Silent Majority”
A new critical voice in the American Jewish Community

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According to its conservative rivals, J Street threatens the unity of the Jewish community and discredits the positions of the Israeli government. For liberal Jews, it represents an opportunity to be heard in Washington. Portrait of a lobby that claims the right to criticize Israel.

Since spring 2009, President Obama has shifted the cursor of Washington's Israel policy to the left. Without challenging the friendship and historic closeness that connect the United States to the Jewish state and unite them in a “special relationship,” the White House has taken the path of critical support: Washington's exercise of pressure on Israel to obtain a complete freeze on settlement, combined with public expression of the disagreements between the two capitals. The Obama administration has deviated from the route traced by George W. Bush's team by effecting a triple rupture: it has wanted to distinguish itself by immediate engagement at the highest level on the Israeli-Palestinian issue while it could still use the new president's political capital; it desired to end the great ideological proximity the preceding administration enjoyed with the party in power in Israel; finally, it committed itself to be an “honest broker,” maintaining good relations with both sides – hence the offer of dialogue extended to Arab public opinion and countries during the Cairo speech on June 4 2009.

This change in tone had been prepared since the 2006 war in Lebanon by a marked change in discourse concerning Israel in Washington. Although still far from

commonplace, criticisms of Israeli excesses and half-failures have nonetheless become more frequent there. A few months before the war, academics John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt published a report entitled "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" on the site of the Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, a report subsequently corrected and revamped in the form of a book published the following year.¹ That study, which accused the pro-Israel lobby (in fact, it was solely AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, that was targeted) of holding American Middle East policy hostage and of leading Washington to adopt measures harmful to the US solely out of concern for Israel's interests, aroused a violent controversy.² Although that interpretation was condemned because its demonstration was tainted by factual errors and faulty reasoning, and attacked because it bordered on anti-Semitism, the two authors undeniably shifted the lines of the debate by making the beginning of a critique of Israel possible and acceptable. Mearsheimer and Walt succeeded in convincing people that AIPAC had muzzled criticism of Israel, and, even more important, had made commonplace the idea that the United States would no longer have to automatically act as Israel's advocate.

That second idea was all the more easily accepted in that, since the Lebanon War, the interests of Israel and those of the United States have seemed more divergent than previously. During that conflict, then again during operation "Cast Lead," Israel demonstrated strategic and military weaknesses, which affected its army's international prestige and the consequent interest it could represent for Washington. If operation "Cast Lead" against Gaza did not arouse the outrage in the United States that was observed in European countries,³ Israel's image changed markedly on that occasion: it has appeared as a country that does not fear the use of sometimes disproportionate force. But the issue over which the divergence between the two countries is the most pronounced is Iran: Israel remains tempted by strikes against the Iranian nuclear program, which it considers an existential threat. Should those strikes take place, they would harm American interests

¹ John Mearsheimer, Steven Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2007. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=891198##

² See Peter Hägel and Pauline Peretz, "La polémique sur le 'lobby pro-israélien' aux États-Unis", <http://www.laviedesidees.fr/La-polemique-sur-le-lobby-pro.html>, *La Vie des idées*, April 2007, pp. 71-85.

³ On January 8 and 9, 2009, the two Chambers of Congress with near unanimity adopted a resolution recognizing Israel's right of self-defense against the attacks coming from Gaza.

in the region since they could lead to Iranian reprisals in Iraq and in the Gulf monarchies and provoke a regional crisis that would be difficult to contain.

Since the February 2009 Israeli elections, this consciousness of a divergence between American and Israeli interests has been reinforced by the political dissonance between the American and Israeli executives. For an American president who preaches reconciliation with the Arab world, a Netanyahu drawn towards the hard right by his partners in a coalition he wants to maintain at any price has become cause for trouble. In the spring, the Israelis' intransigence over the occupied territories began to provoke strong impatience in Democratic circles.⁴ Congress' tone with respect to Israel has cooled. Debates there on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and on the reasons for the failure to establish a Palestinian state are now possible. In this context, dissident voices that have emerged from the heart of the Jewish community have become more audible.

