

# J Street

## National Conference 2012



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# **Mainstream Media Coverage**

## **Huffington Post: Pro-Israel J Street Group Faces Growing Pains at Annual Convention**

*Joshua Hersh (3/28/12)*

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/28/israel-jstreet-annual-convention\\_n\\_1383837.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/28/israel-jstreet-annual-convention_n_1383837.html)

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, shown in a file photo, addressed the crowd at J Street's annual convention Monday night.

WASHINGTON -- By the time former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told the crowd at J Street's annual gathering Monday night that he had "a little secret" to share about Israelis -- that they often disagree with one another, even within the same family -- the old saw had taken on new meaning.

Over the previous three days of J Street's annual conference, which ended Tuesday, the line about friendly disagreements had become something of a defining refrain -- part mission statement, part defensive rationale.

A little less than four years old, J Street was founded with the purpose of creating amicable discord in the house of Israel, or more specifically, of pro-Israeli Jews.

Dissatisfied with the monolithic, and increasingly conservative messaging of the better-funded and more-established American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), J Street sought to make space for alternative viewpoints on Israel. Where AIPAC has tended to emphasize the threat, to Israel, of terrorism and a nuclear Iran, J Street has focused on the danger of the status quo and the failure of the Palestinian peace process.

This year's annual convention, with the slogan "Making History," was designed to be its largest and most glamorous yet: In addition to a former prime minister and two attaches from the Obama administration, J Street would be greeted with in-person remarks from a sitting Israeli government official, for the first time ever.

But when Barukh Binah, the deputy chief of mission at the Israeli embassy, rose to address the gala dinner earlier Monday night, he brought his fighting words.

"Unlike your cozy existence between two shores, our borders are curved and dusty and made of missiles and mayhem," Binah warned, as the several hundred people in attendance shifted uncomfortably in their seats. "It is the Israelis who have to bear the ultimate burdens and might have to bear the ultimate price, so we need you to stand with us."

Dismissing J Street's policy proscriptions and panel discussions as mere "Quidditch games," he added, "Internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem."

"Disrespectful," muttered one diner, as he tucked into his fish dinner once the speech was over. "Classless," said another. J Street's official Twitter live-feed of the event made no mention of Binah's appearance.

Olmert, whose own wife and children have been known to speak out disapprovingly of his political views, was left to play peacemaker, calling the Binah's remarks "all in the family."

"The fact that the government decided to send him -- that is the important thing," Olmert said.

If nothing else, J Street's four-day convention confirmed that the group still has that insurgent feel to it.

Holding the gathering in the same hall where AIPAC had its own convention, just three weeks earlier, only added to this conclusion, and made for an easy measure of AIPAC's considerably greater influence and breadth.

With 13,000 people at its convention, AIPAC consumed the entire massive conference hall. J Street, with a comparatively slight 2,500 attendees, had to split the convention center with three other events, including the Photoshop World Conference & Expo.

And while AIPAC had speeches from the sitting Israeli president and prime minister, as well as President Barack Obama, J Street settled for Antony Blinken, Vice President Biden's national security adviser, and presidential aide Valerie Jarrett, whose biggest applause lines came when she mentioned a women's right to choose and health care.

Still, off in the smaller panel sessions and side room discussions held throughout the conference, there were hints of J Street's inroads.

At one cathartic panel on Monday, several members of Congress -- all Democrats -- described the group with the breathlessness of a religious revival.

"J Street is like an organization I've been looking for for 25 years," said Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas).

"We have a huge stake in not letting Israel and the Middle East become a political wedge issue," added Rep. David Price (D-N.C.). "I think the alternative voice that J Street has empowered -- speaking up for a point of view that often has not been received as the dominant point of view in this debate -- I think that's extremely valuable."

In this, and just about everything that took place through the weekend, Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street's energetic executive director, took heart.

"We're the third largest gathering of Jewish Americans in the country this year -- the fact that we're able to do that in under four years is just incredible I'd say," Ben-Ami told The Huffington Post. "We have nothing to apologize for."

He'd love to have Republicans join the group, he said, and he'd loved to have the president address them: "At one point he will come. Maybe this president, or maybe another one, but we're sure it will happen eventually."

As for the controversy swirling around the Israeli attache's remarks Monday night? Ben-Ami aimed to lower the temperature: "We're pleased that the government and the embassy finally decided to acknowledge the reality that the discussion between us is one that needs to take place."

"There aren't many organizations that in under four years have been able to change the conversation in the way that we have," he went on brightly. "We haven't had the impact on U.S. policy in quite the way we'd want yet, but there's no question that at least the conversation has shifted."



## **WNYC 93.9 FM: Opinion: Why the 'Israel Loves Iran' Movement is Essential for Peace**

*Justin Krebs (3/28/12)*

<http://www.wnyc.org/blogs/its-free-blog/2012/mar/28/opinion-why-israel-loves-iran/>

During a Gala dinner keynoted by Israeli human rights activist Anat Hoffman, one speaker struck a notably different tone: Israel's Deputy Ambassador to the United States Barukh Binah. Binah not only played his role as government representative by defending policies that had been targeted through the conference, but made no hesitation to reprimand J Street for being critical of the Israeli government, suggesting that "pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem."

The audience sat silently. Some were stunned and others visibly bothered by this rhetoric. I wondered why we were giving 20 minutes to a message that was antithetical to the premise of the conference.

There was the politics of it, of course. This was the first time an Israeli Ambassador has come to J Street, a point that former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert celebrated when he took the stage later that evening. To be recognized at all is important for the organization and its cause.

And, in a way, while his position was opposite that of the organization's purpose, his presence reflected a central belief of the movement: that dialogue, even and especially among conflicting viewpoints, is critical for peace. If we are to argue that the players in the region need to speak and listen, and that to be a democratic state Israel needs to heed its own dissidents and allow its own factions, then we need to be willing to hear what we don't like as well.

We recoil against the claim that criticizing the Israeli government equates to opposing Israel, just as we reject any insinuation that it's unpatriotic to criticize our own government in America. Cherishing America means acknowledging where we fail and pushing our country to be better; these challenges strengthen our democracy. The same is true of the many J Streeters who want Israel to live up to its own democratic principles.

So we sat in a room hearing words we disagreed with because we believe that's part of the bargain for them to hear us as well.

Communication between countries, parties and leaders in that region is essential for progress toward peace. And where the elected leaders refuse to communicate, citizens are

trying to fill the void. The recent Youtube-based movement called "Israel Loves Iran" is giving citizens of the two countries the chance to speak to each other, to ask questions, to articulate an alternative to saber-rattling rhetoric, to do what the internet has done for so many users already: connect them with someone new; give a stranger a human face and voice.

As we approach Passover, many Jewish Americans know it's a holiday that lends itself to discussion and argument—"What's the real lesson of the Exodus?" ... "What meaning does the haggadah hold today?" ... "Why is this seder so long?"—without leading to family food fights. Debating something you don't like, but continuing to sit at the table, is the spirit of Passover; it's the fact of being part of a family, a long Jewish tradition and the hallmark of democracy. You talk so you don't have to fight.

Hopefully that's the lesson "Israel Loves Iran" can help citizens of both countries remind their less communicative leaders, as well as a message we bring back to our own national discourse.

**The New York Times**

## **New York Times: Israel Group Adds a Softer Voice to Debate on Iran**

*Helene Cooper (3/27/2012)*

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/us/politics/j-street-pro-israel-but-against-iran-strike-takes-its-message-to-washington.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/us/politics/j-street-pro-israel-but-against-iran-strike-takes-its-message-to-washington.html?_r=1)

WASHINGTON — Memo to Congress: Not all American Jews support a military strike on Iran, either by Israel or by the United States.

Members of J Street, the dovish pro-Israel group formed four years ago in part as an alternative to the more hawkish American Israel Public Affairs Committee, made that point on Tuesday when they descended on Capitol Hill as part of an effort to convince lawmakers that supporting Israel does not mean agreeing with everything advocated by the country's conservative prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

“There's a myth that the so-called Jewish vote is a monolithic vote in favor of a militaristic position in support of Israel,” said Elaine Tyler May, a professor at the University of Minnesota, who came to Washington for J Street's annual conference and met on Tuesday with Representative Keith Ellison and Senator Amy Klobuchar, both Minnesota Democrats. Instead, Ms. May maintained, “the vast majority of American Jews believe the United States should take a leadership role on a peace agreement, even if it means disagreeing with the Israeli leadership.”

Some 700 J Street members turned up to meet with 225 Congressional representatives, or their staff members, from both sides of the aisle. But in numbers and in political clout, the J Street contingent was dwarfed by Aipac's annual conference three weeks ago.

Whereas 2,500 people attended the J Street event this week, a record crowd of 13,000 people showed up for Aipac.

J Street conferencegoers mingled with a handful of Obama administration officials — including Valerie Jarrett, a White House senior adviser, and Antony J. Blinken, Vice President Joseph R. Biden's national security adviser — and a former Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert.

In contrast, the Aipac crowd was addressed by President Obama; Mr. Netanyahu; the House Republican leader, Eric Cantor of Virginia; the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky; and three Republican presidential candidates. Aipac conference leaders scheduled a record 530 meetings with lawmakers over about four hours, with delegates fanning across Washington bearing talking points, the biggest being the dangers inherent in Iran's nuclear ambitions.

But J Street leaders seemed determined this week to add their own, softer voice to the debate.

“There is more than just one way to be a good Jew,” the Israeli author Amos Oz told the crowd during the conference's opening night on Saturday. “Let us all be united, but why unite under the militant, hawkish, extremist manner of Aipac?”

Stav Shaffir, a leader of the social protest movement in Israel that has been called the Israeli Spring, directly took on Mr. Netanyahu, who during his own speech to Aipac compared Iran to Nazi Germany and his trip to Washington to garner support for a tougher line against Iran to a plea from the American Jewish community to President Franklin D. Roosevelt to bomb Auschwitz during World War II.

Roosevelt denied the request, Mr. Netanyahu reminded the Aipac conference, and justified his decision with arguments that Mr. Netanyahu said were similar to those used today by people who object to a military strike against Iran. “None of us can afford to wait much longer,” Mr. Netanyahu said.

Ms. Shaffir disagreed. “A month ago, my prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, came to Washington and shamefully compared our lives to those of our grandparents who lived in the ghettos,” she said, “as if we were doomed to live under permanent, intractable threat, as if Israel were the modern incarnation of the ghetto.”

“We don’t want this,” she added.

With Israeli leaders warning of an existential threat from Iran and openly discussing the possibility of attacking its nuclear facilities, J Street has been sprinting to impress on members of Congress their argument that more hawkish groups like Aipac and the Emergency Committee for Israel, which push for tougher action against Iran, do not speak for all Jews. The clear fissures that have emerged demonstrate the divisions within the American Jewish community.

Brad Pilcher, the communications director at a synagogue in Atlanta, came to the J Street convention and met on Tuesday with Representative John Lewis, Democrat of Georgia, and staff members from the offices of Georgia’s two Republican senators, Johnny Isakson and Saxby Chambliss.

“We have 180,000 supporters across the country — this is not a marginal movement,” Mr. Pilcher said in a telephone interview. He acknowledged that J Street could sometimes appear overshadowed by Aipac, but that that would not stop the group from knocking on doors in Congress.

“They may have a head start in Aipac, but we’re not in competition with them,” Mr. Pilcher said. “We’re bringing the majority of the American Jewish people behind us.”



## Salon: J Street split on Israel's future

Viewpoints clashed as activists gathered in Washington to discuss the two-state solution

*Jordan Michael Smith (3/27/12)*

[http://www.salon.com/2012/03/27/j\\_street\\_split\\_on\\_israels\\_future/singleton/](http://www.salon.com/2012/03/27/j_street_split_on_israels_future/singleton/)

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was nothing if not passionate in his speech at the J Street Gala Dinner on Monday evening. After asserting that Israel cannot tolerate a nuclear Iran, he argued vociferously that negotiations with the Palestinians over a two-state solution must continue, and that they must be successful. “Time is running out for us, not for them,” he exhorted the crowd. Olmert was speaking of the widely held fear that Jews in Israel will soon be outnumbered by the growing Arab population. At that point, Palestinians may simply abandon their desire for their own state and demand the right to vote in Israel proper. Such a reality would mean the end of a Jewish-majority state — in essence, the end of the Zionist dream.

Much of the J Street Conference — indeed, much of J Street, which touts itself as the liberal alternative to AIPAC — is based around this premise. In his recent book, “A New Voice for Israel,” J Street president Jeremy Ben-Ami writes that “Israel finds itself at a critical fork in the road, facing a choice of existential proportion: Either end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict now through a two-state solution or cling to an untenable status quo that leads to the decline of its Jewish character, its democratic values and its international standing.” As Olmert told the Israeli newspaper Haaretz in 2007, “If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished.” California Rep. Barbara Lee fretted on one panel at J Street that settlements are making the two-state solution problematic.

From this perspective, the main solution is for the Obama administration to put firmer pressure on Israel to make concessions for peace, and to renew the peace process that ends with a signed agreement creating two states. Ben-Ami said he was hoping for a more proactive approach from Obama representatives Valerie Jarrett and Antony Blinken toward renewing the push for peace.

But another strain of thinking was present at the J Street Conference, one much more ominous for those hoping to see the Jewish state last another 64 years: It is already too late to salvage the two-state solution. That perspective was on display at a panel featuring Palestinian leader Mustafa Barghouti and Israeli academic and policy advisor Menachem Klein. Barghouti repeatedly used the word “apartheid” to describe Israel’s current reality. He would prefer, he said, another word to use, but apartheid is simply the most applicable. Israelis are hoping the Palestinians will be so miserable under perpetual occupation that they will simply emigrate, he said. But the growth rate will compensate for any emigration, and in any case, “Palestinians have nowhere else to go.” Barghouti has no hope that the U.S. will pressure Israel to forge a comprehensive peace. Instead, he said, the Palestinians and Israeli will simply go through the South African options before arriving at a one-state solution. “We will struggle until apartheid ends,” he said.

It was not only Palestinians who were sounding the death knell for the two-state solution. Menachem Klein focused the audience's attention on a factor often overlooked: A civil war could erupt in Israel if the government did indeed agree to hand over the occupied territories to the Palestinians. "Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated during an interim agreement when he had not evacuated a single settlement," he said. "Israelis will use arms to resist an agreement even if there were a referendum supporting it."

But even as Barghouti and Klein were saying that the sun may have set on the two-state solution, fellow panelist Gershom Gorenberg, author of numerous books on Israeli struggles, was urging hope. "If you had said in 1977 that there would be gay marriage and a black president, you would have been told to up your medication," he said. "Quit saying what you can't do, and go ahead and do it!" The crowd erupted in furious applause. Even as they doubted the future of peaceful coexistence between Israel and the Palestinians, the audience clearly hoped that America may yet play the decisive role in forging a Middle East peace.



## Foreign Policy: Hogwarts, by Way of J Street

Allison Good (3/27/12)

[http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/27/nightmare\\_on\\_j\\_street](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/27/nightmare_on_j_street)

The theme at this year's J Street conference was "Making History," and that's exactly what happened on Monday evening when Barukh Binah, the deputy chief of mission at Israel's Washington embassy, became "the first Israeli diplomat to attend a conference of the liberal pro-Israel group since its establishment in 2008."

Binah, who confessed in the beginning of his address that he has only held this post for two months, also revealed that it was his his first public appearance in the United States. Perhaps it was his condescending tone, or maybe it was just the fact that he spoke on behalf of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is wildly unpopular among J Street's constituency, but the Washington newcomer's speech was less than well-received. He began with a very Netanyahu-esque reminder that the past (read: the Holocaust) is "alive and scorching."

The unpopular message continued as Binah accused the audience of not standing with the Israelis:

"We share your democratic values, but...our borders are curved and dusty and made of missiles and mayhem, and as we continue to face incurable threats we have to make decisions of life and death...At the end of the day it is we the Israelis who must bear the ultimate burden and may have to pay the ultimate price...We need you to stand with us. It is as simple as that and someone ought to say it. Internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem, davka when we need you the most."

Davka is a notoriously untranslatable Hebrew word that in this sense means "especially."

He also applauded J Street for its "repudiation" of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement (BDS), noting that "our shared view in that respect is that BDS is not a form of criticism, but a blatant...attack."

No Israeli diplomatic presence would be complete without a reference to Iran, and Binah repeated the popular line that "while we seek and support peace, the ayatollah's of Iran call for our annihilation." Convincing a room full of peaceniks that the Palestinians should be blamed for thwarting negotiations was also a tough sell:

"We're willing to put contentious issues on the table, but we find that the metaphorical table was...blown up."

His talk exploding tables and rabid Ayatollahs was somewhat grim, but at least he threw in a Harry Potter reference, saying "This is not a game of political quidditch."

Despite the audible booing and hissing throughout, Binah told me after he spoke that he thought the speech was well-received, and that the embassy sent him there because of the "ripeness of time."

Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert (fending off corruption charges back home) had a message more the crowd's liking, discussing the peace plan he presented to Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas:

"I thought then and I think now that there is no alternative to what I proposed and one day...when we celebrate peace with the Palestinians, this peace will be identical to what I proposed to Abu Mazen finally and formally and officially on September 16, 2008."

The Olmert peace plan, to which Abbas did not respond, called for a two-state solution whose borders are based on the 1967 pre-Six Day War lines.

Olmert ended his keynote speech with the adamant affirmation that Kadima, the centrist Israeli political party he helped create in 2005, is the best alternative to Israel's political status quo. Unfortunately for Olmert, the heated race for the Kadima premiership between current chairwoman Tzipi Livni and Member of Knesset Shaul Mofaz has become just as divisive as the America's Republican candidate tug-of-war.

Between a Netanyahu talking head and an embattled politician who continues to advocate for a peace plan past its prime, the evening was a bizarre and disconnected affair that seemed to reinforce the frustrated and pessimistic mood at this year's conference.

## **Chicago Sun Times: Valerie Jarrett keynoting J Street Conference**

*Lynn Sweet (3/26/12)*

[http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2012/03/valerie\\_jarrett\\_keynoting\\_j\\_st.html](http://blogs.suntimes.com/sweet/2012/03/valerie_jarrett_keynoting_j_st.html)

WASHINGTON--White House senior advisor Valerie Jarrett and Tony Blinken, National Security Advisor to Vice Presiden Joe Biden keynote a Monday session of the annual J Street Conference.

Chicago business executive Jim Klutznick will be stepping up to lead the Israel advocacy organization.

From [JStreet.org](http://JStreet.org): *"The four-day conference will bring together 2500 political and opinion leaders, policymakers and activists to put advocacy for a two-state solution back on the foreign policy agenda. Participants from across the United States, Israel and Europe will convene under the banner of "Making History" to chart the future of the pro-Israel movement together."*



## ***Foreign Policy: A Glum Mood on J Street***

*Allison Good (3/26/2012)*

[http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/26/a\\_glum\\_mood\\_on\\_j\\_street](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/26/a_glum_mood_on_j_street)

J Street, the "political home" for pro-Israel, pro-two state solution (read: anti-AIPAC) American Jews, kicked off its third annual conference in Washington on Saturday night. But despite its massive efforts to mobilize behind President Obama, executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami doesn't seem to be terribly satisfied with the commander in chief's track record in a press roundtable:

"We would like to see the president do more, we'd like to see the administration take a more proactive role in outlining the parameters for a resolution of the conflict, and to build an international coalition of supporters beyond the Quartet."

Ben-Ami also invoked Libya and Iran as examples for the White House to follow as it builds consensus for a two-state solution.

"The way the world was brought together around Libya and around the Iran sanctions, that's the kind of mobilization of international support that the administration will need to do if it wants to re-establish American credibility in foreign policy making."

A panel discussion held during the conference on Sunday about the current prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace took on a bleaker tone. According to Lara Friedman, director of policy and government relations for Americans for Peace Now, the current administration is simply exhausted:

"They were serious, but realized that they didn't have the political stomach...They thought they had the will to see it through, but they got exhausted."

Nadav Eyal of Israel's Maariv newspaper added that the president does not appear to be invested in the issue:

"Obama needs to come into this personally, and he has not done that."

Leila Hilal, co-director of the New America Foundation's Middle East Task Force, even questioned the viability of the two-state solution itself:

"This is the time to think about new strategies. Two states is a largely hollow and abstract notion, and the Palestinian public has no interest in dead-end talks...Conditions are not ripe, and the U.S. administration cannot force proposals."

For an organization that's supposed to rally support for a peaceful two-state solution, this year's attendees seem fairly pessimistic about the chances of achieving that goal. Ben-Ami may be optimistic that the stars will someday align, but for now J Street's timing is all wrong.

## **Economist: A lament for America's Jews**

(3/24/2012)

<http://www.economist.com/node/21551055>

ELECTIONS are to special-interest groups what spinach is to Popeye. So it was no surprise that the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) at the beginning of this month produced the usual pandering. Barack Obama, Arab-Israeli peacemaking on hold, said that when the chips were down “I have Israel’s back”. When Mitt Romney’s video address began, one wicked tweet wondered whether the Republican candidate would promise to make his inauguration speech from Jerusalem. In the event, he promised only to make Jerusalem his first port of call as president.

In recent years, however, mighty AIPAC has had to cope with an irritant: a small but dogged competitor. On March 24th a different group of American Jews will meet in downtown Washington at the conference of the organisation known as J Street. J Street is growing, though still a tiddler by AIPAC standards. It now has 50-odd staffers, and has lined up Ehud Olmert, Israel’s former prime minister, as next week’s keynote speaker.

The J Streeters are peaceniks, always banging on about the two-state solution. AIPAC says it is neutral in Israeli politics, but is closer to Israel’s Likud. J Streeters fret about the stateless Palestinians and the damage Israel’s occupation of the West Bank does to its soul. The question at AIPAC is when Mr Obama will send his bombers to squish Iran’s nuclear ambitions. At first glance, this looks like a quarrel about foreign policy. But what if something else is at stake: the future of American Jewry itself?

Enter Peter Beinart, a political scientist and former editor of the liberal (and pro-Israel) weekly, the New Republic. At J Street next week he will launch a book, “The Crisis of Zionism” (Times Books), which has already sent plenty of people into a spin.

That is because, though a passionate Zionist, Mr Beinart wants Israel to save its democracy by leaving the West Bank. He therefore calls in the book—and, provocatively, in an op-ed in the New York Times—for American Jews to start calling the West Bank “non-democratic Israel” and to push for a boycott of the settlements there. By doing so, he argues, American Jews who support Israel but not the occupation would clarify a vital distinction.

This, frankly, is an idea J Street needs like a hole in the head. The fledgling organisation already finds it hard enough to convince would-be supporters that it is a genuine friend of Israel. Its cautious founder, Jeremy Ben-Ami, has been quick to distance himself, and Israel’s ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, has been quick to pounce. The ambassador dismissed Mr Beinart on Facebook as “well beyond the Israeli mainstream”.

Yet if the boycott is not the shrewdest of ideas, the book is by no means bad. Though a bit too blithe about Arab intentions towards Israel, the interesting part of it is not what it says about the Middle East. It is the part about what their affair with Israel has done to American Jews.

Mr Beinart points out that few other Jews have made liberalism such a central part of their identity. For close to a century, American Jews have voted overwhelmingly for Democrats. In 2004, when asked what best defined their Jewish identity, as many chose “social justice” as chose “religious observance” and “support for Israel” combined. In 2008 they voted for Mr Obama at twice the rate of white Christians. So how, wonders Mr Beinart, did a Jewish community famed for its liberalism come to create a leadership so reluctant to defend democracy in the Jewish state?

His answer is that today’s Jewish establishment did not spring from American Jewish liberalism, but was a reaction against it.

The argument goes like this. After Israel’s victory in the six-day war of 1967, Zionism in America reached a fever pitch. But in the 1970s Israel came to be seen by many around the world, and by chunks of the American left, as a bully. To correct this, some of the community’s leaders came to believe that they had to remind fellow Jews and the world that Jews were victims. Victimhood, coupled with a new emphasis on the Holocaust, displaced liberalism as the “defining ideology of organised Jewish life”.

Liberalism out, tribalism in

This, at any rate, was the direction in which the organised Jewish establishment moved. But most American Jews, especially younger Jews, did not. Feeling less embattled, many have transferred their liberal energies from specifically Jewish organisations to the likes of the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Organisation for Women. On Israel and many other issues, American Jews are well to the left of organisations, such as AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents of Jewish organisations, that claim to represent them. Unhappily, says Mr Beinart, that does not matter, because the organisations are sustained by a small number of rich donors and not accountable to the community.

To Mr Beinart, this is a tragedy. Fine Jewish organisations like the Anti-Defamation League, torn between their founding liberalism and the new code of Israel right-or-wrong, have lost their way. Mr Obama, a champion of the liberal Zionism he picked up from Jewish friends and mentors in Chicago and Harvard, is calumniated as Israel’s enemy. Many young American Jews are marrying out, while others are turning away in alienation from Zionism and so ceding control of Jewish organisations to an Orthodox minority less committed to Israeli democracy.

Mr Beinart thinks America’s Jews must redeem both themselves and Israel by rededicating themselves to Israel’s ethical character: “They must see their own honour as bound up with the honour of the Jewish state.” Contrary to what Mr Oren says, many Israelis, scared as they are of Hizbullah’s missiles and Iran’s looming bomb, feel just the same. No doubt Mr Beinart will be written off as a self-appointed Isaiah with a book to sell. But the sentiment is noble, and the message deserves to be heard.



## **Atlantic: An Interview With Jeremy Ben-Ami on Settlements, Beinart, Obama, the Whole Nine Yards**

*Jeffrey Goldberg (3/23/2012)*

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/03/an-interview-with-jeremy-ben-ami-on-settlements-beinart-obama-the-whole-nine-yards/254918>

In what seems to have become an annual tradition here at Goldblog, I interviewed Jeremy Ben-Ami, the founder and major domo of J Street, the left-leaning pro-Israel lobbying group, in advance of his organization's annual conference, which takes place in Washington this weekend. (I would do the same with AIPAC's Howard Kohr, but I stopped asking for interviews a long time ago, because the guy hides from the press.) Jeremy and I went over a lot of ground, starting with the White House decision to send a senior National Security Council official, Tony Blinken (who serves as the vice president's national security adviser) to speak at the J Street convention, rather than a cabinet-level officer, or higher. We also spoke about Peter Beinart's call for a boycott of settlement-made products, which Ben-Ami thinks is a bad idea. The transcript has been edited for space and clarity.

**Jeffrey Goldberg:** Do you think that the White House is scared of J Street?

**Jeremy Ben-Ami:** I think that the White House is making the political calculation according to what I would term the rule book of American politics, the way that it has always existed.

**JG:** Which means that you haven't been able to change the rules.

**JB:** In the four years that J Street has existed, we have not yet successfully changed the rules. That is our mission and that's our goal. We will only succeed in doing that when we build J Street further, and we have more people, and we raise more money, and we have more points of access to the political powers-that-be. That will be when we have succeeded.

**JG:** Do you think it's because they judged that sending a higher-ranked official would alienate AIPAC? Or did they make the judgment that J Street isn't important enough to warrant deploying someone like the secretary of state or vice president. It must be frustrating to you, because you're there to advance an agenda you believe the president actually embraces, correct?

**JB:** You know, I'll let them answer as to what was their calculation. I don't think it advances the ball for me to speculate on their behalf. I would say that they missed an opportunity. I think that there is a real significant base of people out there who are waiting to rally behind the leadership of the president and of this administration to really achieve two states and to really help to cement Israel's future. And I think that base is waiting to be mobilized. And I think that this conference and J Street itself is an opportunity for a leader to really define a new vision of what it means to be pro-Israel. I think if you don't take that opportunity, that you're missing that opportunity.

**JG:** Let's go to the Beinart op-ed in the Times, in which he called for "Zionist BDS," or boycott, divestment, and sanctions of settlements. By the way, you referred to him as the --

**JB:** Troubadour! Troubadour of our movement.

**JG:** What, are you running over there, a Renaissance fair?

**JB:** You know, it's funny -- the students in J Street U last year, I think they made up a t-shirt that said, "We are Beinart's army." The message that he's putting out there really resonates with a lot of our people in their desire to find a way to integrate their values and their love of Israel. That was the core of his message, and it really resonates with people. A desire to find that way to liberal Zionism.

**JG:** But you publicly disagreed with his op-ed in which he called for a boycott of products made in settlements. Why do you disagree with it?

**JB:** Because I don't think that it makes any sense to put negative pressure on people whose behavior you hope to change. I think that the way that Israelis will feel comfortable making the compromises and the sacrifices--and Israel as a whole, not just the settlers --is when they really feel that not only American Jews, but the United States, is going to be there for them. I think if you begin to do things that say, "We're not really with you, we're against you, we're putting pressure on you," I think that causes people to pull more into a shell and pull back

**JG:** Under pressure they harden, they don't soften.

**JB:** Yes.

**JG:** Is that an Israeli national characteristic, or is that just a human response to pressure?

**JB:** I think it's both. I think it's very human, and then I think it's doubly so, probably not just for Israelis, but I think for the Jewish people as a whole. I think it's sort of characteristic of us that I think we're very used to being under pressure, under criticism, under attack. And it doesn't sit well, and you get defensive, and your defenses go up. Rather than it making you more inclined to do something, it actually makes you less inclined.

**JG:** Can I extrapolate from this and say that J Street will never argue for a cutting of American aid to Israel, commensurate with the amount of money the Israeli government spends on settlements and roads to settlements and the like? In other words, would you ever go down the path of saying, we think that the best way to influence Israeli decision-making is to have the American government directly pressure Israel economically, or diplomatically?

**JB:** In four years, in the entire existence of J Street, we've made exactly this case: that you can't use boycotts, you can't threaten aid, you can't use these kinds of forms of negative pressure. I think you're right to extrapolate. It is all of a piece that these negative approaches to trying to get people to do something you want them to do, we've lumped them all together for four years and said, this doesn't work.

What you need to do, I often call it positive pressure instead of negative pressure. Positive pressure means actually giving people hope and something to believe in again. The biggest obstacle I see in the Israeli psyche at the moment is this sense that two states is never going to happen, that there's just no way peace is ever going to come. While 70% of Israelis want a two-state solution, 80% of them think it's never going to happen in their lifetime.

**JG:** How do you dislodge the settlers?

**JB:** The way that you overcome the mindset, which I think is the first step, is you actually present an agreement that, lo and behold, the world supports, and Palestinians would support, and you realize that, hey, we actually can get it. And that positive pressure to make that decision by creating a path to hope, a path to the future, gives you then the national political will and the national political consensus to make that very difficult move: to say to the settlers, it's time to come home.

**JG:** What, in your view, is keeping this process from continuing, or accelerating? I read Peter Beinart's book. He puts most of the blame on Israel. Do you agree?

**JB:** Well, I think there's more than enough blame to go around across the board. There's certainly been moments of opportunity when Palestinians didn't take an opportunity to come back with a proposal or to say yes. There have been moments when the Israelis have done things that weren't helpful. So there's more than enough blame, but I've always liked to focus on the future. And to say, "What can we now do to actually make progress?" rather than say, "Well, it's 90% this person's fault and 10% that person's fault." It's much more useful [to say] what actually could work.

I put a lot of blame on a focus on process. You know, how do we get the parties back to the table, how do we get direct talks going again, where are we going to meet, who's going to be in the room. Those kinds of process questions become an end in and of themselves, and you lose sight of the end result: the outcome that you're trying to reach. The problem with Oslo was it laid out a process without ever telling you what the end result is going to be. What does that Palestinian state look like? What does the border look like? What are the security arrangements? Let's actually skip over the three to five years of process and talks, because we don't need them--because we already know what the end result looks like. Let's put that deal on the table and force the political decision on both sides--both the Palestinians and the Israeli political world--to decide if they are really ready to say yes to a realistic resolution to this conflict.

**JG:** Do you want President Obama, in his second term, if he has one, to lay out the vision for final status, and then invite both parties to negotiate based on that vision?

**JB:** Yes. And it would be not just President Obama alone. I think he's been very adept at building larger international coalitions, and I think the Quartet is a starting point. But it doesn't necessarily define the be all and end all of what you would need to do. You'd want to bring in some Arab states, you'd probably want to expand a little bit into some of the other actors that are relevant to the Middle East beyond the Quartet. Think about a new approach to this, that has international backing--a broad base of international backing--and have the president take the basic outlines that were in the Clinton parameters and Geneva and all the rest of the model plans that are out there, get international backing for them, and go to Ramallah, go to Jerusalem, at the beginning of the second term. I would say this to a Republican president, too. Whoever is going to be the next president. If they want to get this done, the way to do it is not to find a new envoy and start a whole new round of talks. the way to do it is to lay out the basic checklist of the items that we know have to be part of this, and see if the sides are serious or not.

**JG:** Come back to Peter a little bit, because the criticism that I have of the book, the criticism that other people have of the book, is that it seems to blame Israelis and the American Jewish establishment for the impasse. It doesn't seem to me to be an effective way of convincing the mainstream of American Jewry to move toward a position closer to your position. It's kind of in

the same ballpark as negative pressure. But what is it that you like about the book?

**JB:** I didn't say that I liked the book. I said that I liked his analysis in the op-ed of what the problem is.

**JG:** No, but he's the troubadour of your movement, your description.

**JB:** Right, that was before. I'm just saying his article from two years ago in The New York Review of Books, which laid out the failure of the American Jewish establishment and this notion that in order to be part of the Zionist movement you have to check your liberal values at the door: now that framework, I think, speaks deeply not just to the young people at J Street but to a lot of people at J Street who have just felt that they don't have a route into the pro-Israel world if they don't just sign off on everything the government of Israel does and everything that the mainstream groups stand for.

In calling that out and saying that that's a failure, and really a part of the reason that people are distancing themselves from Israel and from the Jewish community, I think that's what I was describing when I say he's the troubadour of our movement -- in laying out that challenge and that problem and then framing the problem the way that he did. I think that's where his vision is, that you can create a home for liberal and progressive Zionists who want a Jewish home, want a Jewish nation, and at the same time want to be able to advocate for what they believe are the values that they were raised on and our fundamental Jewish values. Again, squaring that difficult challenge is something that he says can be done. And I think again that's what J Street is trying to do, is to find a way to create that home for progressive and liberal Zionism.

**JG:** Is J Street not more popular than it is because people have ascribed to it a negative message? Or because the American Jewish establishment makes it hard for you to penetrate the mainstream?

**JB:** Probably the reticence and the reluctance of people to embrace what we're saying has multiple roots. One is that I think people are not used to the notion that you can, in fact, have more than one public voice and public opinion on these issues. Go back generations and our community, the Jewish community, was very deeply set on the notion of unity, and that as a minority, and as a group that didn't have much power and had been suffering discrimination and anti-Semitism, we really needed to make sure that we presented a public face to the world that was unified. And that mindset from two or three generations ago, I think, does still permeate a little bit.

I think one of the things that makes people uncomfortable with J Street is that we're saying we've sort of moved beyond that. That we as American Jews are established enough in this country, we're comfortable enough, we don't have to act in that way anymore. That it actually is just fine for members of Congress to know that in fact there's a disagreement in the Jewish community over the best way to express our love of Israel. And that that's okay, and that it actually makes us stronger.

I think that's an uncomfortable notion, and I think that gives some people pause. I also think that there are plenty of people who have been out there trying to create a bad impression of J Street by spreading either lies or falsifications or other rumors, and that hasn't helped. There's a real readiness in our community at times to take an email filled with 20 supposed facts and forward it on to 40 people before they check whether anything in it was true. I think that also fed some of this over the last few years. You see it with the emails about Obama, you see it with the emails

about other topics that spread like wildfire in the Jewish community. There's a few different reasons why, I think. It's an uphill battle, but we are climbing step by step up the hill. There's no question that it's a steep one.

**JG:** You're going to go for membership in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations next year, right?

**JB:** As I understand the rules, one can apply for membership in the Conference after being in existence for five years. So that comes up next year.

**JG:** So what you're basically waiting for is to see if they recognize your right to exist.

**JB:** (laughs) Right.

**JG:** Are you going to apply?

**JB:** We are going to apply, and we will apply after the five years are up.

**JG:** Right. And what do you expect will happen?

**JB:** I would hope that we will be welcomed and admitted as a member of the Conference.

**JG:** We've talked about this before, but there is this perception--and I don't think this is a line only invented by J Street detractors--that J Street loves Israel so much it can't find a nice word to say about it. You've heard that criticism before. Do you think that you have failed to communicate the pro-Israel part of your message adequately? Or not even the pro-Israel in the political sense, but "this is why we believe in a Jewish state" message. I'm wondering if that's something that you've thought about.

**JB:** It's certainly the less interesting piece for people to talk about and write about, in that a group of American Jews sitting around talking about how much they love Israel would make for less interesting copy, but when that group turns around and says something critical, that's the man bites dog part of the story. So I think a lot of our activities, a lot of our community session, our trips to Israel -- there's a lot of discussion and a lot of study and a lot of in-depth feeling of trying to really understand Israel and express our hopes and our dreams and the roots of our connection. I think that's very much a part of what we do, but I don't think it's as interesting publicly, so I think it gets a lot less attention. We constantly need to do the best job we can to express how deeply everybody who is involved in J Street is committed to the notion that the Jewish people have the right to a state of their own, and to defend themselves, and to be part of the community of nations. It's a very, very deep-seated feeling that all of us have that are involved in J Street.

**JG:** Young American Jews used to feel unalloyed pride about Israel. Do you think that many people are embarrassed by Israel now?

**JB:** Well, I don't think that it's anything to do with the country or the people. I think that there are issues that a lot of people have with the policies that the state and the government follow.

**JG:** So is that a yes?

**JB:** No, but it's not in Israel. I think that there's a really important distinction. I think there's a deep --

**JG:** But people don't walk around thinking to themselves, Boy, I'm really disappointed in the foreign minister of Israel. They think, I'm really embarrassed by the thing Israel did. Right? I mean, it's hard to disaggregate.

**JB:** But I think people do draw a distinction. It's like in the United States, when you are deeply disappointed in a particular president: If you're a Democrat and you're disappointed in George W. Bush and what's happened in the Republican-led Congress, or you're a Republican and you're not thrilled with Obama, everybody says, "But I love this country. I love the United States and I believe so deeply in it. And that's why I'm fighting for [fill in the blank]."

**JG:** There are a lot of people on the far left of the Jewish spectrum who argue that Zionism and liberalism are incompatible. I think one of the things that Peter is trying to do--in my opinion, in a flawed way -- is merge the two again. Do you think it's hopeless? You look at the population of Israel and you see how it votes, you see the coalition, you don't see many trends that suggest that *Haaretz* readers are going to take over the country anytime soon. Do you think we're just on a trajectory away from the idea that you can be both a Zionist and a liberal at the same time?