A “Liberal” Pro-Peace Lobby

J Street, a newcomer to the community scene, today monopolizes the debate on the reconfiguration of the Jewish American world. Its rivals established in Washington for several decades consider it a radical organization that threatens community unity⁵ and discredits the Israeli government's positions; on both these bases, its influence is to be fought. For liberal Jews, on the contrary, J Street perhaps represents an opportunity to finally be represented in Washington. And for the Obama administration, J Street is a substantial ally since it's able to make the administration's critical positions with respect to Israel acceptable to a community that had been likely to resist new orientations. The media, fascinated by the arrival of this meteorite in the Jewish world, invited themselves into the debate, and, by putting J Street in the limelight⁶, have granted it influence disproportionate to its real influence. J Street, however, is not a media creature only.

⁴ Robert D. Kaplan, “Losing Patience with Israel”, *Atlantic Monthly*, April 3, 2009.

⁵ In a symbolic manner, one of the roundtables organized October 8, 2009 by the neo-conservative think tank Hudson Institute in the framework of a conference on the relations between the United States and Israel was entitled, "Will the Current Crisis Split the American Jewish Community?" <http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm/?fuseaction=HUDSON_UPCOMING_EVENTS&id=717>

⁶ See below, among many others, the articles cited in following notes.

In a community dominated by organizations situated for a decade to the right of center (specifically AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations) and broadly aligned with Israel, J Street, a liberal lobby, pro-Israel, but also pro-peace, created in April 2008, is the main source of the new pluralism in Jewish American voices. Although left-leaning Jewish organizations already existed (particularly, the Israel Policy Forum – IPF – created in 1993 through Yitzhak Rabin’s initiative), up until then, none of them had the means J Street has equipped itself with: this organization is a lobby⁷ (AIPAC is the only other Jewish American community organization that is one) which has created a PAC (Political Action Committee) to finance campaigns. The political configuration within which J Street appeared is also totally new. In 1995, IPF had been galvanized by the political compatibility of the Clinton and Rabin governments. Today, the situation is less favorable. J Street benefits from the Obama administration's new approach, but it is completely out of sync with the Israeli government since February 2009.

J Street's creation responds to a need felt by American Jews ever more acutely in recent years: to be represented by a liberal lobby as a counterweight to AIPAC, deemed too far right. Although the latter succeeded in imposing itself as an indispensable interlocutor on the Middle East for both Congress and the White House since the beginning of the 1980s, it may not purport to represent a community (in the largest and not solely organizational sense of the word) at least two thirds of the members of which are loyal Democrats, ill at ease with the policy conducted by Israel's successive right wing governments. Moreover, the emergence of a new generation of Jewish organizations has been made necessary by the new demographic and political dynamics within the community. Certainly the share of youth is decreasing because of the fall in birthrate and the continual progression of mixed marriages. But the youth point of view must be taken into account by the community at the risk of an irreversible distancing. Those youth, who, unlike their elders (a good number of whom were survivors), did not experience the Holocaust, no longer see in Israel the original affective homeland that it was for their elders. J Street's gamble is that it can federate a part of that generation

⁷ To act as a lobby, J Street had to renounce tax deductible status as AIPAC and all other lobbies.

around a platform of critical support championed by young leaders and harnessing the most modern political activism techniques.

J Street, in fact, distinguishes itself by its claim that the Diaspora enjoys a right to criticize Israel. Like the other organizations, J Street favors a strong American presence in the Middle East to help the two parties find a durable settlement. But it supports the option of a “just” peace: the creation of two states, Israeli and Palestinian, delineated by the 1967 borders (derogations to that principle having to be compensated by land exchanges) and the definitive freeze of settlements. In 2008, J Street openly criticized Israel. Virtually the sole dissident voice last winter, it condemned operation “Cast Lead” in Gaza early on as counterproductive and wrong. In 2009, it was the only Jewish American organization that called for Israel to establish a commission of official inquiry into the conflict, in application of the recommendations of the Goldstone Report that was presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in October. J Street also differentiated itself on the Iranian issue, supporting the Obama administration's attempt at diplomatic engagement and opposing any Israeli attack.⁸ Its criticism also extends to Israeli domestic policy – in February 2009, the lobby posted a YouTube video critical of Avigdor Lieberman, accusing him of racism. J Street derives this right to criticize Israeli policy from the Jewish state's counterproductive impact on the situation of American Jews and on American interests in the region.⁹

The anti-AIPAC Lobby

J Street's blunt talk and interference into Israeli affairs are far removed from the systematic loyalty and discretion of AIPAC. It must be said that in many respects J Street is the anti-AIPAC. It is firmly anchored on the left, while AIPAC systematically looks for consensus, a midline position that may satisfy all its donors and assure it bipartisan

⁸ Exchanges between Shmuel Rosner and Jeremy Ben-Ami, “Rosner's Guest”, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/rosnerGuest.jhtml?itemNo=987196>, *Haaretz*.