**JB:** I don't, and that's kind of why I said that Peter is the troubadour of our movement. Because that's exactly what we're trying to do, is to build a movement that is grounded in exactly the merging of those two things, that you really can be both. I look at the 450,000 people who took to the streets last summer--1/10th, almost, of all Israeli Jews, on the streets last summer fighting for social and economic justice --

**JG:** Yeah, but that wasn't an issue related to the peace process or compromise with the Palestinians.

**JB:** No, but it's related to the values on which the country is founded. There's a vision of the country that was intended to be a place with opportunity for all, and equality, and rooted in the lessons that we learned from the injustices and oppression of living in other people's lands. I feel the social and economic justice movement in Israel is deeply grounded in exactly those values, and trying to return the country in a very fundamental way to its roots. I don't think it's lost. I think that it's there.

You look at the tremendous groups that are working on a whole range of civil society issues, whether they're fighting for religious pluralism, whether they're fighting for women's rights, gay rights, economic justice, there's so much activity going on in Israel in the NGO sector and through activism. And it parallels exactly what's going on in the Jewish community in this country, and the great work of groups like Jewish Funds for Justice and the American Jewish World Service, giving expression of those values through the work people are doing. I think it is there. And it's a fight! There is a fight to be had over what is the nature of our people and what's the nature of the country that represents our people. But by no means is that fight anywhere near lost or over.

**JG:** We expect J Street to condemn settler violence, or provocative settlement building, or the power of the religious right parties in Israel. But another thing that we don't seem to hear from J Street enough is where the left side of the framework is. I understand where you go on the right, but it's always this concern--look, some of it is manufactured by people who don't like your general outlook, but some of it is real. What is "too left" for J Street? What sort of expression of criticism is too far to the left, from your perspective?

**JB:** We established at the beginning of the interview some of the tactical things that are too far. We don't support, obviously, BDS but also Peter's conception of "Zionist BDS," that that is either advisable, doable, or workable.

**JG:** Do you think that this would put you on a slippery slope toward full BDS?

**JB:** I think it's very hard to make a clear line between what is "settlement business" and what is not. So many businesses do business on both sides of the Green Line. Very few things are simply, purely done on the other side of the Green Line.

**JG:** And isn't it, of course, the Israeli government that subsidizes factory-building in settlements that then create products that are sold?

**JB:** Right.

**JG:** So then why are you blaming the factory? Shouldn't you be blaming the guy who gave you the money to build the factory, which in this case is the Israeli government?

**JB:** The same issue comes up with divestment. Because if you divest from a company that produces a military product that is used in the occupation, that same company is probably producing a product that helps defend Israel from, let's say, rockets. So if you're saying you shouldn't be supporting a truck company or a boot manufacturer, is that the boots of the soldiers who are going to defend Israel itself? It is a slippery slope and very hard to draw that line.

**JG:** Do you think Beinart's idea is going to catch on?

**JB:** I think there are a lot of people in the progressive part of the pro-Israel community who are personally, deeply bothered by the notion that we would do anything that helps to perpetuate this occupation. So I think on a personal level, people do, when they find out that a product or a wine or whatever it is comes from the West Bank, then personally I think people will consider this.

**JG:** I don't think this is going to gain traction in the American Jewish community. Tell me I'm wrong.

**JB:** No, I don't think so either. I think people are flailing about right now because there is nothing serious happening in the realm where it really matters -- the realm that really matters is the political side of things. There is no movement, whether it's from here out of fright or out of stasis on both the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, there's just no movement. And people are deeply frustrated. They sense that this is slipping away, that we're headed toward a one-state nightmare, and people are frustrated. They say, "What can I do?" And it isn't enough to just come to Washington and lobby--although it's very, very important that people come. We're having our conference this weekend and we'll have 2,500 people, and we'll be larger, louder, and bigger than we were last year. And next year we'll be bigger than this year. You know, we'll keep on growing and we'll make this movement heard. But people are frustrated that time is of the essence and it's slipping away. And I can understand the frustration. It's very, very urgent that political leadership step forward and fill the vacuum, and that's what J Street is trying to push.

**JG:** Do you sense any movement on this whatsoever?

**JB:** Not for seven months. Not until election day. But my hope is -- I would say you can't really

afford to take this election cycle off. But the reality is that we're in a very, very difficult political environment and I think in a second term or in a new president's first term, they have got to take another crack at this.

(Thanks to Sarah Yager for transcribing the interview)



## **Huffington Post: How the Split on the Jewish Left Helps AIPAC and What Can Be Done About It**

*Myriam Miedzian (3/22/2012)*

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/myriam-miedzian/how-the-split-on-the-jewi\\_b\\_1368751.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/myriam-miedzian/how-the-split-on-the-jewi_b_1368751.html)

The 2012 March 4-6 AIPAC annual conference was attended by hundreds of congressional leaders; President Obama addressed the conference, as did Republican presidential candidates by video.

In 2001, Fortune magazine ranked AIPAC the fourth most powerful lobby in Washington. AIPAC lobbyists urge our government to support Israel's hawkish policies including Prime Minister Netanyahu's focus on a preemptive attack on Iran's nuclear sites.

J Street, founded in 2008 to provide American Jews with an alternative to AIPAC, supports a two state solution, is opposed to West Bank Settlements and military action against Iran. It is unlikely that many members of congress will attend, nor will the President address its annual March 24-27 Conference.

AIPAC spends a million dollars a year on lobbying. In 2011, Its American Israel Educational Foundation spent \$2 million on trips to Israel for members of congress and staff who met almost exclusively with hawkish Israeli leaders. AIPAC professionals work with synagogues and churches; and high school and college students to "promote pro-Israel advocacy."

J Street's budget does not remotely approach AIPAC's -- it spent \$46,000 on congressional trips to Israel in 2011, which included visits with Palestinians and Israeli Human rights groups.

In light of this disparity, it is not surprising that many American Jews are highly -- but not entirely -- influenced by AIPAC. The 2010 American Jewish Committee (AJC) survey indicates that 48 percent favor, and 45 percent oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state.

But according to a 2011 poll commissioned by J Street 67 percent of American Jews would support U.S. leadership in helping to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict even if it meant "publicly stating its disagreements" with Israelis and Arabs. This is contrary to AIPAC's position of pressuring our government into supporting Israel's conservative leaders.

Most American Jews remain exceptionally liberal -- according to a 2010 American Jewish Committee (AJC) Survey only 15 percent are Republicans. In 2008, 78 percent of Jews, but only 41 percent of other white Americans voted for Obama; a 2005 American Jewish Committee poll found that 70 percent of U.S. Jews opposed the war in Iraq.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that AIPAC influences U.S. Jews to be less liberal on Israel than on other issues.

J Street needs a huge leap in funding before it can begin to approach the Congressional support and media attention that AIPAC gets, and develop the expansive educational and public relations operations necessary to win widespread Jewish attention and support.

J Street has since its creation been hampered by virulent attacks from AIPAC and the right, but also suffers from a destructive fissure between mainstream Jewish liberal and Jewish radical organizations, which could prevent J Street attaining anything close to the power of AIPAC.

Liberal organizations like J Street, and Americans for Peace Now, and radical organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and Jewish Women for Justice in Palestine, agree on many issues including opposition to the growing influence of the Orthodox in Israel and to right wing policies which endanger Israeli democracy. Both groups vehemently oppose West Bank settlements, and are highly critical of Israeli actions in Gaza.

But fundamental disagreements remain. AIPAC's commitment to depicting the two groups as identical, as well as the media's tendency to focus on the extremes rather than the reasonable middle -- J Street -- makes it difficult for American Jews to distinguish between them. Since radicals support policies and actions which are anathema to most liberal U.S. Jews -- see a few examples below -- this likely conflation is bad news for J Street.

According to the 2010, AJC poll, 75 percent of American Jews believe that "the goal of the Arabs is not the return of occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel." It is difficult to argue that this is a completely unfounded belief when The Hezbollah Political Manifesto, 2009 states: "We categorically reject any compromise with Israel or recognizing its legitimacy, this position is definitive... " Hamas's charter still does not recognize Israel's right to exist.

What then could turn American Jews off more than Jewish organizations supporting The Boycott, Divest, and Sanction's (BDS) movement started by Palestinian NGO's. (J Street and other liberal groups vehemently oppose it.) In addition to a boycott of all -- not just West Bank --Israeli products and culture , it calls for "the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in the 1948 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194." Omar Barghouti, a BDS founder, describes this as the most important demand. It would give about 4.5 million Palestinian refugees -- approximately 95 percent of whom are children and grandchildren of those who fled in 1948 -- the right to "return" to Israel.

BDS has been rejected by thinkers as diverse as Peter Beinart, author of The Crisis of Zionism whose views are close to those of J Street, and Norman Finkelstein, leading radical Jewish spokesman for the Palestinian cause, whose book, The Holocaust Industry, has made him the darling of the Holocaust deniers. They both point out that BDS would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish homeland, since Palestinians would soon outnumber Jews. Noam Chomsky, the leading leftwing American spokesman and a radical critic of Israel also opposes BDS.

Yet some groups and thinkers persist in supporting it. (I suspect this support grows out of a longstanding tendency on the part of some on the radical left to uncritically accept the perspectives and demands of the oppressed however misguided they may be. It reminds me of the 1967 National Conference for New Politics, where whites -- many of them undoubtedly Jews -- acquiesced to giving blacks who represented 15 percent of those present 50 percent of the votes which led to a resolution condemning Israel for the Six Day "Imperialist Zionist War.")

The introduction of anti-Israel posters, slogans, and actions in demonstrations unrelated to Israel is another issue deeply disturbing to many liberal Jews. Already in 2003, Tikkun editor Michael Lerner expressed concern about it. Recently Tikkun published a letter from an Occupy Wall Street demonstrator so disturbed by the "down with Israel" rhetoric, he left the demonstration "overcome with tears."

In Boston, at an October 2011 Occupy Wall Street demonstration, Jewish Women for Justice in Palestine, staged an Occupy Boston Not Palestine demonstration. In November, some Boston OWS demonstrators chanting "Viva Palestina" staged a sit in at the Israeli Consulate.

And if that is not enough, what could be more anathema to American Jews than Medea Benjamin who is Jewish and the founder of Code Pink, awarding Helen Thomas a PINK medal of courage. Benjamin stated that CODEPINK had long "admired Helen Thomas's courageous journalism," and explained that Thomas had "misspoken" when she said "Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine...Remember these people are occupied and it's their land..." and those who are the occupiers should "... go home" to "Poland, Germany... and America and everywhere else."

A strong vibrant J Street is desperately needed to balance AIPAC. Supporters of organizations whose policies can only alienate most American Jews, would do well to consider transferring their support to J Street (and organizations such as Americans for Peace Now) which can attract wide support and eventually provide a serious counterbalance to AIPAC.



## **Atlantic: Obama Administration, Scared of AIPAC, Punts on J Street**

*Jeffrey Goldberg (3/20/2012)*

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/03/obama-administration-scared-of-aipac-punts-on-j-street/254797/>

J Street, the left-leaning pro-Israel group, is having its big conference in Washington starting this weekend. It's not going to be an AIPAC-sized 13,000-person circus, but J Street is still expecting 2,500 people or so. One person who won't be coming is President Obama, even though (or perhaps because) roughly 100 percent of the attendees will be Obama supporters. The Administration isn't sending the vice president, the secretaries of state or defense, or the national security adviser, either, to speak at the conference. Instead, in a clear sign that the Administration is spooked by AIPAC, which sees J Street as a left-flank threat, the White House, according to J Street's Jeremy Ben-Ami, is sending Tony Blinken, the vice president's national security adviser and a senior official of the National Security Council, to speak to the gathering next Monday.

One important note: Tony Blinken is a great guy (and a friend-of-Goldblog), a huge brain, a powerful inside player, and a highly-respected adviser to both the president and vice-president. But he's not the president, or the vice-president, or a cabinet-level official. He's the choice of a White House that isn't interested in upsetting its tenuous relationship with the Jewish establishment.

J Street's head, Ben-Ami, told me he's disappointed with the White House.

"Tony Blinken is one of the absolute best foreign policy thinkers in the Administration, so he's a great representative for the Administration to send, but I also think they're missing an opportunity to excite a passionate portion of their base." Ben-Ami went on, "This decision is really indicative of the problem we started J Street to fix. This is precisely the kind of calculation that shouldn't be made."

Goldblog readers know I have many doubts about J Street's actual policy ideas (I have plenty of doubts about AIPAC as well.) But I believe that J Street should be part of the pro-Israel conversation in America, and it would be quite a signal if the White House sent a higher-ranking official to speak to the group. But it seems that the White House will do nothing to inflame the right-leaning AIPAC just months before the general election.

**UPDATE:** A spokesman for AIPAC, Patrick Dorton, called me to object to my description of the group as "right-leaning." I told him that this is what my eyes and ears led me to believe, but he said, "I object to that characterization. AIPAC is at its core a bipartisan organization, with plenty of Democrats as well as Republicans."

# **Jewish Media Coverage**

### **Washington Jewish Week: J Street's message from left**

*Zach Silberman (3/28/12)*

<http://washingtonjewishweek.com/main.asp?SectionID=4&SubSectionID=4&ArticleID=16893>

In a year filled with change and uncertainty throughout the political spectrum, the theme that J Street sought to highlight during its third annual conference was choices that need to be made to advance peace.

As 2,500 participants, 650 of whom were students, descended on the Walter E. Washington Convention Center, the liberal pro-Israel group's confab provided an opportunity for speakers to highlight methods for moving the peace process forward. Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street's founder and president, noted during a press availability that while there were speakers at the conference that the group did not completely agree with, the conference served as a forum to discuss a wide range of opinions about the important issues.

"There are going to be people attending this conference and all sorts of meetings all year that say things the organization does not agree with and that's the nature of the beast. What we're trying to do is that we're not dictating the acceptable vocabulary of people coming to the conference," Ben-Ami said.

J Street has been critical of the current Israeli government in the past and while there were speakers during the conference that highlighted that criticism, bringing the topic of the two-state solution, a core mission of J Street, back into the conversation was the main focus of the conference.

J Street's advocacy day focused on urging members of Congress to sign a letter initiated by Reps. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), John Yarmuth (D-Ky.) and Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) that called on President Barack Obama to reaffirm U.S. support for a two-state solution. One delegate from New York, who requested anonymity, agreed with the assessment that it was important to bring the peace process back into the discussion.

"The two-state solution still exists and it still needs to be at the forefront of people's minds even while other countries are potentially building nuclear weapons," said the delegate.

During his remarks, Ben-Ami sought to highlight the choices that he felt the Israelis needed to make in order to achieve peace.

"We know that at some point a choice must be made - give up the land necessary for a Palestinian state and secure Israel's future as a Jewish democracy or keep all the land and sacrifice either the Jewish or the democratic nature of the state," Ben-Ami said. In response to Ben-Ami's opening remarks, one policy expert believed that a responsibility also needs to be placed on the Palestinians and Americans to make actionable choices towards peace.

"Of course the Israelis have a choice to make and so do the Palestinians and the Americans for that matter, but right now, this is a thought experiment. Neither (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu, (Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud) Abbas nor (President Barack) Obama are prepared to pay the necessary price for a serious negotiation, let alone an agreement to end the conflict," said Aaron David Miller in a comment to WJW. Miller advised six secretaries of state on peace negotiations and is now a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the conference's keynote speaker, echoed those sentiments during his Monday night remarks. While Olmert did focus on the importance of the Israeli government taking actions towards peace, he emphasized the need for the Palestinians to follow through on their obligations to achieving peace. "When we try to look at the entire picture, no one should relieve the Palestinians from their responsibilities," Olmert said .

(Hearings in Olmert's long-running corruption trial came to an end this month, and the Jerusalem District Court's decision in Israel's biggest corruption trial ever is pending.) The attendees also heard remarks from two administration officials who used their addresses to discuss Obama's record on the issues and highlight the significance of finding a solution to the peace process.

Presidential adviser Valerie Jarrett noted that peace "can only be reached by Israelis and Palestinians coming together to reach agreement on the issues that divide them." Following Jarrett's remarks, Antony Blinken, national security adviser to the vice president, reiterated that direct negotiations between the parties is the only way to peace. "As the president has said, there is no shortcut to peace - these issues can only be resolved through negotiations," Blinken said, as some members of the J Street crowd jeered.

While speakers discussed hopeful ways to move towards achieving peace, some speakers focused criticism on the current Israeli government headed by Netanyahu, particularly on Iran and the peace process.

Israeli novelist and peace activist Amos Oz used his remarks on Saturday night to reject Netanyahu's comparisons of the existential threat that Israel faces from Iran to that of what the European Jews faced during the Holocaust from Nazi Germany. "It will be a mistake for Israel to launch an attack on Iran. And let us not be misled by the demagogical comparisons between the present condition of Israel and the Jews during the Holocaust," Oz said to cheers from the crowd.

An Arab-Israeli member of the Knesset disparaged the Netanyahu government for what he described as giving "too much power to the settlers."

"I'm not optimistic about prospects for negotiations in the coming year because the government headed by Netanyahu is a bad government. The composition of the government gives too much power to the settlers," said Raleb Majadele, an Israel-Arab, Labor Party member of Knesset, through a translator, during a panel on the two-state solution.

Some attendees of the conference echoed the same sentiments about the issue of settlements.

"The settlements are a hugely contentious issue and they are the major roadblock. There's not going to be peace as long as the settlements are allowed to grow," said Rabbi Alana Suskin, director of strategic communications for Americans for Peace Now, in an interview.

A college student from Michigan attending the conference, who requested anonymity, told WJW that she believed "settlements are morally terrible and anything we can do, including boycotting, can reinforce the idea that they are illegal and an obstruction to peace."

Despite the criticism on the current Israeli government, an Israeli diplomat sought to address J Street about the dangers involved when "pressuring" Israel during a speech before the conference's gala dinner.

"We welcome the opinions of our brethren in the Diaspora ... but at the end of the day, it is we, the Israelis, who must bear the ultimate burden and may have to pay the ultimate price. And we, dear friends and family, have no margins of error, none whatsoever," said Barukh Binah, Israeli Embassy deputy chief of mission, in his prepared remarks. Binah went on to say that "internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem, when we need you the most," which received a silent reception from the crowd.

Binah was the first Israeli diplomat to speak before J Street's conference since the organization's founding in 2008.

In addition, there was discussion during the conference about the controversial idea put forward by author Peter Beinart in his New York Times piece where he promoted a "Zionist BDS [boycott, divestment and sanctions]," which would be a campaign undertaken by American Jews to boycott any products made in Israeli settlements. Beinart was the featured speaker during Sunday night's plenary session to release his book, *The Crisis of Zionism*; however, while Beinart was a top speaker for J Street this year, Ben-Ami rejected Beinart's calls for a boycott.

"I don't, however, agree with Peter that pressure on settlers and settlements through targeted boycotts and other measures will lead them to change course," Ben-Ami said in a March 19 response that was posted on J Street's web site.

While J Street's president opposed the thought of a targeted settlement boycott, some Israeli government officials in attendance embraced the idea.

"Settlements are the obstacles for peace, and we cannot give them a chance to keep on thriving," said Majadele amid some applause from the crowd. "This is why it's a very special boycott on something that we do not accept and is an obstacle for peace." Knesset member Zehava Galon, chairwoman of the liberal Meretz Party, supported such a boycott, while Labor Party Knesset member Avishai Braverman voiced opposition because he feared the international community would confuse a boycott of settlements with a total boycott of Israel.

The former peace negotiator Miller argued against a boycott and noted that from an American perspective "BDS gets you the worst of all possible worlds." "You alienate the Israeli government and a fair percentage of the public, raise expectations among the Arabs and the international community that this is the road to a two-state solution without getting where you want to go. Settlements are a symptom of the problem: the absence of a serious negotiation leading to a conflict-ending agreement. Why waste time, energy and political capital on the key to an empty room?" Miller told WJW.



## **Forward: J Street Swims Upstream in Election Year** *Group Targets Pro-Peace Message at Obama Democrats*

*Nathan Guttman (3/28/2012)*

<http://forward.com/articles/153841/j-street-swims-upstream-in-election-year/>

Washington — In this election year, even liberal Democrats are seeking to protect their flanks by touting hawkish credentials on Israel.

For J Street, the dovish pro-Israel lobby whose annual Washington conference wrapped up recently, that makes 2012 a year for swimming upstream. The group is targeting its message where it believes it will have the most impact: Jewish Democrats who support President Obama.

“They do need to take a stand on what it means to be pro-Israel so politicians stop pandering,” said J Street’s president, Jeremy Ben-Ami, referring to dovish Jewish voters who he believes could have a much bigger impact.

The lobby wants to push the White House and its supporters not to abandon the Mideast peace process and to press for a two-state solution with the Palestinians, even as Israel looks warily at the threat posed by Iran.

In contrast to the determinedly bipartisan strategy of its much larger rival, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Ben-Ami candidly acknowledged that neither Republicans or conservatives may be receptive to J Street’s message.

“There’s no question that the position that J Street takes and the language that we use will never appeal to a solid quarter of the American Jewish community,” Ben-Ami said.

The reaction of the conference to the Obama administration officials’ speeches dramatically illustrated the group’s strong identity within the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. It also may indicate a certain wariness about Obama’s apparent willingness to set aside their views when it seems politically expedient to do so.

The crowd gave only muted applause to comments touting the administration’s positions on the Middle East, Iran and the Palestinian issue. But the audience offered a lengthy standing ovation to Obama’s senior adviser Valerie Jarrett when she trumpeted the president’s health reform plan. Her mention of women’s rights to birth control brought the J Street delegates to their feet.

Given that it’s an election year, many analysts see little or no chance of pushing Obama into a more active role in the peace process anytime soon.

But J Street nevertheless wants to continue a fight to define “the future of pro-Israel,” as the group dubs its campaign. The issue is especially urgent because Republican candidates are increasingly eager to stake out much more hawkish approaches to the Middle East conflict.

Jim Gerstein, a Democratic pollster and one of J Street’s founders, said that the drive to educate voters on dovish pro-Israel views does not reflect a concern about losing votes to Republicans.



## **Jewish Journal: The Future of Pro-Israel Activism**

*Rabbi John Rosove (3/28/2012)*

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/rabbijohnrosovesblog/item/the\\_future\\_of\\_pro-israel\\_activism\\_20120328/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/rabbijohnrosovesblog/item/the_future_of_pro-israel_activism_20120328/)

I have just returned from the 3rd annual J Street Conference in Washington D.C. attended by 2500 pro-Israel pro-peace activists from around the country and world. I was invited to deliver a statement to the plenary on the future of pro-Israel activism, and I offer those remarks here.

“Good afternoon. My name is John Rosove and I am the Senior Rabbi of Temple Israel of Hollywood in Los Angeles. I am the Future of Pro-Israel activism because I believe that progressive Zionism is the best assurance that Israel will remain secure, Jewish and democratic.

Gloria Steinem was right when she said that “All politics is personal,” and so before I share a bit about how my Pro-Israel activism has shaped my life and rabbinate, I want to say a few words about my roots in Zionist and Jewish leadership.

In the late 19th century half my family left Ukraine for Canada and the United States and the other half went to Palestine. Those who made aliyah were religious Jews and arrived in Jerusalem in 1880. Along with Jeremy Ben-Ami’s great-grandparents, my family were among the original settlers of Petach Tikva when they moved there in 1882. My great-great uncle was famous as Petach Tikva’s first shomer, policeman, and as both Theodor Herzl’s and Chaim Weizmann’s body guard whenever they visited the land. Another cousin became the founding professor of the Department of Near Eastern Languages at the Hebrew University, translated the Koran and A 1001 Nights to Hebrew. Yet another helped facilitate the Camp David Accords as a Knesset attorney, and a third, Ruby Rivlin, is the sitting Speaker of the Knesset.

In Los Angeles, my uncles and aunts were top leaders of the United Jewish Appeal, the Jewish Federation, the American Jewish Committee, Brandeis Camp Institute, and the Jewish Centers Association in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

I was tutored in classic mid-century Jewish liberalism and claim as my childhood rabbis Leonard Beerman and Richard Levy who mentored me in civil disobedience during the civil rights and Vietnam eras.

Taken together, all roads led me to serious engagement in Jewish religious, communal and Zionist life. My passion for Israel was especially inspired in those heady years immediately after the 1967 Six Day war and reflecting the sentiment of Yehuda Halevi, though my body is here b’kitzei maarav (at the far ends of the west), libi b’mizrach (my heart lives in the east). I feel as at home there as I do here and when I am not there, I yearn for her. My adult life has been in part a struggle to join my two central worlds as a liberal American Jew and an ohev am u-m’dinat Yisrael (lover of the people and state of Israel).

It is therefore as a Progressive Reform Zionist that I have found my true and natural home. As such I take the view that Jewish nationalism must envision our people's independence as a means of serving humanity as a whole, that we might fulfill Isaiah's vision to be an or lagoyim, "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6). I believe that social justice must be applied to all the major issues confronting Israeli society including Israeli Arab and Palestinian rights, minority rights, immigrant worker rights, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, poverty, education, and justice. Israel becoming a just society in every way needs to be the endgame if Israel is to live its own Declaration of Independence. It isn't enough for us here in the west to mouth the right words. We have to be prepared to put our money where our mouths are, to visit Israel often, to support those progressive forces there working towards these good, just and decent ends, and, for some of us, to make aliyah.

Just as we expect much of the Jewish state, we Diaspora Jews have an obligation to give back to Israel not just our love and ideas, but of our time, expertise and treasure, especially when it's hard to do so, when we feel frustrated, angry and alienated by Israel's government policies and direction.

The organizations I support (e.g. Rabbis for Human Rights, B'tzelem, New Israel Fund, Shalom Achshav, the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, the Israel Religious Action Center, and Hiddush) represent a vision of Israel that is Jewish, democratic, pluralistic, compassionate, and just. They and others like them need strong American Jewish support just as we American Jews need Israel to embody the values we cherish... We need Israel and Israel needs us – it's a relationship that must be intimate and mutual. The Talmud (Pesachim 112a) makes this point when it says, *Yoter ha-egel rotzeh linok, parah rotzei l'hanik* – "Even more than the calf needs to suck, the mother needs to suckle."

Though my synagogue is located at the far ends of the west, I feel grateful that by and large my community has embraced my progressive Zionist vision. Even so, I have my share of members who don't share that vision, and who I know I have irritated over the years. The challenge for me as their rabbi is...to show them sincere respect for their vision, as different as it is from what I believe, even as I hope they respect mine as different as it is from theirs.

Over many years I and many in my community have created and nurtured a safe and open space to talk about Israel and engage multiple perspectives and viewpoints. It's through this kind of robust dialogue that religious and community leaders can best support Israel. Even so, I've been attacked for my progressive Zionist activism. I was especially criticized when my synagogue hosted Jeremy Ben-Ami this past spring in dialogue with David Suissa, the President of the Los Angeles Jewish Journal, an equally passionate, articulate and intelligent Israel advocate, who incidentally, is speaking at this conference after Jeremy invited him when they appeared together at Temple Israel of Hollywood.

I had already been tagged communally as a "J Street Rabbi" for articles I penned in support of J Street's vision and activism, and in this role I know that I've been dismissed by many in the LA Jewish community as being beyond the pale of "acceptable" pro-Israel activism.

I know and you know that we are not beyond the pale. Our pro-Israel pro-peace positions represent, according to recent surveys, not only the majority in the American Jewish community but also that of hundreds of thousands of Israelis. More importantly, progressive pro-Israel activism is the future because the alternative, which represents the status quo (i.e. the brutal occupation and submission of another people), is what most endangers Israel's integrity and existence and its future as a Jewish and democratic state.

## **Jewish Week: Israeli Government Stops Its J Street Boycott**

*Ron Kampeas (3/27/12)*

[http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/national/israeli\\_government\\_stops\\_its\\_j\\_street\\_boycott](http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/national/israeli_government_stops_its_j_street_boycott)

Washington — The first Israeli government official to ever appear before J Street received a rousing, whistling, foot-stomping reception.

And that was it, as far as the welcome went.

The speech delivered Monday night at J Street’s annual conference by Barukh Binah, the deputy chief of mission at the Washington embassy, was a compendium of the Israeli government’s differences with the liberal pro-Israel group — and, accordingly, it was not interrupted once by cheers or cries of agreement, and Binah left the stage to the lightest of applause.

Yet what was noteworthy was that he turned up at all — something made evident later in the evening when Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli prime minister, told the gathering that Binah’s appearance was “historic,” even if it was mostly about disagreement.

“The fact that the government decided to send him is the most important thing,” Olmert said, triggering another round of cheers, applause and table thumping from among the approximately 2,500 conference attendees at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center here.

Binah’s very presence was emblematic of how J Street seems to have gravitated toward deeper identification with the country whose interests it has claimed to defend since its 2008 inception — as well as toward the mainstream pro-Israel community in the United States.

Israeli officials monitoring the event said they were surprised by a tone that they considered more pro-Israel than they had expected.

They contrasted this year’s J Street conference with last year’s, when the group opened its conference by honoring Peter Beinart, the journalist who had made waves with an essay warning Israel that it was losing American youth; Izzeldin Abuelaish, the Gaza doctor who remained committed to peace in the wake of the 2009 deaths of three of his daughters from Israeli fire during Operation Cast Lead; and Sara Benninga, a founder of the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement, which protests Israeli policies in eastern Jerusalem’s Arab neighborhoods and condemns “ethnic privilege” in Israel.

This year, all three opening speakers were Israelis who are participants in the mainstream of the country’s political debate: Amos Oz, the novelist and peace activist; Stav Shaffir, a

founder of the social justice protest movement launched last summer in Israel; and Michael Bitton, the mayor of Yerucham, a development town. Sessions included officials of The Israel Project, an Israel advocacy group that consults with the Israeli government — and one that J Street had once attacked as being unrepresentative of American Jews. Shaffir earned applause when she defined her movement as the natural heir to the “crazy, beautiful dream” of the early Zionists.

In all, it was a striking shift for a group that at its conference last year featured a panel discussion on the boycott Israel movement, which J Street opposes. The panel included a representative of Jewish Voice for Peace, which describes itself as a part of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.

The shift did not escape the notice of Israeli officials. The decision by Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street’s president, to pronouncedly distance himself from Beinart’s latest initiative — a call to boycott products made in West Bank settlements — was the deciding factor in sending Binah, Israeli officials told JTA. The embassy’s announcement that Binah would attend came a day after Ben-Ami told Atlantic blogger Jeffrey Goldberg that Beinart’s initiative would not be productive.

“I don’t think that it makes any sense to put negative pressure on people whose behavior you hope to change,” Ben-Ami told *The Atlantic*. “I think that the way that Israelis will feel comfortable making the compromises and the sacrifices — and Israel as a whole, not just the settlers — is when they really feel that not only American Jews but the United States is going to be there for them.”

The point of sending Binah was to establish a relationship with a group that the Israeli government has come to perceive as significant, said a senior Israeli official.

“A critical conversation is better than no conversation because apathy is our enemy,” the official said. “They understand it’s a process — next time they may get the ambassador.” The point was dialogue “among friends, even if there are differences, even if it is unpleasant.”

To that end, Binah stoically, in apprehensive tones, slogged through a speech replete with rebuke, and the audience just as stoically bit its collective lip and refrained from interjecting, although there was an occasional derisive yelp.

“We need you to stand with us. It is as simple as that and someone ought to say it,” Binah said. “Internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem, *davka* when we need you the most,” he said, using a Hebrew word meaning, in this context, “especially.”

Binah suggested that J Street did not appreciate its potential to harm Israel in the organization’s capacity as a lobbying group.

“I respectfully submit that this relatively new role lays responsibilities before you which I am certain have not been adequately considered,” he said, adding that “when you bring lawmakers to Israel, please make sure they come out with a full picture.”

On its legislative tours of Israel, J Street has shown lawmakers Israeli measures in the West Bank that it contends hinder peace, but also has organized meetings with settlers and highlighted Israeli success stories in immigration and business.

Ben-Ami pushed back in his response, which immediately followed Binah's speech. J Street, Ben-Ami said to loud applause, was founded by those who "wanted a voice grounded in commitment and love for Israel but grounded in the Jewish values in which we were raised, grounded in the democratic values in which Israel was founded." In an interview with JTA, Ben-Ami said that J Street's emphasis was always on Israel's well-being.

Critics have attacked J Street over the participation in its previous conferences of speakers and attendees who are to its left and more hostile to Israel. Asked about the criticism, Ben-Ami attempted to balance his organization's support for a big tent and open dialogue with clear definitions of its stances.

"I don't think it's appropriate to use 'apartheid' " in discussing Israel, he said. "I don't think it's appropriate to use those words, and people who do don't speak for J Street. I don't want to hear the phrase 'one-state solution,' but does that mean there aren't people here who do? No."

J Street's positioning has disappointed and angered some to its left. In particular, the organization has been criticized over its speaking invitation to Olmert, who is under indictment in Israel on corruption charges.

While Olmert in his address highlighted his efforts to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, many on the left have criticized his role in ordering Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli human rights monitoring group B'Tselem, which was listed as a participating organization in the J Street conference, issued a statement saying, "we would not have advised featuring Olmert as a speaker." The statement referred to "grave suspicions regarding serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law under the Olmert government," citing Cast Lead.

All in all, Israelis seemed more prevalent than in previous years. At one session made up of current and former members of the Knesset, Raleb Majadele, an Arab-Israeli lawmaker from the Labor Party, delivered his speech in Hebrew.

Such sessions notwithstanding, an Israeli official monitoring the event through live streaming said that the conference in general seemed more about J Street finding its place in the American community rather than about Israel per se.

While J Street has expressed an interest in building bipartisan support for its agenda, some sessions would not have been out of place at a Democratic Party event.

A panel on U.S. elections this year turned into a strategy session on getting Jews to vote Democratic. One questioner began his question, “As a Jewish Republican — and I come in peace ...”

Another panel titled “Strange Bedfellows: Neocons, Hawks, Christian Zionists and Casino Magnates” included two Jewish journalists, Michelle Goldberg and Sarah Posner, who are outspoken critics of the Christian right. They emphasized end-times scenarios in describing Evangelicals’ support for Israel, a posture that conservatives say is a caricature of Christian Zionism.

Some of the lines that drew the biggest applause at the conference had nothing to do with Israel.

Valerie Jarrett, a close adviser to President Barack Obama, devoted much of her speech to the administration’s domestic policies. Jarrett won loud cheers with her defenses of the president’s health care reforms and position on contraceptive coverage.

In her opening remarks Shaffir, the Israeli protest movement leader, suggested that the liberalism of J Street supporters could be a valuable contribution to her country.

“I know and admire the histories of many of the communities and individuals in this room,” she said. “I know of your important history in the trade union movement, of your involvement in the civil rights’ struggle, and of the role that American Jewry takes today in fighting social justice in the U.S. and throughout the world. I know you fight not only for my country but also for my values.”



## **JTA: J Street and Israel are still arguing—but on friendlier terms**

*Ron Kampeas (3/27/2012)*

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/03/27/3092356/j-street-and-israel-are-still-arguing-but-on-friendlier-terms>

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Binah's very presence was emblematic of how J Street seems to have gravitated toward deeper identification with the country whose interests it has claimed to defend since its 2008 inception -- as well as toward the mainstream pro-Israel community in the United States.

Israeli officials monitoring the event said they were surprised by a tone that they considered more pro-Israel than they had expected.

They contrasted this year's J Street conference with last year's, when the group opened its conference by honoring Peter Beinart, the journalist who had made waves with an essay warning Israel that it was losing American youth; Izzeldin Abuelaish, the Gaza doctor who remained committed to peace in the wake of the 2009 deaths of three of his daughters from Israeli fire during Operation Cast Lead; and Sara Benninga, a founder of the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement, which protests Israeli policies in eastern Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods and condemns "ethnic privilege" in Israel.

This year, all three opening speakers were Israelis who are participants in the mainstream of the country's political debate: Amos Oz, the novelist and peace activist; Stav Shaffir, a founder of the social justice protest movement launched last summer in Israel; and Michael Bitton, the mayor of Yerucham, a development town. Sessions included officials of The Israel Project, an Israel

advocacy group that consults with the Israeli government -- and one that J Street had once attacked as being unrepresentative of American Jews.

Shaffir earned applause when she defined her movement as the natural heir to the “crazy, beautiful dream” of the early Zionists.

In all, it was a striking shift for a group that at its conference last year featured a panel discussion on the boycott Israel movement, which J Street opposes. The panel included a representative of Jewish Voice for Peace, which describes itself as a part of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.

The shift did not escape the notice of Israeli officials. The decision by Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street’s president, to pronouncedly distance himself from Beinart’s latest initiative -- a call to boycott products made in West Bank settlements -- was the deciding factor in sending Binah, Israeli officials told JTA. The embassy’s announcement that Binah would attend came a day after Ben-Ami told Atlantic blogger Jeffrey Goldberg that Beinart’s initiative would not be productive.

“I don’t think that it makes any sense to put negative pressure on people whose behavior you hope to change,” Ben-Ami told The Atlantic. “I think that the way that Israelis will feel comfortable making the compromises and the sacrifices -- and Israel as a whole, not just the settlers -- is when they really feel that not only American Jews but the United States is going to be there for them.”

The point of sending Binah to the J Street conference was to establish a relationship with a group that the Israeli government has come around to perceive as significant, said a senior Israeli official.

“A critical conversation is better than no conversation because apathy is our enemy,” the official said. “They understand it’s a process -- next time they may get the ambassador.”

The point was dialogue “among friends, even if there are differences, even if it is unpleasant.”

To that end, Binah stoically, in apprehensive tones, slogged through a speech replete with rebuke, and the audience just as stoically bit its collective lip and refrained from interjecting, although there was an occasional derisive yelp.

"We need you to stand with us. It is as simple as that and someone ought to say it," Binah said. "Internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem, davka when we need you the most," he said, using a Hebrew word meaning, in this context, “especially.”

Binah suggested that J Street did not appreciate its potential to harm Israel in the organization's capacity as a lobbying group.

"I respectfully submit that this relatively new role lays responsibilities before you which I am certain have not been adequately considered," he said, adding that "when you bring lawmakers to Israel, please make sure they come out with a full picture."

On its legislative tours of Israel, J Street has shown lawmakers Israeli measures in the West Bank that it contends hinder peace, but also has organized meetings with settlers and highlighted Israeli success stories in immigration and business.