⁹ See Jeremy Ben-Ami, “An Open Letter to Michael Oren,” <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1255450643490&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull> *Jerusalem Post*, 13 October 2009: “We too have our own serious concerns over the policies of the present Israeli government and its impact not just on Israel's interests but on our interests as Americans and as American Jews. As Jews who care about Israel, we fear that, on Israel's present path, we will see our shared dream of a Jewish, democratic home in the state of Israel slip through our fingers. As Americans, we worry about the impact of Israeli policies on vital US interests in the Middle East and around the world...”

Congressional support. The personnel and executive board members of the new lobby are virtually all Democrats and have easy access to the Obama team. Many former Clintonians are members of J Street's staff, including its founder, Jeremy Ben-Ami, who was the former president's domestic affairs advisor before working as Howard Dean's political director. Ben-Ami can assert his family's Zionist pedigree to protect himself from attacks: his grandparents were included among the founders of Tel-Aviv and his father was an Irgun leader during the 1930s, and, on that score, responsible for the purchase of the boat Altalena. Ben-Ami himself lived in Israel for several years. J Street's political director, Dan Kohl, raised funds for Obama and is the nephew of Senator Herb Kohl (D-Wisconsin). And the J Street advisory council notably includes Morton Halperin, Policy Planning director under Clinton and now senior advisor for George Soros's Open Society Institute, as well as Alan Solomon, a former financial director for the Democratic National Committee.

Unlike AIPAC, which never directly involves itself in campaign financing, J Street has created its own PAC in order to be able to exert not only ideological and political influence, but also financial influence. In November 2008, the JStreetPAC obtained good results for a first campaign: in seven months, it spent \$575,000 dollars on thirty-eight congressional candidates and three senators.¹⁰ This PAC's goal is to support candidates whose positions on the Middle East may expose them to reprisals from AIPAC.¹¹ In 2008, with one exception, all the candidates supported were Democrats. Jewish and non-Jewish, Congressmen and Senators from North and South, their commonalities were firm attachment to Israel's security and to the friendship between Washington and Tel-Aviv, but they differentiated themselves from AIPAC-supported candidates by their public criticism of the settlements, by their positions on the borders of the two states, on the fate of Jerusalem and on assistance to Palestinians. Out of those forty-one candidates, thirty-three were elected.¹² JStreetPac undeniably scored.

¹⁰ See the site, Open Secrets <http://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/lookup2.php?strID=C00441949>.

¹¹ Neil A. Lewis, "U.S. Jews Create New Lobby to Temper Israel Policy," *New York Times*, 25 April 2008.

¹² Natasha Mozgovaya, "New 'pro-Israel, pro-Peace' Lobby J Street Hopes for Obama-era growth", *Haaretz*, 13 November 2008.

Another difference between the two lobbies: J Street seeks out the greatest possible visibility, while AIPAC remains faithful to its legendary discretion. To attract young people and attempt to short-circuit the powers-that-be as Obama did during his campaign, J Street conceived an action model similar to that of Moveon.org or MyBo.com. Jeremy Ben-Ami and Isaac Luria, its hot 28 year-old campaign director with extensive experience in local and on-line political organization (and who has lived in Israel and is married to a woman completing her rabbinical training) have made opinion campaigning and permanent movement their main action modes. To improve efficiency, reduce costs, and harvest on-line donations, J Street practices e-politics. By associating traditional lobbying techniques and an aggressive media approach – notably through the Internet – the lobby has assured itself a disproportionate presence in the media. The special report the *New York Times Magazine* devoted to it in its September 13, 2009 edition has contributed to imposing it as a Washington actor of the first rank: in that article, the newspaper, which up until recently was still fairly close to AIPAC's positions, legitimated criticism of America's systematic alignment with Israel and showcased J Street, all the while presenting AIPAC as an organization of the past that counts on the support of disreputable allies – such as Reverend Hagee's Christians United for Israel.¹³