Ben-Ami pushed back in his response, which immediately followed Binah's speech.

J Street, Ben-Ami said to loud applause, was founded by those who "wanted a voice grounded in commitment and love for Israel but grounded in the Jewish values in which we were raised, grounded in the democratic values in which Israel was founded."

In an interview with JTA, Ben-Ami said that J Street's emphasis was always on Israel's well-being.

Critics have attacked J Street over the participation in its previous conferences of speakers and attendees who are to its left and more hostile to Israel. Asked about the criticism, Ben-Ami attempted to balance his organization's support for a big tent and open dialogue with clear definitions of its stances.

"I don't think it's appropriate to use 'apartheid' " in discussing Israel, he said. "I don't think it's appropriate to use those words, and people who do don't speak for J Street. I don't want to hear the phrase 'one-state solution,' but does that mean there aren't people here who do? No."

J Street's positioning has disappointed and angered some to its left. In particular, the organization has been criticized over its speaking invitation to Olmert, who is under indictment in Israel on corruption charges.

While Olmert in his address highlighted his efforts to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, many on the left have criticized his role in ordering Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli human rights monitoring group B'Tselem, which was listed as a participating organization in the J Street conference, issued a statement saying "we would not have advised featuring Olmert as a speaker." The statement referred to "grave suspicions regarding serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law under the Olmert government," citing Cast Lead.

All in all, Israelis seemed more prevalent than in previous years. At one session comprised of current and former members of the Knesset, Raleb Majadele, an Arab-Israeli lawmaker from the Labor Party, delivered his speech in Hebrew.

Such sessions notwithstanding, the Israeli official monitoring the event through livestreaming said that the conference in general seemed more about J Street finding its place in the American community rather than about Israel per se.

While J Street has expressed an interest in building bipartisan support for its agenda, some sessions would not have been out of place at a Democratic Party event.

A panel on U.S. elections this year turned into a strategy session on getting Jews to vote Democratic. One questioner began his question, "As a Jewish Republican -- and I come in peace ..."

Another panel titled "Strange Bedfellows: Neocons, Hawks, Christian Zionists and Casino Magnates" included two Jewish journalists, Michelle Goldberg and Sarah Posner, who are outspoken critics of the Christian right. They emphasized end-times scenarios in describing

evangelicals' support for Israel, a posture that conservatives say is a caricature of Christian Zionism.

Some of the lines that drew the biggest applause at the conference had nothing to do with Israel.

Valerie Jarrett, a close adviser to President Obama, devoted much of her speech to the administration's domestic policies. Jarrett won loud cheers with her defenses of the president's health care reforms and position on contraceptive coverage.

In her opening remarks Shaffir, the Israeli protest movement leader, suggested that the liberalism of J Street supporters could be a valuable contribution to her country.

"I know and admire the histories of many of the communities and individuals in this room," she said. "I know of your important history in the trade union movement, of your involvement in the civil rights' struggle, and of the role that American Jewry takes today in fighting social justice in the U.S. and throughout the world. I know you fight not only for my country but also for my values."

## Jewish Journal: Mission impossible

*David Suissa (3/27/12)*

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/david\\_suissa/article/opinion\\_mission\\_impossible\\_20120327/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/david_suissa/article/opinion_mission_impossible_20120327/)

After spending three days at the J Street conference in Washington, D.C., and hearing one speaker after another talk about the importance of a two-state solution, I've come to the conclusion that Jews are blessed with two attributes: one, an unlimited capacity to tolerate the tedious repetition of the obvious, and two, an extraordinary ability to work on improving ourselves and taking responsibility for what happens to us.

It is this second impulse that I want to focus on. Throughout the conference — from Amos Oz declaring the urgent imperative to “divorce” our Palestinian neighbors, to Peter Beinart reaffirming his call for a boycott of settlements, to countless speakers exhorting us to aim for the highest ideals of Judaism and Zionism — the implication was clear that, somehow, everything is in our hands.

The shadow of the high-achieving Jewish parent hovered above the conference — the parent who always told us: If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything.

After all, we're the Jews, right? We're the people of the miracles, of the seas that split wide open, of the enemy armies that bow to our will, of the Nobel Prize winners who are the wonders of the world.

If we, the great chosen people, can't take responsibility for bringing peace to the Middle East, then who can?

There was something flattering, even oddly reassuring, about this level of self-confidence. It's nice to know there are Jews who still have faith in our ability to accomplish the impossible. But while I appreciated their enthusiasm and confidence, it unsettled me.

Where J Street people saw a pathway to a two-state solution, all I saw was the brick wall of Arab rejectionism. Where they saw the need to pressure Israel, all I saw was the wrong target.

After I spoke on a panel, someone stood up and complained that her “right-wing friends” call her “anti-Israel” because she's a member of J Street. I responded that labels like “pro-Israel” and “anti-Israel” are not useful because they describe people rather than action.

For example, J Street promotes putting most of the pressure on Israel to make peace. I believe that's wrong and misguided. But instead of calling its members “pro-Israel” or “anti-Israel,” I prefer to call them “pro-pressure-Israel.” It's more accurate.

From that perspective, they are “pro-pressure-Israel” and I am “pro-pressure-Palestinians.” I am that way not because I think Israel is blame-free or makes no mistakes, but because I believe we will get closer to peace by pressuring the Palestinians than by pressuring Israel.

I can come to that conclusion because I don't think "it's all about us."

To the credit of the organizers, they invited a speaker who made that same point loud and clear: Rabbi Donniel Hartman of the Shalom Hartman Institute. Hartman spoke of balancing power with humility, "contracting ourselves" to allow for differing views and acknowledging that "it's not always about us."

I wish there had been more such speakers at the conference.

I know J Street is trying to reach out and broaden its movement. To that end, I would make two suggestions for next year:

One, if you really want to promote peace, broaden your targets of criticism. Put as much pressure on the Palestinians as you do on Israel. Show more sensitivity to the fear many Israelis have that a two-state solution will create another Jew-hating terror state — on top of a nuclear Iran. Defend Israel as much as you criticize it.

Two, if you really want to empower Israel, broaden your mission. Don't put all your eggs on the Palestinian conflict. No matter how much you hate the occupation, Israelis won't vote to end it if they see withdrawal as suicidal. (Even Leon Wieseltier, the self-described "hawkish dove," told me he doesn't expect to see a two-state solution in his lifetime.)

So, while you will surely continue to work for a two-state solution, broaden your mission to include a "22-state solution."

Show the world that Jews care about all Arabs, not just the Palestinians who can give us a two-state solution. Jews also care about the Palestinians suffering in the squalid refugee camps of Jordan and Lebanon. We also care about the plight of women and other oppressed and poor people throughout the Middle East.

Yes, Israel is an imperfect democracy that needs a lot of improving, and we should continue to help it improve. But let's be real: It would be extraordinary if every country in the Middle East had the same opportunities, freedoms and human rights that this flawed and imperfect Jewish nation already provides.

Israel has learned an enormous amount in its 64 years of existence that also can benefit the countries in its neighborhood. As Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi of The Israel Project pointed out at the conference, there is an opportunity now to start a "people-to-people" movement using social networks that can plant the seeds for economic partnerships and peaceful co-existence.

The way I see it, reaching out for a 22-state solution will improve the prospects for a two-state solution, not the other way around.

Think of how empowering and ennobling it would be for Israel to be seen as a model and active participant in a new Middle East Spring. Of course, there is so much animosity toward the Jews and Israel that this would be a monumental task.

But we're Jews, remember? If we put our minds to it, we can do the impossible. Just look at that little miracle country we built.

It would be extraordinary if every country in the Middle East had the same opportunities, freedoms and human rights that this flawed and imperfect Jewish nation already provides.



## **JTA: AIPAC and J Street, the emotional disconnect**

*Daniel Treiman (3/27/12)*

Haaretz's Chemi Shalev has some astute observations from the J Street conference: In many ways, in fact, the rounds of applause and the moments of silence at the gala dinner were as clear an indication as can be that J Street is the "Bizarro World" of AIPAC, or vice versa, if you prefer. Just like in the opposite Superman world invented by DC Comics, statements such as Olmert's "Israel cannot live with a nuclear Iran" which would have had the crowd on their feet at AIPAC were met with cool reserve at J Street, while his proclamation that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas genuinely wants peace brought the audience to their feet. If someone spoke so glowingly of Abbas at AIPAC, you could probably hear a pin drop in the room in response.

Likewise, when Olmert spoke of the deep Jewish connection to Jerusalem, a staple crowd pleaser at AIPAC, the J Street audience yawned, but when he referred to the inevitability of the capital's division, his listeners howled with approval. Realizing where the crowd's sentiments lay, Olmert had to beg his audience not to applaud when he recounted his painful agreement during his talks with Abbas to relinquish Jewish sovereignty on the Temple Mount.

I'd note that this applause disconnect isn't entirely due to the (very real) policy differences between the two groups. For instance, AIPAC and J Street both support Iran sanctions, and both would certainly agree that there is a deep Jewish connection to Jerusalem. But talking about the Iranian nuclear threat or the Jewish connection to Jerusalem evidently doesn't put the fire in the bellies of J Streeters in the same way as it does for AIPACers.

This is, to a certain extent, reflected in the two groups' position statements on Jerusalem. AIPAC's issues page on Jerusalem hits the emotional notes. It states that Jerusalem "has served as the Jewish people's spiritual and religious capital for 3,000 years."

By contrast, J Street's policy statement on Jerusalem offers (in some detail) its prescriptions for the city's future under an eventual peace accord, but the language is clinical and devoid of emotion. It makes no mention of the Jewish historical connection to the city even as it devotes one of its four paragraphs to criticizing Israeli policies in eastern Jerusalem.

Even in affirming Jerusalem's status as Israel's capital, the J Street statement sounds more defensive than emphatic: "J Street does believe that Israel's capital is in Jerusalem and will be internationally recognized as such in the context of an agreed two-state solution." (Why the use of words like "does believe" with reference to the notion that Jerusalem is Israel's capital?)

## **Forward: J Street Stumbles by Inviting Olmert** *Pro-Peace Group Errs in Honoring Architect of Two Wars*

*Nicolas Pelham (3/26/12)*

<http://forward.com/articles/153641/j-street-stumbles-by-inviting-olmert/>

J Street's decision to offer Ehud Olmert the keynote address at the peace lobby's annual conference indicates a loss of moral compass. When Olmert takes to the podium tonight, delegates will applaud the Israeli prime minister who orchestrated the punishing siege on Gaza, launched two wars, killing 2,500 Lebanese and Palestinians and pulverizing their infrastructure. He was Israel's only prime minister since Yitzhak Shamir not to withdraw from territory Israel occupied following the 1967 war. Israel's leading human rights organization, Btselem, a participant in this year's J Street conference, called the invitation a mistake.

Undeniably, Olmert speaks a more humanitarian language than most Israeli politicians on the right. During his 2006 election campaign for Israeli prime minister, he promised to withdraw from the West Bank, unilaterally if need be, to something akin to the 1967 lines. But he balked. When the moment of reckoning neared, he waged war, first in Lebanon shortly after his election, and then in the winter of 2008 when he invaded Gaza. By his own admission, he and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas were just then close to agreeing to the small print of a two-state settlement. Olmert had also accepted Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's offer to mediate a peace agreement with President Assad and then, once talks had begun, torpedoed them with a Gaza adventure that embroiled Israel in allegations of war crimes. He lambasted Israeli settlers for their attacks against Palestinians, but continued to sponsor and defend their expanding settlements.

It might be that Olmert's warmongering was unwitting, and that the blood that he has on his hands was forced by so many adverse events on his watch. Both the Lebanon and Gaza wars were retaliation for intense cross border attacks from Hezbollah and Hamas, including thousands of rockets that rained down on southern Israel. But he was leader of the region's most powerful state, not a mere victim of circumstance. When the moment called for caution and cool appraisal, Olmert showed himself a loose cannon, jeopardizing the lives of Arabs and Jews alike. He seemed forever tugged back by the moorings of his early career when he denounced peace with Egypt and was Jerusalem's most hard-line mayor to date.

As prime minister, his sugar-coated words stood at odds with his actions. He lambasted Israeli settlers for their attacks against Palestinians, but continued to sponsor and defend their expanding settlements. He endorsed a sovereign Palestine, but when Palestinians elected their own government sought to topple it, first by withholding the Palestinian customs revenues required to run it and then with a punishing siege, which he refused to lift even when Gazans agreed to hold fire. He denied Gaza such basics as fuel and toiletries, and reduced the enclave back to the age of donkey travel. Gaza's plight triggered an escalation, which spiraled first into Gilad Shalit's abduction and then full-scale invasion.

By contrast, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has captained a more steady ship. While sparing his public the pipes of peace, he has repaired much of his predecessor's damage. He has eased, considerably, the siege on Gaza and removed many of the roadblocks and obstacles that Olmert retained across the West Bank. He has brought back Israel's captured soldier alive, in exchange for a mass Palestinian prisoner release. He even halted the settlement construction Olmert pursued, just for a bit. The military occupation of the West Bank remains with all its associated injustice, but while Olmert rushed to escalate and radicalize, Netanyahu has largely calmed. Contrast Netanyahu's sanguine and low-key response to the cross-border attack near Eilat last August with Olmert's ill-judged rush into war following a less violent penetration of its border with Lebanon. Even a government-appointed commission condemned Olmert's judgment as "misguided and rash." Olmert insists that that ending the conflict justified his lethal means. Netanyahu has been more circumspect about shedding blood for elusive goals.

At a time of regional upheaval, J Street could have played a constructive role in reaching out to the region's new actors, and attempting to bridge the polarization. At least for balance, it might have found the courage to invite representatives of some of those Olmert killed. Instead J Street has given its platform to a man indicted for corruption who exacerbated the conflict and lost the confidence of his electorate. Olmert has not come to J Street to promote the cause of peace. More likely, he has come to whitewash his reputation and airbrush his past. Israel's public will see through the charade, even if J Street, in a far-off fantasyland, cheers. By honoring Olmert's words and condoning his actions, J Street risks giving peace, Israel and itself a bad name.

## **Forward: J Street Features Beinart, Rejects His Boycott Call** *Young Activists Dominate Dovish Lobby's Conference*

*Nathan Guttman (3/26/12)*

<http://forward.com/articles/153695/j-street-features-beinart-rejects-his-boycott-call/>

Living up to its promise of bringing together a “big tent” of Jewish opinions, J Street has chosen to highlight at its conference speakers whose views at times exceed the dovish lobby’s comfort zone.

In its Sunday evening plenary session, J Street gave the stage to author and journalist Peter Beinart, despite his call for a boycott on settlement products; that boycott was opposed by J Street.

“We are open to airing opinions with which we disagree,” said the lobby’s president, Jeremy Ben-Ami, as he introduced Beinart to a crowd of some 2,500 J Street activists who had gathered in Washington for the three-day conference.

Despite a clear rejection of the boycott idea by J Street and the across-the-board criticism from the Jewish establishment, Beinart made clear in his answers to audience members that he does not regret the call he made for a “Zionist BDS,” a term he coined to distinguish targeting West Bank settlements from the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, which takes aim at the entire state of Israel.

The Sunday night event also served as the official launch event for Peter Beinart’s new book “The Crisis of Zionism.”. Participants, even those who say they support J Street’s rejection of Beinart’s call for a partial boycott, gave the author a warm welcome.

“I’m personally not comfortable buying settlement products, I empathize with why he is saying that, but on a political action level I think J Street needs to keep on taking the approach it’s been taking,” said Rainer Waldman Adkins, chair of J Street’s Seattle branch.

Beinart, in his J Street address, also repeated his call for changing U.S. tax rules so that charitable contributions to West Bank settlements will not be deductible.

He argued that giving up Israel’s democratic character, a likely outcome of rejecting the two-state solution, would spell the end of the Jewish state. Beinart also called for providing more space in the public discourse for critics of Israel.” Any Jewish leader who conflates disagreement in policy with anti-Semitism should be fired,” he said.

The theme woven throughout J Street’s conference is an attempt to define the “future of pro-Israel” in terms that will be more in line with the group’s liberal beliefs. To help make the case, the dovish lobby featured Donniel Hartman, an Orthodox rabbi who heads the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem and is hardly the usual suspect for liberal advocacy.



## **JTA: J Street, discovering America, discovering Israel**

*Ron Kampeas (3/26/12)*

<http://blogs.jta.org/politics/article/2012/03/26/3092339/j-street-discovering-america-discovering-israel>

There's an expression in Israel roughly equivalent to "reinventing the wheel": "Discovering America."

It can mean, less charitably, that someone is going over well-tread territory, but it also means that someone is figuring something out, finally, for better or worse.

At its third national conference, J Street seems to be "discovering America" when it comes to Israel.

Of course, J Street has, since its inception in 2008, been all about Israel, or pro-Israel. And it has always had Israeli guests at its proceedings.

But it has also missed a critical component common to other pro-Israel groups here, on the left and right: A definable Israeli constituency. Americans for Peace Now was founded by Peace Now; AIPAC has deep ties in the Israeli political mainstream establishment, as well as in the defense establishment; ZOA has settler ties.

This conference appears, in large part, about redressing that gap: J Street ISO Israeli partner.

The lack of an Israeli constituency led J Street to fuss and bother for a long time about whether it should back Iran sanctions. Significantly, when it leapt in in late 2009, it was because a top American lawmaker -- Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) -- did so. Not that other pro-Israel groups do not seek U.S. leads -- they do, eagerly -- but J Street's sanctions decision was dependent purely on an American dynamic: Berman wanted to make sure the sanctions were timed precisely to advance, and not to scuttle, President Obama's efforts to build an international coalition around them.

It's not that that calculus is unreasonable, but it was divorced from the urgency that Israel attached to sanctions. And instead of being perceived as having helped lead the U.S. polity toward a sanctions policy, J Street ended up being perceived as a follower.

So this year, J Street's opening session all Israel -- three speakers representing considerable breadth: Amos Oz, the peace activist and novelist; Stav Shaffir, the social protest movement leader; and Michael Bitton, the mayor of Yerucham, a development town. (Not only that, but for the first time I can remember in covering loads and loads of

"national conferences" in this town, I heard a speech in Hebrew -- delivered by an Israeli Arab lawmaker.)

Contrast this with last year, when there were also three honorees at the opener: An Israeli, yes, and an American and a Palestinian.

More significantly, two of the three speakers this year represented the country's indigenous social protest movement -- a constituency that remains untapped to a degree by American groups. (The exception is New Israel Fund.)

If that seems an odd coupling -- J14, a social protest movement that has gone to great lengths not to involve itself in matters of Israel-Palestine, and J Street, an American organization founded on the principle of achieving Israel-Palestine as a two-state solution -- Stav Shaffir, a leader of J 14 went to great lengths to wrap them together in her speech.

"I talked about the cross-communal partnerships we build," she said to an adoring crowd. "One is missing: You. I know and admire the histories of many of the communities and individuals in this room. I know of your important history in the trade union movement, of your involvement in the civil rights' struggle, and of the role that American Jewry takes today in fighting for social justice in the US and throughout the world. I know you fight not only for my country, but also for my values."

Will this partnership take? Does J Street finally have an Israeli home? Time will tell. Israeli officials monitoring this event (it's streaming!) are telling me that they're surprised at its pro-Israel tenor.

But how Shaffir framed her vision -- as one of liberals uniting to buck conservatives -- circles back to J Street's other issue: discovering America.