In spite of this media ascension, J Street is far from being capable of rivaling AIPAC. The latter has been exerting its influence in the Capitol for over fifty years. Its contacts there are solidly established; its lobbying techniques, extremely well-polished; and its reputation, assured. Its means are also incommensurable with those of J Street: a 75 million dollar budget (versus 4), staff of 120 employees in Washington (versus approximately 30). Above all, J Street encounters serious limitations in its influence with Congress. It was unable to check the virtually unanimous support of the two Chambers for Israel during operation “Cast Lead.” Shortly before Netanyahu's arrival in Washington, a letter addressed to Obama, prepared by AIPAC and relayed by Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Republican Whip Eric Cantor, warned against the Democratic administration imposing a solution on the two parties. Its impact was far more significant than that of the letter prepared by J Street and relayed by Steve Cohen, Russ Carnahan

¹³ James Traub, “The New Israel Lobby”, *New York Times Magazine*, 9 September 2009.

and Charles Boustany (a Republican), which presented the recovery of the economy and the construction of transparent institutions in Palestine as objectives to support and not as preconditions to the creation of a Palestinian state. The AIPAC letter obtained signatures from three quarters of the House; the J Street letter, from 87 Representatives. And in mid-July, J Street was unable to neutralize the so-called letter of the 71, prepared by AIPAC, and calling on the president to exert the United States' pressure as much on the Palestinians as on the Israelis.¹⁴

A Legitimacy to be Consolidated

J Street will certainly be able to exert its influence more strongly when it has succeeded in reassuring people of its representativeness. Its adversaries still manage to paint it as a radical and dangerous organization. Its public condemnation of operation “Cast Lead” has contributed to its marginalization on the left. Its support for talks with Hamas also sets J Street on the left.¹⁵ As expected, the right's attack is extremely virulent – the accusations of anti-Zionism and betrayal of Israel fuse under the pens of the Jewish conservative press, such as *Commentary*¹⁶ or in the mouths of leaders of rightwing Jewish organizations (such as the Zionist Organization of America or ZOA). In the rightwing Jewish and Israeli press, J Street's leaders were called “renegades” on multiple occasions.¹⁷ Even though AIPAC members admit in private to being disturbed by the emergence of these newcomers, the organization itself refuses to take a public position.

To gain in legitimacy, J Street must succeed in ridding itself of this, mostly unjustified, heretical reputation. To that end, it is trying to consolidate its base. Its initial ambition was to return younger and more liberal American Jews who did not feel represented by an establishment deemed excessively hawkish to the communal fold. But J Street's problem is to arouse interest in Israel among Jews who are generally exclusively concerned with domestic issues. So J Street finds itself in the paradoxical

¹⁴ See “71 Senators urge Obama to Press Arabs”, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1249418574239&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull>, *Jerusalem Post*, 11 August 2009.

¹⁵ See James Kirchick, “The Surrender Lobby”, *Haaretz*, 11 January 2009.

¹⁶ Noah Pollack, “They're Doing the J Street Jive”, *Commentary*, April 2009.

¹⁷ For a particularly virulent example, see Isi Leibler, “Marginalize the Renegades”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 October 2009.

situation of claiming to represent the majority opinion of a group not yet organized on a question that is far from being the first of its concerns. To represent those Ben-Ami has cleverly designated as “the previously “silent majority””,¹⁸ J Street must go beyond the limited recruitment perimeter of other Jewish left-leaning organizations, such as Americans for Peace Now, Israel Policy Forum, Meretz USA, or Brit Tzedek v’Shalom.

The lobby endeavors to convince that it speaks in the name of a significant share of Jews by distributing the results of two series of polls, the methodology of which has been much criticized in the Jewish and Israeli press.¹⁹ The results tend to show that J Street defends the positions of a vast majority of Jewish Americans: activist American diplomacy in the region (approved by 87% of Jews polled in July 2008, 86% in March 2009), even if American commitment to the issue involves public criticism of Israel (75% in July 2008, 66% in March 2009) or pressure exerted on Israel (70% in July 2008, 64% in March 2009), beginning negotiations with Syria and Hamas (76% then 66%), opposition to the extension of settlements (60% in March 2009).²⁰ In this way, J Street demonstrates that at least two thirds of American Jews (and not only those Jews who belong to community organizations) are in favor of a change in the paradigm of Israeli-American relations.

To get rid of this leftwing reputation, J Street today endeavors to appear more “mainstream” than it really is, by trying to obtain the support of key Jewish American and moderate Israeli figures. In the beginning of September 2009, J Street hired Hadar Susskind - former vice president of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, an umbrella organization for the community, positioned at its center, and charged with defending the community's domestic interests – as its new political and strategic director.²¹ In 2008, the Jewish magazine *The Forward* singled out Susskind, this Sergeant First Class in the

¹⁸ Jeremy Ben-Ami, “The ‘Previously Silent’ Majority”, *Haaretz*, 29 July 2009.

¹⁹ For an example of these critiques, see Smuel Rosner, “Do U.S. Jews Really Support ‘Necessary Compromises for Peace?’” *Haaretz*, 17 July 2008.

²⁰ J street, “American Jews Defy Conventional Wisdom On Israel and the Middle East”, http://www.jstreet.org/files/images/PRJStreetpoll_final.doc 16 July 2008, and <http://www.jstreet.org/page/media>.

²¹ Nathan Guttman, “J Street Makes a Strategic Acquisition as Other Groups on the Left Struggle”, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, 4 September 2009.

Israeli army, on its list of the fifty most influential Jews. J Street is also seeking to obtain the support of leading Israeli voices, a task made problematic by the disintegration of the Israeli left in the February 2009 elections. Nonetheless, in June 2009, J Street secured the written support of numerous Israeli diplomats and military and in August, the organization widely broadcast a YouTube video in which Israelis with important international and security responsibilities expressed their support for the demand of a complete settlement freeze Obama addressed to Israel, as well as for J Street's action (former Shin Bet director Ami Ayalon, former Israeli consul to New York Colette Avital, and Israeli negotiator of the Oslo accords Uri Savir).²² In the coming months, at the same time as J Street will seek to federate the organizations on the left it has begun to absorb (such as Brit Tzedek V'Shalom), it will have to work to obtain more allies to better establish its position in Washington.

J Street's first national conference took place in Washington from the 25th to the 28th of October 2009. Conceived as a counter to the annual high mass organized by AIPAC in the spring, it constituted a moment of truth for the “pro-peace” lobby. The number of the participants (around 1,500 people) and the identities of the speakers (among whom National Security Advisor James Jones,²³ former Senator Chuck Hagel and former Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Shlomo Ben-Ami) demonstrated J Street's growing influence in Washington. But the controversies that preceded the conference also proved that this organization continues to arouse very strong defensive measures in the United States as well as in Israel: probably intimidated by rightwing blogs (including StandWithUs), a dozen Representatives withdrew their names from the list of "hosting guests" at the gala that closed the conference and Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren declined J Street's invitation under the pretext that the lobby defends positions harmful to the Jewish state. And rumors have attempted to discredit the organization itself -

²² <http://jstreet.org/israel/>

²³ White House participation, which came to strengthen the impact of the invitation extended to J Street to participate in the meeting with Jewish organizations that took place July 13, symbolizes its obvious desire to contribute to establishing the young organization's legitimacy.

allegedly J Street has received gifts from individuals connected to Palestinian defense and is even supported by Stephen Walt.²⁴

An Asset for Obama's Israel Policy?

J Street's trajectory since its creation is promising nonetheless. The lobby has succeeded in carving out a front row seat for itself in the American political debate and in noticeably changing the terms of the debate over Israel in the United States. Its centering strategy seems to be the right one; today, it no longer appears as the oddity it did a year ago. In the present configuration, in which critical Democrats are attempting to revise the United States' Israeli policy, the “pro-peace” lobby is likely to succeed in progressively diluting AIPAC's influence as well as that of other organizations on the right. But even as it continues to support an administration led by a president who received 78% of Jewish votes in November 2008, its backing will not be sufficient to assure the success of the Democratic administration's Israel policy.

Subject to a crossfire of criticism, that policy, in fact, runs the risk of leading to an impasse. Instead of proposing a peace plan to the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the Arab countries during its first year, the Obama administration has made the choice to advance progressively and focus its attack on one issue, the settlements, on which progress seemed the most likely – notably because an American and international consensus exists condemning them – and which would require Israel's efforts first of all. The administration demanded not only that Tel-Aviv cease its territorial expansions into the territories situated outside its present borders, all expropriation for building and all economic support to the new developments, but also that it cease expansion within existing settlements, thus excluding “natural growth.” Moreover, the administration formulated its demands publicly, taking the whole of international public opinion as its witness. This complete freeze was supposed to be accompanied, on the part of moderate Arab countries, by normalization measures with respect to Israel (such as flyover rights for their territories by Israeli civilian aircraft or the opening of Israeli trade missions).