This is not a conference that a Republican or a conservative would slide easily into. That's not simply stating the obvious: There are conservatives and Republicans who are not averse to a more assertive U.S. role in peacemaking. (A Republican president, George H.W. Bush, kick-started this process, after all.)

Jeremy Ben-Ami told me today that he wants J Street to be their home as well. "The voter education that you do is non-partisan," he said, explaining his strategy. "You tell people there's a choice" on pro-Israel, "whether they're Republican, Green Party or Democrat."

Yet a session on Jews and the vote was solely about getting Jews to vote Democratic. Yet the biggest applause lines at today's plenary were delivered when Obama's closest advisers, Valerie Jarrett, defended his record on... health care, gay rights and contraception. Yet the session yesterday on conservative evangelicals devolved into caricatures of that group's eschatology.

J Street is discovering Israel. America -- it seems to be half way there.



## **New Voices: An exercise in letting things go [J Street 2012]**

*Shani Chabansky (3/26/12)*

<http://blog.newvoices.org/2012/03/26/an-exercise-in-letting-things-go-j-street-2012/>

Before the conference began, David blogged about “Israel-haters” at J-Street. He wrote that they’re here, and that’s okay. We have room to discuss their one-state solutions in the in-betweens, walking out from the plenaries and schmoozing. This place is the only place where “Israel-haters” can still feel like Jews.

So I asked a couple people what they thought about the open dialogue at this conference, what made them uncomfortable, and what they were letting go of. I got – not surprisingly — polar opposite reactions. One woman described a situation that made her uncomfortable earlier this morning: During one of the opening sessions, a person who was clearly new to J Street asked a “right-wingish” question was met with heckling and booing. She said that although her own politics align with that of J Street’s, our goal should be to open our arms to all perspectives, even those perspectives with which J Street openly disagrees.

On the other hand, during the J Street U student session this afternoon, I spoke with a young man who felt that most of the speakers were overly optimistic. He, unlike the woman I spoke with, was not convinced of the viability of a two-state solution. But both of the people I spoke with realized that the only way to achieve a solution is to let go of their discomfort.

And there are all sorts of things that are making me uncomfortable. The “Israel-haters” are not the source of my discomfort. What makes my arm hairs stand on end are the religious folks. Back when I was studying for my Bat Mitzvah, I rejected religion outright. In fact, I was so disgusted with the whole idea of religion that I rejected Judaism outright.

So when Amos Oz spoke, I was totally captivated. But even his speech made me squirm with anxiety. His metaphors had us all in the palm of his hand. When he made the comparison between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and marriage, we ate his words up like safta’s kugel. And he sealed the deal when he spoke of the tragedy of the conflict, arguing that we don’t want a Shakespearean ending in which everyone in the play is dead, but a Chekovian ending in which everyone is dissatisfied, but alive. But at the end of his speech, when he mumbled something about “God bless you, J Street,” I was immediately furious. I couldn’t believe my ears. For me, that comment undermined his earlier point, that “there is more than one way to be a good Jew.”

Why does it always have to be about God? And why is God always so well-received by the audience? It feels to me like even though non-religious Jews are totally welcome and

encouraged to participate, we still make up the minority of our representation. If a speaker is religious, then they're really important and what they have to say really matters.

And this overly-represented religiosity is a narrative we're all swallowing. Even I myself applauded when Anat Hoffman asked J Street U students to purchase the Women of the Wall tallit. Why should I care whether or not women are allowed to say the sh'ma aloud near the Western Wall? I have absolutely no connection to the site, other than its historic value. But it's remarkably effective, this integration of feminism and activism and religiosity. It's a narrative that is extremely attractive, even for those of us who remain firmly on the secular end of the Jewish spectrum. But I'm not buying it. And that's okay. I don't have to buy it. It makes me extremely uncomfortable, but that's okay. Nobody's forcing me come to shul. Nobody's forcing me to cover my shoulders. Nobody's forcing me to pray to God or follow halacha.

But there are other things besides the religious rhetoric that make me uncomfortable. I'll admit it: as a die-hard practitioner of a social science (of the anthropological pedigree), I'm a bit of a snob when it comes to comparisons, especially metaphors. So I'll be perfectly frank: there are a whole bunch of comparisons that are, to be polite, lacking.

For instance, even before Oz made that little remark about God at the end of his speech, I was really perturbed by his comparison between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and divorce. A divorce implies marriage, that at one time the two parties entered the contract willingly. To the best of my knowledge, this is not the case for many Israelis, and certainly not for Palestinians.

And I was hit again with the a similar repulsion for the rampant misuse of metaphors when Ilyse Hogue spoke at yesterday's plenary. She compared the coming out of a non-heteronormative individual to coming out as a supporter of J Street. While this comparison offers much in the way of addressing the discomfort we will all inevitably feel when gather around the seder table and discuss the things we learned at this conference with our less critically-minded friends and family, it also does something pretty gross.

How can we ever come close to understanding the oppression queer folks endure on a daily basis? How dare we compare our own discomfort to the challenging task transgender individuals must face every moment? And what about the queer Jews in our midst? How did they feel when Hogue made this comparison? I'm not trying to play the oppression Olympics here, but I felt that Hogue would have done well to at least mention the holes in the metaphor.

But as I keep reminding myself, it's okay. Just like I can let go of my distaste for religious Judaism, I can let go of my distaste for faulty comparisons. At J Street, I'm accepted even if I don't make the minyan. Whether or not a speaker's comparisons are totally sound is kind of irrelevant. When a speaker thanks God or blesses us, I don't have to get mad.

They're just words. They're words that, for me, evoke an old feeling of radical resentment. But it's time to let go of that story. This place is an exercise in letting things go, in acknowledging that maybe what you feel really, really strongly about should be set aside for a moment in order to work towards a larger goal. That's really freaking hard, but when you're fighting for a better future... if the work isn't hard, you're probably not doing it right.

This entry was posted on Monday, March 26th, 2012 at 10:59 am and is filed under activism, Daily Recap, Israel, j street conference. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.



## **JTA: Israeli envoy chastises J Street for pressuring Israel**

*Ron Kampeas (3/26/2012)*

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/03/26/3092344/israeli-envoy-chastises-j-street-for-pressuring-israel>

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- An Israeli diplomat chastised J Street for pressuring Israel on diplomatic issues.

The arrival of Barukh Binah, the deputy chief of mission at Israel's Washington embassy, was greeted with enthusiastic applause at the gala dinner Monday night of J Street's annual conference.

He is the first Israeli diplomat to attend a conference of the liberal pro-Israel group since its establishment in 2008.

A good deal of Binah's speech, however, was reproachful, and earned silence.

"We need you to stand with us," he said. "It is as simple as that and someone ought to say it. Internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem, davka when we need you the most."

"Davka" is an Israeli emphatic meaning "especially."

Binah suggested that J Street did not appreciate its potential to harm Israel in the organization's capacity as a lobbying group.

"I respectfully submit that this relatively new role lays responsibilities before you which I am certain have not been adequately considered," he said. "This, when you bring lawmakers to Israel, please make sure they come out with a full picture."

On its tours, J Street has shown lawmakers Israeli measures in the West Bank that it contends hinder peace, but also has organized meetings with settlers and has highlighted Israeli success stories in immigration and business.

Binah also appealed to J Street not to invite leaders of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement to its conferences, although he also welcomed J Street's stated repudiation of the movement.

There was no high-profile presence of the movement this year, but BDS supporters were featured on a panel last year.

J Street says such invitations do not imply endorsement, but Binah said that the BDS movement uses groups like J Street to attain legitimacy.

He praised J Street for endorsing Iran sanctions and for rejecting one-sided resolutions at the United Nations.

J Street director Jeremy Ben-Ami pushed back in his response, which immediately followed Binah's speech.

J Street, Ben-Ami said to loud applause, was founded by those who "wanted a voice grounded in commitment and love for Israel but grounded in the Jewish values in which we were raised, grounded in the democratic values in which Israel was founded."



## **JTA: J Street pushing peace process letter, Iran envoy bill**

*Ron Kampeas (3/26/2012)*

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/03/26/3092336/j-street-pushes-peace-process-letter-iran-envoy-bill>

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- J Street is backing a congressional letter urging President Obama to actively pursue Israeli-Palestinian peace and a bill that would direct him to appoint a special Iran envoy.

The two initiatives will be on the agenda of some J Street activists attending this week's conference when they visit Capitol Hill on Tuesday for meetings with lawmakers. Of 2,500 people attending the conference, 700 plan on lobbying, and they will have meetings in the offices of 225 lawmakers, out of 535.

The letter circulating among members of the U.S. House of Representatives says that Israel "cannot afford the absence of diminution of U.S. leadership in the urgent quest for peace." It implicitly attacks Republicans who have accused Obama of having involved himself too deeply in the process, which they claim undermines the U.S.-Israel alliance.

"Some on the national political stage have argued that the United States should not play a lead role in the peace process, even denying the existence of the Palestinian people," the letter says, a reference to comments by Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich that stirred controversy. "Far from undermining Israel's enemies, such rhetoric empowers them, and threatens Israel's long-term security and survival."

Reps. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), John Yarmuth (D-Ky.) and Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) initiated the letter.

Also on the J Street legislative agenda is a bill initiated last week by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) that would direct the president to appoint a special envoy "for the purpose of ensuring that the United States pursues all diplomatic avenues to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, to avoid a war with Iran, and for other purposes."

# Tablet

## **Tablet: J Street Dispatch: Tuesday**

***UPDATED: Many conference attendees stand to the left of the official party line; some support the boycott of products made in West Bank settlements***

*Adam Chandler (3/25/2012)*

<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/95050/j-street-dispatch-sunday/>

“Greetings, fellow self-haters!” That’s how Peter Beinart, former editor of the *New Republic* and author of the controversial new book *The Crisis of Zionism*, began his speech Sunday at J Street’s annual confab, to the delight of the audience. Over the next 30 minutes, Beinart reiterated his proposal for a “Zionist boycott”—of any products made beyond the Green Line—and also called for the dismantling of the Israeli position of chief rabbi, arguing that the position violates a needed separation of church and state.

It was a speech that no official representative of J Street could have given, since the liberal pro-Israel organization seeks to reach more of the Jewish mainstream. But part of why Beinart seemed to appeal to the 2,500 person-crowd was that his story—struggling privately with Israeli policies, and then coming out publicly as a critic of the Jewish state—mirrored the political trajectories that many J Streeters shared with me over the past few days.

I joined the members of the D.C.-area J Street group, which hosted a happy hour before Beinart’s speech for its members at *Busboys and Poets*, a popular D.C. bookstore and café. Leah Wilkes, who is studying for a master’s degree in international affairs as she works for J Street, spoke of her inability to address her complicated relationship with Israel with her mother.

“My mother was deeply involved in the civil rights movement in the South. She loved everyone, but there was one group of people we could never seem to talk about.” she said, referring to Palestinians.

Wilkes went on to say that her mother passed away before J Street was founded in 2008, but that for many, the organization provides a way for people whose views on Israel are outside of the mainstream to discuss it with their families. People like Ilyse Hogue, a writer for *The Nation*. At a forum called “The Future of Pro-Israel,” one of the conference’s most dynamic events, Hogue spoke about visiting Israel in her earlier years and being able to spend time playing hide-and-seek with her friends and roaming through the shuk in the Arab quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City, an activity that children visiting Israel today are much less likely to partake of.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are,” Hogue said, urging more supporters of J Street to reveal themselves.

Speakers at the conference’s major events and staff members mostly adhered to J Street’s platform, but at smaller sessions, the standards seemed looser and the tone could often be incendiary. At “Palestinian Perspectives: What’s the Next Move?” statements made by panelists—Mustafa Barghouti, a prominent Palestinian politician and member of the Palestinian parliament; Randa Hudome, a strategist and international affairs expert; and Aziz Abu Sarah, a Palestinian academic and writer—would have likely alienated liberal Zionists.

“Israeli society, instead of moving toward peace... finds itself moving more toward the extreme right wing,” Barghouti said. “In all new polls it is clear that Mr. Netanyahu will maybe increase his power by maybe 30 or 40 percent if there are elections soon, and this whole spectrum is moving to the right for one very simple reason and that is because this occupation, which is the longest in modern history for now more than 45 or 46 years, is a profitable occupation. It’s profitable. They make profits.”

Barghouti went on to estimate that the area around Bethlehem, “which was confiscated,” is worth \$30 billion. “They [Israelis] confiscate 90 [percent] of the water in the West Bank,” he added.

He also seemed to equate Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier kidnapped by Hamas and released late last year, with the Palestinian prisoners he was traded for, many of whom had committed or plotted acts of terrorism. He accused the IDF of routinely shooting and killing nonviolent protesters. A participant asked the panel to criticize J Street itself, at which point all the panel’s members fired away at the organization’s opposition to the attempted Palestinian bid for statehood at the United Nations last fall. The audience applauded.

“It would be a really cheap conference to pull off if we only allowed people who agreed with everything I said. It would be in a phone booth somewhere,” J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami told me. “I think one of things we’re trying to change in the way J Street operates, which is different from a more traditional, mainstream, or established, Jewish organization, is that we are not dictating the acceptable vocabulary of everybody who walks through the door.”

It was here Ben-Ami best drew the implicit comparison with AIPAC. Both groups have designs on being big tents, and AIPAC has already achieved high status as a power lobby with a collection of very different people who support Israel, albeit with limited room for rhetorical wiggling. Perhaps this is why the movement is picking up among university students.

“One thing I’ve liked are the audience reactions when issues like BDS or the U.N. bid came up.” said Rachel Richman, a student from the University of Chicago. “I could see that while J Street’s position is one thing, there are a lot of people here who are further to the left. It made me feel good that I wasn’t in the minority there and also that they brought in Palestinians and Arabic speakers.”

“People with a lot of different opinions can say they are all behind the same thing.” said Eric Siegel, a junior at Tufts. “And that’s a powerful thing.”

Jonathan Rich, a student at the University of Georgia, perhaps summed it up best:

I think I’m personally more progressive than J Street is and I feel like my concern was what the average person at J Street was going to be like. My experience has been that more people are like me and are more progressive—like about the United Nations bid and the inclusion of Palestinian voices as well as pro-Israel ones. In a way it’s good because [the conference] gives everyone access to the mainstream, in the same way that the Democratic Party is not as left wing as I would consider myself, but I still vote for the Democrats because that’s what you have available. I feel the same way about J Street. For now, this is good enough.

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Monday, March 26: The start time for the first set of panels at the J Street Conference was 8:15 a.m. Sunday morning. Those put off by the serpentine line for coffee could instead be jolted awake by a session on the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on U.S. interests. Arad Nir, head of the foreign news desk at Channel 2 News in Israel, was joined by three retired high-ranking members of the American military. It was still before 9 a.m. when the military brass reached a consensus: Israel has become a strategic liability to the United States.

Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Colin Powell during his tenure as secretary of State, led the charge: “Since the end of the Cold War, Israel has become more of a liability than an asset to the U.S.,” he said to nods of agreement.

The packed room—which included many college students, despite the hour—sat rapt as the panelists sprinkled their answers with references to apartheid and Vietnam. What was billed as a conversation about the Arab-Israeli conflict—the centerpiece issue of this year’s confab—soon became one about Iran. Every panelist decried the idea of an attack (by the United States or Israel). “A strike on Iran will do nothing,” said Brigadier Gen. John H. Johns, former deputy assistant secretary of defense. Like others at the conference, Johns argued that a strike on Iran would only solidify its decision to build a nuclear weapon.

A recurring theme over the past two days has been participants’ broad opposition to military confrontation with the Islamic Republic. Meantime, the official J Street line is that the focus on Iran is deflecting attention away from Israel’s myriad domestic problems and a peace plan with the Palestinians.

“Polls show an increasing number of non-Jewish Israeli citizens are expressing extraordinary displeasure with their third- and fourth-class citizenship in the state.” said Wilkerson during the panel. “This is not a positive development. But it’s a development brought on, in many respects, because the national security argument can be used by the government just as it’s used in this country to do all sorts of things. ... You can justify the liquidation of civil liberties, you can justify killing American citizens, for example, without due process, you can justify all kinds of things under that argument. And increasingly in Israel, that is what Netanyahu and [Foreign Minister] Avigdor Lieberman and others like him are doing. And this is very dangerous to the future of this state.”

Later, at a press conference at the Convention Center, J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami said: “Some are using the beating of the drums of war to try and shift the agenda from the critically important work that needs to be done to end this conflict.”

This is J Street’s major challenge: The organization is trying to avoid making Iran Topic A, but the Islamic Republic’s march toward nuclear weapons just so happens to be the biggest foreign policy issue facing the United States and Israel. Putting aside the fact that confronting Iran was the singular focus of the AIPAC conference earlier this month, many of J Street’s own members want to talk about Iran. Specifically, they want to advocate against a potential Israeli or American attack. The issue has dominated key panels, as well as happy hours.

Stand by to learn what subject—resolving the Israel-Arab conflict or advocating against a strike on Iran—will prevail as J Street activists head to the Hill to lobby on Tuesday.

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Sunday, March 25: Denizens of D.C. and history wonks (by no means mutually exclusive groups) are fond of explaining why Washington's alphabetical street layout does not include a J Street among its lettered grid. Across the city's four quadrants, every letter has its own street all the way from A through W (sadly X, Y, and Z didn't make the cut, either), excepting J. One moth-eaten myth is that Pierre L'Enfant, the city's original designer, had a beef with John Jay, the first chief justice, and left "J" out as a slight. The truth is actually that until sometime in the mid-19th century, the letters "I" and "J" were difficult to distinguish from each other. As usual, the explanation is much closer to pragmatic than exciting.

On Saturday, J Street, the organization designed to be a liberal counterweight to the more hawkishly pro-Israel AIPAC, kicked off its third convention under the banner of "Making History," history being something the group has assiduously tried to avoid becoming. As its 2,500 participants gathered, it seemed as though the group might have found some footing. Nearly a quarter of this year's attendees are college students from over 100 different universities in five different countries. This young, 650-strong contingent was the point of much attention, as they were featured parading through the conference's opening plenary on Saturday night. It was announced that J Street U, the organization's campus outposts, had reached 33 colleges.

Nearly four years ago, when J Street was founded, it received the L'Enfant treatment. Regarded by many as an insurgent excess or a confusing, unwanted presence, the group got the cold shoulder from most of the various Washington, Jewish, and pro-Israel establishments. Along the way, J Street endured a notable share of controversy, from its controversial funders (rhymes with George Soros) to the organization's initial response to Israel's Cast Lead operation, which placed the group politically to the left of even marginal Israeli political parties such as Meretz. But four years later, the group persists.

This year's conference has also already benefited from a surge of publicity, thanks to Peter Beinart, the movement's so-called troubadour, whose new book (which, at this point, you cannot possibly have not heard of) is being promoted prominently. To boot, Beinart's recent call in the New York Times for an American boycott of the West Bank settlements drew heavy note from the commentariat this week, touching off a series of high-level blood matches from public intellectuals and Jewish functionaries alike. Yet for all their closeness, J Street founder and head Jeremy Ben-Ami pointedly refused to back Beinart's boycott.

The literary undercurrent at J Street this year is bolstered also by Gershom Gorenberg and Ben-Ami himself, both of whom will be hawking books that raise alarm about Israel's policies and present an alternative approach to what many would consider the mainstream view of Israel's political future. It also didn't hurt that the Israeli novelist Amos Oz, a perennial contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature, was a featured speaker at Saturday night's opening plenary. It was at this event that Oz took a shot at AIPAC for its status as K Street monolith, lambasting its "militant, hawkish, extremist manner" to wild applause. He added: "There is more than just one way to be a good Jew. There is more than just one way to be a good Zionist."

Here's where the idea of "Making History" makes its play for J Street. While at AIPAC's conference earlier this month, American and Israeli politicians issued warning calls about the Iranian nuclear program (to over 13,000 attendees, in the same cavernous Washington Convention Center), the J Street conference will emphasize what's receded: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The panels, discussions, and workshops also have a staggering breadth, from issues like Iran, Jerusalem, and the two-state solution to pinkwashing, Gilad Shalit, and the environment. Emblematic of the available flavor is a session called "Strange Bedfellows: Neocons, Hawks,

Christian Zionists, and Casino Magnates” (don’t they mean Casino Magnate, singular?) as well as a feature called “Home Front: Portraits From Sheikh Jarrah.”

What will be missing is any notable presence from the White House, and little from Congress. As many have noted, the highest-level guest at J Street will be Anthony Blinken, the well-regarded national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, as well as Valerie Jarrett, a close adviser to (and close friend of) the First Couple. From Israel, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (well on his way to Jimmy Carter status at home) will appear. Like AIPAC, J Street will close out on Capitol Hill, where its members will seek an audience with various congressional representatives. Unlike AIPAC, J Street won’t already have hosted many of those representatives over the past few days.

According to (also disputed) legend, President Ulysses S. Grant’s wife forbade cigar smoking in the White House. Not to be denied, Grant would set out for the nearby Willard Hotel to satiate his craving, accompanied by a glass of brandy. Word spread of his routine, and political wheelers would come to the Willard to sit and angle to speak with him about various issues. And where in the Willard was this? The lobby, of course.

In addition to covering the goings on here at the J Street conference, we will be focusing our coverage on what is not going on. For a group that is working to forge its own avenue into American influence, where does J Street appear in the lobby? Is it close enough to smell the cigar smoke? Check back with us over the next few days.



## **JTA: J Street launches conference with Israel outreach message**

*(3/25/2012)*

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/03/25/3092315/j-street-launches-conference-with-israel-outreach-message>

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- J Street launched its annual conference with an emphasis on reaching out to Israelis.

The roster at the opening session Saturday night of the pro-Israel, dovish group's assembly was nearly all Israeli.

"The best-kept secret about J Street is that most Israelis agree with your goals," said Michael Biton, the mayor of Yerucham, a development city in southern Israel and one of the keynote speakers at the opening event.

Also speaking was Stav Shaffir, a founder of the social protest movements in Israel last summer, and Amos Oz, the novelist and veteran peace activist.

Oz urged American Jews to back J Street and not unite behind the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the mainstream pro-Israel lobby.

"No one can claim Zionism for themselves, it's a surname," he said.

J Street since its launch in 2008 has been dogged by accusations from centrist and right-wing pro-Israel groups that it does not have an indigenous Israeli constituency.

The conference theme is "Making History," and other featured speakers include Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli prime minister, and Valerie Jarrett, a top adviser to President Obama.



## **Forward: J Street Kicks Off With Calls for Peace Push** *2,500 Attend Conference in Tricky Political Climate*

(3/25/2012)

<http://forward.com/articles/153677/j-street-kicks-off-with-calls-for-peace-push/>

Nearly 2,500 peaceniks came together Saturday night at the Convention Center in Washington, D.C., for the third annual conference of leftist pro-Israel lobby, J Street. In the upcoming two days, the participants will listen to speeches, participate in debates, pray, and brainstorm together - until the traditional finale - the storming Congressional offices on Tuesday, trying to make the case for both Israel and peace.

J Street is still young, although some conclusions can be already be made about the organization. They did help change a discourse on Israel in the Jewish-American community but less so on Capitol Hill and the White House.

In 2012, during a very different election year, Barack Obama made a speech at the annual AIPAC conference, attended by 13,000 people. At J Street's conference, the U.S. administration will only be represented by Vice-President Joe Biden's National Security Advisor and President Obama's senior advisor Valerie Jarrett. At the AIPAC conference, both Israeli President Shimon Peres and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke. J Street conference attendants will have to make do with Peres's video address complemented by one by deputy head of the mission of the Israeli Embassy in Washington. This is certainly an improvement, since last year there was no one representing the embassy.

But the crowd at J Street did not come to hear officials' speeches and the repetition of the slogans regarding "ironclad," "sacrosanct" or "unshakeable" support for Israel. They came to hear activists like Stav Shaffir, one of the intrepid leaders of Israel's social protest movement. They came to hear about the real Israel, with its internal struggles, threats and fears.

Lobby founder, Jeremy Ben-Ami, boasted that this year, there was 25% increase in registration for the conference. Student activists opened the conference, calling out the names of the universities that sent young Jewish activist to Washington this weekend. However, Ben-Ami admitted that many stayed home this year as it is hard to have hope under the current conditions.

"We are dissatisfied with the status-quo. The status quo is simply not sustainable," Ben-Ami says. "Give the land for the Palestinian state, or keep the land and sacrifice the democratic and Jewish nature of Israel. The history of our era rests in no one's hands, but our own. What we are going to do with the closing window of the two-state solution? There is a cause for despair - the Israeli government is paying lip service to the peace process - undermining it on the ground with settlements expansion."



## **New Voices: College Students Flood J Street Conference**

*Zach C. Cohen (3/24/12)*

<http://blog.newvoices.org/2012/03/24/college-students-flood-j-street-conference/>

Of the 2,500 attendees of J Street’s “Making History” Conference, a lot of them are skipping class.

About 650 students, 24 percent of the conference’s attendees, turned out in droves for the movement’s third national conference in Washington, D.C. (500 were at last year’s conference). Just to break that up for you, that’s:

125 universities, 24 states and five different countries.

Israel advocacy on campus will be a major part of the discussion this weekend as nearly every time block has a subject relevant to college students. J Street U board members, student leaders and executives pepper the agenda, discussing “Telling Your Story to Make an Impact,” “The Future of Pro-Israel” and “The Next Generation: How Young Israel Activists and Young American Jews are Transforming Zionism and Pro-Israel Advocacy.”

But before any of that happens, March 24’s opening plenary featured a parade of students announcing the presence of 33 chapters of J Street U, the campus branch of the dovish pro-Israel lobby. Shortly thereafter, author Amos Oz, Yerucham Mayor Michael Biton and activist Stav Shaffir applauded J Street’s mission for representing the majority of Israeli public opinion.

“You, J Street, are the only ones brave enough ... to have this difficult conversation with us,” Biton said.

As is to be expected, when you gather a bunch of liberal Jews in one room, there’s going to be excitement over criticism of the pro-Israel right, who, according to speakers, shut down conversation and don’t have the answers to solving the peace process.

Oz had this zinger to share: I’ve been traveling in America for 45 years, once or twice a year, to Jewish communities and campuses and for 45 years they were always trying to hush me by telling me that, ‘Well, in Israel you may you’re your differences but here in America we opt to be united.’ My answer is: United by all means, absolutely. Let us all be united, but why unite under the militant, hawkish, extremist manner of AIPAC? ... There is more than just one way to be a good Jew. There is more than just one way to be a good Zionist.

At the end of the day, speakers, particularly J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami, hoped attendees would leave the conference more energized to help solve what Oz called the Israeli-Palestinian “tragedy” with a “Chekhovian solution.”

“As a Jew,” Ben-Ami said. “You’re simply not allowed to throw up your hands and walk away.”



## **New Voices: There are ‘Israel-haters’ in J Street. And that’s OK.**

*David A.M. Wilensky (3/23/12)*

<http://blog.newvoices.org/2012/03/23/there-are-israel-haters-in-j-street-and-thats-ok-communal-politics/>

The J Street conference kicks off here in D.C. tomorrow night. I’ve come down from New York to cover it and I’ll be joined by four more New Voices contributors by the time the whole shebang kicks off.

There’s a great piece in Tablet today in anticipation of the J Street conference about Breira, a short-lived 1970s lefty group made up largely of students, Hillel leaders and chavurah-types. (Which is a pretty similar constituency to the folks who founded the Jewish Student Press Service, which now published New Voices, a few years earlier. The article is chock-full of people who were involved with JSPS back in the day.) It was founded as an alternative to the American pro-Israel establishment of the time. The piece examines how and why Breira failed and how and why J Street has been more successful at doing a similar thing.

One of the major critiques of Breira at the time was that it wasn’t just a home for pro-Israel lefties, that it also included an openly anti-Israel contingent as well. In the article, Rabbi Michael Paley, a student at Brandeis when Breira was formed, says, Breira included “many haters of Israel.” Then he says, “I get that J Street has people that hate Israel in it, too. That’s a problem.”

This certainly isn’t the first time I’ve encountered this charge, but this time something new occurred to me. Obviously, Paley is right; all is not well in an organization devoted to a two-state solution to the region’s troubles when it has members that are fundamentally opposed to its goal of a two-state solution. However, there’s a difference between hating a state and hating a people. Not to go for the rhetorically nuclear option here, but it was surely possible to hate the Nazi state without hating the German people. For an example a little closer to our time, look at Iran: It’s easy for some these days to hate the Iranian state, but that doesn’t mean they hate the Iranian people.

So yes, there are some “Israel-haters” within J Street’s ranks, but my sense from last year’s conference is that they’re an insignificant minority. And even so, they don’t make up the national leadership of the organization and they certainly don’t set policy for J Street. They’ve simply found the only part of the American Jewish establishment that won’t kick them out on their asses if they’re found out.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the American pro-Israel establishment....

You wouldn't have a hard time flushing out some prominent Palestine-haters. (OK so a national entity called Palestine doesn't exist, but I mean people who hate the idea of it.) And you wouldn't have to look far for some people who actually hate the Palestinian people. (Quite a feat for the significant portion of them that also believe there's no such thing as a Palestinian.) We often hear from them about how Islam is a religion of violence and how backward Arabs are as a people.

But I have yet to hear anything approaching that kind of hatred for Israelis from any on the pro-Israel left, regardless of their feelings about the State of Israel.

# Tablet

## Tablet: J Street's Forerunner

The dovish organization, meeting this weekend in D.C., isn't the first to propose an "alternative" pro-Israel stance. Breira did it 40 years ago.

*Alex Klein (3/23/12)*

<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/94906/j-streets-forerunner/?all=1>

On March 10, 1973, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir packed a Brandeis University auditorium with almost a thousand people, some spoiling for a fight. The previous week, multiple brawls had broken out in cafeterias: New Lefties versus Jewish Defense Leaguers. Now, outside the auditorium, the ranks swelled to over 500, hawks and peaceniks competing chant for chant.

But for all the fervor and fist-fighting, Meir's speech singled out one group in particular: a troupe of liberal, anti-settlement Hillel members known as Breira. These lads, the prime minister said, were "not nice boys."

Rabbi Michael Paley, then a Brandeis senior and Breira member, remembers the smear. "We felt under attack," he told me. "The line was: We didn't have the right to criticize Israel because we weren't living in Israel, or fighting for it." In 1973, Meir's least-favorite group was energized by the insult. They were opening chapters nationally, led by Reform and Conservative rabbis, and poised to offer a policy breira, or alternative, where many claimed there was none. According to Wellesley historian Jerold Auerbach, the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman worked with the Brandeis Breira chapter in his junior and senior year.

But by 1977, four years later, Breira had been destroyed and, in many ways, disgraced.

This weekend, over 2,000 people will gather in Washington for the 2012 confab of another liberal, anti-settlement group, albeit a much larger and richer one: J Street. "We've turned the corner," Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street's founding director, told me. Unlike Breira, "we have survived the efforts to kill us."

While Breira wasn't quite J Street's 40-year forefather, its rise and fall offer parallels and lessons for the Jewish left and its opponents. J Street's structure and approach are generations from Breira's post-Yom-Kippur-War platform: J Street wants to be accepted as mainstream and would rather work within the system through lobbying and political action committees than upend it. Nevertheless, Ben-Ami says, "we had the same vision, and in that sense, the same path." He's hoping the comparison works in J Street's favor. "Four years is enough time to kill something. Four years is also enough time to prove that you're here to stay."

Breira was founded in 1973 by Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, then the Jewish chaplain and Hillel director at Yale University. He enlisted a corps of intellectuals, academics, and rabbis based in New York and Washington. Propelled by anti-Vietnam-War ire, an active student body, and a

monthly alternative journal called *interChange* published at Brandeis, the group's lively, iconoclastic founder was well-poised to introduce a new flavor of leftism, even while most Israel conversation seemed inseparable from Israel's razor's-edge victory in the Yom Kippur War. By contrast, Wolf denounced the "chutzpah and pride of the Israelis" in the *American Report*. To young Jewish liberals, he was near irresistible.

At the time, the group's policy positions were deeply out of step with mainstream Jewish opinions. Breira demanded that Israel hold talks with the PLO, immediately dismantle the then-new West Bank settlements, and pursue a loosely formulated two-state approach to resolve the conflict. As Hebrew Union Prof. Isa Aron, who served on Breira's board for all four years, told me, "Almost everybody in Breira was part of a *chavurah*, and not part of the Jewish establishment." The group had only three paid staff members, and they worked out of a sublet room in a *chavurah*-rented New York apartment. (As it happens, the group's secretary was a young Faye Ginsburg, now one of America's best-known anthropologists.)

Unlike J Street, Breira's lobbying efforts were focused less on the American government than on Israel's. Without Peace Now, whose founding was still five years away, the group stood close to alone, breaking sharply from the post-Yom-Kippur-War consensus: that is, hard-nosed and suspicious of concession. The group plotted a remarkably public, sometimes antagonistic course—especially for such a new organization. For example, they protested loudly in front of the United Nations and argued that the Jewish future lay in the Diaspora.

Breira found an ally in Leonard Fein, founding editor of *Moment* magazine, which hosted a symposium in 1975 titled "Should Israel Talk to the PLO?" At the time, the question was "unthinkable, scandalous, unheard of," according to Fein. "It was an outrageous perspective ... we thought Israel was being imperialistic in the West Bank," Paley told me. In the wake of the Jewish state's narrow 1973 victory over Egypt and Syria, "criticizing [it] was like criticizing your mother."

The group's leaders hoped to couch their criticism in loving terms: to oppose Israeli policy while supporting Israel's right to exist, a now familiar refrain. It was a sensitive balancing act, but one well-suited to the community-minded rabbis and Hillel directors who led individual chapters. They hoped to strike a chord with the young, the idealistic, and the dissatisfied—much as J Street does today.

But avoiding stepping on toes was not Wolf's strong suit. He was a born radical. "Arnie was a tough, tough critic of American Jewry," Fein said about the late rabbi. "He was an irascible fellow." Wolf himself was an early friend and supporter of Barack Obama—and, as it happens, the Chicago Seven: a connection that critics of both the president and Wolf are all too happy to revive. The rabbi and the future president met in the 1980s, when Wolf served as rabbi emeritus at KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation, a synagogue in the Obamas' Hyde Park neighborhood. The pair talked at length about faith, civil rights, and the Middle East, and the president commemorated Wolf's late-2008 death with a personal letter to his family. Earlier this week, Norman Podhoretz, the neoconservative writer, said that the pair shared a "hatred of the Jewish state."

Almost 40 years ago, Breira was vulnerable to the same attacks. The press barrage began almost immediately. "I don't think anyone foresaw how vicious the counterattack would be," Fein told me. In July 1977, *Commentary* magazine claimed that Breira was fostering "an attitude of enmity toward Israel," while Rael Jean Isaac of *Americans for a Safe Israel* wrote a devastating 30-page pamphlet and several columns that accused Breira of favoring a one-state solution: Palestine. "At

Breira and New Jewish Agenda, there were many haters of Israel there,” Paley conceded. “I get that J Street has people that hate Israel in it, too. That’s a problem.”

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a leader in the Jewish Renewal movement and a Breira firebrand, proved a particular magnet for vitriol. Critics jumped to reprint his oft-quoted 1971 piece in *Response* magazine that asserted: “We, the whole Jewish people, have been commanded by our tradition to preach the destruction of America.” The group’s ties to the New Left—and the fact that many of its fringe members were ardent anti-Zionists—didn’t help.

The most damaging story appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* in November 1976. It was written by none other than Wolf Blitzer, future CNN anchor. The piece revealed that Breira members had met personally with two members of Arafat’s PLO—at the time, a near-apostasy. Breira fired back, accusing its critics of McCarthyite yellow journalism. “Not since the anti-Hasidic attacks in 18th-century Poland and Ukraine do I remember such a vicious time for Jew-against-Jew. It was a real schism,” Fein remembers. Like J Street, Breira took fire for its funding. Its “George Soros” was Samuel Rubin, whom critics lambasted for funding left-wing organizations like the “anti-imperialist” Institute for Policy Studies’ Transnational Institute, where Waskow was a fellow. On Feb. 20, 1977, members of the Jewish Defense League mobbed the entrance to Breira’s first and only national convention in Chevy Chase, Md., chanting “death to Breira” and “Jewish blood is on your hands.”

Traditional accounts of the organization’s 1977 dissolution point to sound and fury in the press. But according to the members and sympathizers with whom I spoke, mainstream Jewish organizations closed in on Breira in quieter, but more effective ways. “People were fearful of losing their jobs ... I was under the impression that they left Breira because they thought they would be blackballed,” Isa Aron said. “Jobs were threatened. The financial supporters of B’nai Brith and Hillel came to the directors and said, ‘Stop this, we’ll fire you.’ And they had families and mortgages. ... It was real stuff, it wasn’t just press acrimony,” Paley recalled. Wolf and Rabbi Everett Gendler, another Breira board member, were barred from the executive council of the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism. While the war of words spilled ink and damaged reputations, it was institutional stonewalling within the Jewish establishment that finally snuffed Breira out.

In trying to forge a pro-peace, pro-Israel coalition, Breira faced a now familiar dilemma. As Paley put it: “Can you build an organization which is an alternative and not attract all the haters of Israel?” Breira was squeezed internally between its own anti-Israel fringe on the left, and its fearful Zionists on the right. “One side borders on disloyalty and the other side borders on irrationality,” said sociologist and author Steven M. Cohen. Cohen hosted Breira meetings in the living room of the Columbia Jewish House and now serves on J Street’s advisory board. Looking back, he wishes Breira had adopted more “palatable” positions. “It’s an ongoing struggle of all left-liberals. They always have a more radical wing that shows up.” Cohen called these radicals “an embarrassment”—and then went a step further. “Frankly,” he said, “they’re the enemy.”

But J Street is a different organization for a different time. “J Street is much, much, much more centrist, much more careful. ... Its grassroots constituency is more left than its leadership, which plays things very close to the vest,” Fein said. And as William Novak, one of Breira’s most vocal writers, put it, “Breira was more of a dissenting organization. It seems to me that the J Street position is all around us.”



## **JTA: Valerie Jarrett Will Speak at J Street**

*(3/23/12)*

<http://forward.com/articles/153609/valerie-jarrett-will-speak-at-j-street/>

Valerie Jarrett, a top adviser to Barack Obama, is addressing the J Street conference. Jarrett will join Tony Blinken, the national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, in a session on Monday on the U.S. role in advancing Middle East peace.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, the group's director, had complained in an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of the Atlantic that only sending Blinken signalled that the administration feared sending a higher-ranking official to the liberal pro-Israel group's conference, and that it was succumbing to pressure from some centrist and right-wing groups to isolate the lobby.