²⁴ Dan Egged, “Israel Conference to Open amid Controversy”, *Washington Post*, 25 October 2009. And Jeffrey Goldberg, “J Street's Ben-Ami On Zionism and Military Aid to Israel”, http://jeffreycgoldberg.theatlantic.com/archives/2009/10/j_streets_ben-ami_on_being_a_z.php, *The Atlantic*, 23 October 2009.

In spite of J Street's support and that of other Jewish organizations on the left, the political reorientation attempted by the Obama team has been constrained by strong domestic resistance. Up until the Cairo speech, the Democratic president had enjoyed the support of the Capitol and of conservative pro-Israeli circles that saw an obvious interest in granting their confidence to a president who still had a great deal of political capital. Since then, strong warnings have been expressed, in Congress by the voices of several leading members, but also outside of Congress at AIPAC's initiative and at that of other establishment Jewish organizations (such as the Anti-Defamation League, the Conference of Presidents, the ZOA, or the more moderate American Jewish Committee) that are far from having been rendered inaudible. The critiques of pro-Israeli conservative political circles with respect to the reorientation of American Middle East policy are convergent. The pressure exerted on the Arab countries and Israel is allegedly asymmetric and at Israel's expense alone. The exertion of that pressure is supposedly taking place at an unacceptable time for Israel, given the Iranian nuclear threat hanging over it. On top of that, the Obama team refuses to acknowledge assurances about the settlements supposedly given to the Olmert and Sharon governments by the previous administration. Consequently, the betrayal of word given to a friendly country is denounced. At the same time, the feeling that Jews and Israelis are being neglected by the new administration in favor of Arabs is spreading in conservative Jewish circles.²⁵ Obama has not succeeded in convincing people of the impartiality of his policy.

The blast from conservative Jewish organizations is, however, not the sole reason for the failure of Obama's Israel policy. That policy presents real limitations in its conception and implementation. Above all, the White House failed to foresee the intensity of Netanyahu's resistance. It underestimated the constraints the rightwing parties in his government impose on the Prime Minister. Washington's insistence strengthened Netanyahu's domestic position²⁶ and contributed to a deterioration in the United States's

²⁵ See, for example, Aluf Benn's article in the *New York Times* published 27 July 2009, "Why Won't Obama Talk to Israel?" in which the author writes: "The Arabs got the Cairo speech; we [Israel] got silence."

²⁶ Howard Schneider, "Netanyahu's Defiance of U.S. Resonates at Home", *Washington Post*, 19 August 2009.

image in Israel.²⁷ Moreover, the exertion of American pressure in broad daylight and the public revelation of the totality of gestures expected from Israel alienated Israelis. If the administration scored points in Arab public opinion, it tied its own hands for negotiations to come. The Arab countries have hardened their positions: they will not agree to make any of the gestures as long as the Israelis do not cede on the complete freeze of settlements. The White House's room for maneuver has, in consequence, been dramatically reduced. Given the present stalemate, the hypothesis of any success from American re-engagement in the peace process, as well as that of any re-equilibration in the relations between the two capitals is highly unlikely, in spite of the growing weight of the positions the "pro-peace" lobby endorses.

For an update, see Pauline Peretz, "J Street, un nouvel acteur de la politique américaine au Moyen-Orient", *Politique américaine*, 2011, n°1.

Photo URL: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/whitehouse/3994561424/>

Title: President Barack Obama greets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu 9/23/2009.

Caption: President Barack Obama greets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a receiving line at the reception for heads of state and officials attending the United Nations General Assembly at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, N.Y., Sept. 23, 2009. (Photo: Pete Souza / White House)

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²⁷ According to a poll conducted by Tel-Aviv University in July, 60 % of Israelis do not trust Obama to look out for Israel's interests and 46% think he favors the Palestinians. See Barak Ravid, "Obama to U.S. Jewish leaders: Israel must engage in self-reflection", *Haaretz*, 14 July 2009.