“This decision is really indicative of the problem we started J Street to fix,” Ben-Ami said. “This is precisely the kind of calculation that shouldn't be made.”

In a statement Friday announcing Jarrett's participation, Ben-Ami said that along with a video message from Israeli President Shimon Peres and a first-time participation by an Israeli diplomat – deputy ambassador Baruch Binah – Jarrett's attendance was a sign that J Street had arrived. “I think it's clear that J Street has established itself as a permanent and important part of the mainstream American dialogue on Israel,” he said.

In his interview with the Atlantic, Ben-Ami also said that J Street would next year apply for membership in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.



## **J Space: Israeli Diplomat to Address J Street Conference**

*(3/23/12)*

<http://www.jspace.com/news/articles/israeli-diplomat-to-address-j-street-conference/8222>

An Israeli diplomat is scheduled to address a J Street conference, marking a changing attitude on behalf of the Israeli embassy. In past year's, the embassy has shied away from J Street functions, citing differences of opinion on settlement issues.

Barukh Binah will attend the conference in Washington this weekend and give remarks to the gathered group, which is supposed to reach over 2,000 attendees coming from more than 40 outreach groups.

Israel officials have occasionally butted heads with J Street over settlement and boycott issues, with the group sometimes criticizing the Jewish state for not doing more to further peace talks with Palestine. However, J Street describes itself as “pro-peace” and “pro-Israel,” and a source close to the Israeli embassy reportedly noted J Street is undergoing a “positive process,” according to Israel Hayom.

“We are sending a very senior official to represent us,” an embassy official said. “Binah is an ambassador by title who, until recently, was responsible for U.S.-Israel relations in the [Israeli] Foreign Ministry.”

.ORG-Connection: J Street's mission is two-fold: first, to advocate for urgent American diplomatic leadership to achieve a two-state solution and a broader regional, comprehensive peace and, second, to ensure a broad debate on Israel and the Middle East in national politics and the American Jewish community.

## **Jewish Journal: ‘Many in J Street are pro-peace first and pro-Israel second’**

*Shmuel Rosner (3/23/12)*

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/rosnersdomain/item/many\\_in\\_j\\_street\\_are\\_pro-peace\\_first\\_and\\_pro-israel\\_second\\_20120323/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/rosnersdomain/item/many_in_j_street_are_pro-peace_first_and_pro-israel_second_20120323/)

Dr. Gilbert Kahn, professor of political science at Kean University, discusses J Street, its policies and its future.

J Street is both a political vehicle and a form of identity, how do the two go together - or don't they?

J Street has become a form of identification, although at its inception it was understood to be an alternative or different voice which was part of the conversation about the relationship between American Jews and Israel. Structurally it was set up to behave somewhat differently than the Jewish defense organizations on the one hand and AIPAC on the other. For example it would not be tax exempt, it would lobby, and it would raise money and donate to candidates.

It has become a form of identity and because of that, I believe, it has suffered. There has been a perception of an agenda as a result of which J Street has lost some potential supporters. In addition it is not clear how effective its political efforts have been because some of the positions that it has taken have been beyond the bounds for many of its backers.

You write that, “the likelihood is that J Street will obtain its greatest traction and following among members who are pro-peace and not viewed as especially strongly supportive of Israel, or are even pro-Arab”. That’s a strong statement – can you please explain it?

One gets a sense that J Streeters (I do not like to generalize) set up their priorities in reverse from most American Jews who are involved in Middle East politics. Unlike other groups, it seems to me that many in J Street are pro-peace first and pro-Israel second. Most activist American Jews feel the need to feel that Israel is secure before addressing the peace issue. Today - leaving aside the Iran discussion, which really can't be left aside - Israel is in an excellent position to engage the Palestinians in peace talks and could even begin to dismantle illegal settlements and outposts; but for domestic political reasons this government argues that it is too risky to do so when in fact it is not risky from a security perspective - but it is very risky from a political perspective.

You also write that AIPAC “generally follow the direction of the Israeli government.” However, AIPAC critics (J Street activists included) blame AIPAC for only following hawkish policies - they specifically retell the story of AIPAC’s reluctance to accept the Oslo accords. So, following or obstructing?

Both. AIPAC’s history involves being more moderate in one period and more hawkish today. AIPAC did not oppose Oslo but some of their leadership were ambivalent about it. They did not oppose Oslo, but they were not enthusiastic. even in the religious Zionist community there were

supporters of Oslo, if for no other reason than the fact that it was the policy of the Israel government.

It seems as if a growing numbers of leftist activists are growing disenchanted with J Street. Where will they go?

This is a serious and sad situation because a strong Zionist voice on the left is valuable. Those who care first about peace and Israel will move into a stronger pro-peace camp and those who are first pro-Israel will try to find a new home or may need to create one. Some are suggesting that they may help to re-energize the Israel Policy Forum.

How much of J Street's apparent failure is personal (i.e. the current leader is not the guy) and how much is institutional (i.e. you can't succeed with such policies)?

It is difficult to tell but probably some of both have contributed to its struggles.

You mentioned that "Israel's leadership, for the most part, has given [J Street] the cold shoulder" – do you see the speech by former prime minister Ehud Olmert to the J Street conference as an important breakthrough in that regard?

No. Olmert was a former prime minister but he has little standing today and little influence. He disgraced the office of prime minister and being the key note speaker at J Street ought to be embarrassing for J Street. It would be somewhat analogous to having Silvio Berlusconi address the European parliament about ethics in government.



## **J Weekly: Security adviser to address J Street**

*(3/22/2012)*

<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/64648/security-adviser-to-address-j-street/>

Tony Blinken, national security adviser for Vice President Joe Biden, will address

J Street's annual conference starting this weekend.

Blinken will address a session on the U.S. role in resolving the Arab-Israel conflict and join a panel afterward at the March 24-27 conference.

Obama administration officials attending previous conferences of the dovish pro-Israel group include former national security adviser James Jones in 2009 and Dennis Ross, the architect of Obama's Iran policies, in 2011.

Keynoters this year include Amos Oz, the Israeli novelist and peace activist; Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli prime minister; Anat Hoffman, a secular and women's rights leader in Israel; and Peter Beinart, author of the new book "The Crisis of Zionism."

Since J Street's inception, right-wing groups and activists have lobbied mainstream political figures not to associate with the group.



## **JTA: Israel's deputy ambassador to speak at J Street confab**

*(3/21/2012)*

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/03/21/3092257/israels-deputy-embassador-to-speak-at-j-street>

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- An Israeli diplomat will speak at J Street's annual conference.

A statement from the Israeli Embassy in Washington issued Tuesday said the deputy chief of mission, Barukh Binah, will participate in the March 24-27 conference in the U.S. capital and deliver remarks.

Israeli Embassy officials in Washington have attended conferences of the liberal pro-Israel group only as observers, in part because of differences with the group, which has criticized Israel for not freezing settlement building and not doing more to restart peace talks.

**Washington Jewish Week: J Street's real target**

*(3/21/12)*

<http://washingtonjewishweek.com/main.asp?SectionID=31&SubSectionID=29&ArticleID=16849>

With the rhetoric and extensive media coverage from the recent AIPAC Policy Conference still hanging in the air, J Street, the left-leaning pro-Israel organization with a knack for attracting attention, will be bringing its delegates to the nation's capital for a gathering of its own starting Sunday.

In the past two weeks, the armed conflict in the southern part of Israel has escalated and is causing great concern in Jerusalem and around the country. Kassem and Grad rockets are being fired upon Sderot, Ashkelon and Ashdod. And tensions seem to be mounting daily.

The confluence of these most troubling events and the J Street convention presents a meaningful opportunity for J Street's leadership and delegates to speak out forcefully in support of Israel. As J Street meets and brings national and international speakers to its convention, the Arab street and Arab leaders will be watching every move and listening to every speech.

Now is a chance for J Street to make a difference. We will be watching to see and hear what J Street's leadership has to say about the more than 200 missiles launched into Israel last week.

With an undeclared war being waged against the Jewish state, this is not the time to stress differences in the pro-Israel community. This is a time to unite in the face of danger to Israel from Hamas terrorists in Gaza and their Hezbollah counterparts in Lebanon, as well as the even greater threat from Iran.

A strong and forceful message on these issues from J Street could be very helpful to Israel.



## **JTA: Biden's national security adviser to address J Street**

*(3/20/2012)*

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/03/20/3092240/bidens-national-security-adviser-to-address-j-street>

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- Tony Blinken, Vice President Joe Biden's national security adviser, will address this year's J Street conference.

Blinken will address a session on the U.S. role in resolving the Arab-Israel conflict and join a panel afterward discussing his remarks.

Obama administration officials at previous conferences of the dovish pro-Israel group have included James Jones, the national security adviser at the time of the 2009 conference, and Dennis Ross, the architect of President Obama's Iran policies, at the 2011 conference.

Keynoters at the conference include Amos Oz, the Israeli novelist and peace activist; Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli prime minister; Anat Hoffman, a secular and women's rights leader in Israel; and Peter Beinart, whose book "The Crisis of Zionism" will be unveiled during the March 24-27 conference.

Right-wing groups and activists since J Street's inception have lobbied mainstream political figures not to associate with the group.

## **Jewish Journal: Opinion: The irrelevance of J Street**

*Jonathan S. Tobin (3/19/2012)*

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/opinion\\_the\\_irrelevance\\_of\\_j\\_street\\_20120319/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/opinion_the_irrelevance_of_j_street_20120319/)

In January 2009, flushed with the success of Barack Obama's election to the presidency, many on the left assumed that the new left-wing lobby J Street would soon be a major force in Washington. They thought that even if it did not replace AIPAC as the voice of American Jewry on Israel, it would, at the very least, be a potent rival that would help the new administration's policy of pressure on the Jewish state survive criticism from the right.

But as J Street's supporters gather for their second annual conference March 24-27 in Washington, they face a very different political environment than their founders may have envisioned.

Though the group's identity is still bound up with the fortunes of President Obama, he has largely abandoned them.

J Street loyally backed Obama in every one of his spats with the Israeli government in the last three years. J Street cheered every attempt by the administration to hammer the Israelis on settlements, borders and Jerusalem.

Yet with his mind focused on his re-election fight and chastened by the way the Palestinians have rebuffed his efforts to tilt the diplomatic playing field in their direction, Obama dropped virtually all mention of J Street's issues when he spoke to the conference held by AIPAC earlier this month.

Instead, the president concentrated on currying favor with the mainstream group that he knows represents the views of most pro-Israel voters. There was no way of interpreting his decision to opt for an election year charm offensive aimed at those who disagreed with J Street other than as a harsh rebuff to the group's hopes for influence.

J Street has suffered a similar fate on Capitol Hill where even most liberal Democrats don't give it the time of day. Its knee-jerk reflex to criticize Israeli measures of self-defense, help for the infamous Goldstone Commission and refusal to go along with the rest of the pro-Israel community on consensus issues such as Iran and opposition to unilateral Palestinian independence has crippled their ability to make inroads outside of the left.

Just as important, J Street is out of touch with events on the ground in the Middle East. Those Israelis who share the group's views have been discredited by the events of the last two decades. The Israeli left has been utterly ruined by its blind faith in Palestinian good will.

No better indication of this disconnect can be found than the fact that the keynote speaker at J Street's conference will be former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Olmert is a virtual pariah in

Israel and not just because he is under indictment on corruption charges. He is widely seen as probably the worst leader in the country's history.

Olmert's lame duck attempt to hand the Palestinians statehood in Gaza, virtually all of the West Bank, and part of Jerusalem in 2008, was rejected by Mahmoud Abbas. The offer was just the latest proof that Israel has no peace partner but this is a message that has yet to get through to J Street. Olmert will get applause at their conference that he could not hope to get at home but that only goes to emphasize the chasm that exists between J Street and the people of Israel.

J Street's platform, which is predicated on the notion that American Jews must help save Israel from itself, might have made sense generations ago before the Oslo Accords and subsequent events exposed the Palestinians' disinterest in peace. But after all the withdrawals and the creation of a terror state in Gaza that no sane Jew would wish to duplicate in the West Bank, the idea that Israel needs to be pressured to make sacrifices for the sake of peace belongs in the dustbin of history.

Though J Street can always count on a sympathetic hearing in the liberal mainstream press, it has failed to make a dent in AIPAC's influence or to have any impact on Congress. Contrary to those who saw the group's emergence as a genuine threat to the pro-Israel consensus, the hopes of its supporters and the fears of its opponents have been largely unrealized.

J Street isn't a danger to Israel. It's irrelevant.

## **J-Wire: Olmert Honors J Street – a Disgrace**

*Isi Leibler (3/19/2012)*

<http://www.jwire.com.au/featured-articles/23726/23726>

I must confess I rubbed my eyes in disbelief when I read that former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had accepted an invitation to be the keynote speaker at the J Street Conference Gala dinner on March 26.

By doing so, Olmert has sunk to an all-time low, not only destroying whatever remained of his battered political legacy but also shaming the State of Israel.

Let me state at the outset that I am acquainted with Olmert and once admired him. At 28, as the youngest member of Knesset, he developed a reputation, ironically as a crusader against crime and corruption. A successful fundraiser and networker, his engaging personality contributed towards making him the consummate politician. Olmert was loyal to his supporters and friends and made a distinguished contribution as health minister. I enthusiastically supported him when he was candidate for the mayor of Jerusalem, campaigning on the platform of a united city.

Let me also express the hope, for Olmert's sake as well the reputation of Israel, that the courts will exonerate him from the charges currently confronting him. Few of us wish to see yet another former high-profile Israeli leader found guilty of corruption or consigned to prison.

Something snapped with Olmert when he effectively spurned his longstanding political roots and developed a penchant for crass political opportunism. This climaxed when he joined the Kadima bandwagon, and became one of the most enthusiastic promoters of Ariel Sharon's devastating unilateral disengagement, paving the way for his appointment as deputy prime minister and succeeding Sharon.

It was evident that he had lost the plot when on June 9, 2005, in the course of the disengagement debate, he gave the keynote address to the left-leaning US-based Israel Policy Forum and in words that will continue to haunt him for the rest of his life, proclaimed: "We are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies".

These bizarre remarks epitomized the subsequent calamitous course of action he undertook just a year later, in July 2006, when he launched the disastrous Second

Lebanon War. This led to the subsequent control of the Lebanese government by the Iranian surrogate Hezbollah.

The Winograd Committee reviewing the war, whose members had been hand-picked by Olmert, produced a scathing report, condemning Olmert's zig-zagging policies which culminated in "a major and grave missed opportunity" to inflict a major defeat of Hezbollah and restore Israel's deterrence. The report employed the term "failure" 190 times and "flaws" 213 times.

By refusing to accept responsibility and resign, even having the chutzpah to claim that the findings exonerated and "lifted the moral stigma" from him, Olmert made a mockery of public accountability.

As Prime Minister, he continued on his downward spiral and, in a desperate effort to retrieve his legacy, offered the Palestinians exorbitant concessions, proclaiming that in the absence of a two-state solution, Israel "would be finished".

Without consulting the Knesset or cabinet, he unilaterally offered Mahmoud Abbas 98.1% of the West Bank, foregoing defensible borders and Israel's security presence along the Jordan River. Furthermore, he agreed to divide Jerusalem and was even willing to yield jurisdiction of the Temple Mount to a multinational committee. In addition, he offered to allow a number of Arab refugees to settle in Israel – with no reference to restitution for the hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Arab countries expelled from their homes in 1948.

Abbas, like his predecessor Yasser Arafat, turned down Olmert's proposals and failed to even make a counter offer, merely adamantly reiterating that the "right of return of Palestinian refugees" – which would result in the demise of the Jewish state – was nonnegotiable.

Since his ouster as Prime Minister, Olmert has engaged in a campaign to revise history, blaming Netanyahu for the breakdown of peace talks with Abbas and insisting that had he remained in office, he could have consummated a final peace settlement with the Palestinians.

Desperate for any platform, Olmert's fall from grace reached its nadir when he stooped to the depths of accepting the role of keynote speaker to J Street.

J Street is an organization comprised of American Jews who do not consider it unconscionable to canvass the president of the USA to pressure Israel. It justifies this on the grounds that Israelis need "tough love", comparing us to children on drugs who must be pressured to do what is good for them or impounding car keys from a drunken friend. These trendy American Jews have the gall to canvass the Obama administration to force the democratically elected government of Israel to act contrary to its will in relation to national security issues impacting on the life and death of its citizens.

But beyond this, in the midst of the Gaza conflict -orchestrated by Olmert – when all sections of the Israeli political spectrum,including the far leftwing Meretz,were united in support of the war, J Street refused to back Israel. Applying moral equivalence to Israel and Hamas it claimed “that there are many who recognize elements of truth on both sides of this gaping divide” and reproached Israel for launching “a disproportionate response”. J Street stated that “we recognize that neither Israelis nor Palestinians have monopoly of right and wrong” and accused the Israelis of “lacking sanity and moderation” in their attitude towards Hamas.

Only last week as hundreds of missiles were being launched against Israeli civilians, J Street, again applying moral equivalence, expressed “concern” on attacks on Israel and IDF “airstrikes on Gaza that killed over a dozen Palestinian civilians”. They were subsequently obliged to retract and apologize as all but two of those killed were terrorists.

For Olmert to be so desperate as to appear before such a discredited body which had even maligned him, reflects his pathetic desperation for a platform in order to fabricate a contrived historical legacy. One would feel sorry for him were it not for the anti-Israeli propaganda that, as a former prime minister, he provides to our adversaries.

## **Ethan Weiss: American Jews need J Street**

*Ethan Weiss, Rachel Cameron, Simone Zimmerman (2/29/2012)*

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/opinion\\_american\\_jews\\_need\\_j\\_street\\_20120229/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/opinion_american_jews_need_j_street_20120229/)

As founders and leaders of J Street U college and university chapters, we expected the hardest part of our work to be confronting issues on campus like divestment at UC Berkeley, an unwillingness to engage with Israel at Occidental, or a polarized conversation at UCLA that had grown toxic after years of enmity. But in fact, overcoming skepticism, misrepresentation and opposition to our work has proved one of our greatest challenges. And surprisingly, this has come from within our own Jewish community — the very source of so many of the values that inform our passions for Israel.

Given the growing divide between American Jewish youth and Israel, one would imagine that the Jewish community would celebrate the growth of a new pro-Israel student movement. You'd think that, when 60 of our peers from 10 campuses in Portland, San Francisco, San Diego and Los Angeles came together at Occidental College on Jan. 29 to say together, "We are going to build a community of deep devotion and obligation to Israel," our first West Coast student assembly would be cause for celebration in Hillels and synagogues.

But this is not the case. Many in the Jewish community question our commitment to Israel and its future. Engaging them and securing our rightful place in this conversation has proved a relentless challenge.

Confronting this reality made Rabbi Ed Feinstein's words at our assembly so inspiring. "No matter what they do to tell you to shut up, don't shut up," he told us. "They need you. The Jewish community needs you. Israel needs you."

Why do you need us?

You need us because traditional Israel advocacy no longer works. It no longer works because it fails to acknowledge the trends that imperil Israel's future. It no longer works because it doesn't speak to the Jewish values upon which many of us were raised: to stand with those who suffer; to "repair the world"; to examine, debate and argue with intellectual rigor and respect. And it fails, as Rabbi Feinstein put it at Occidental, "to speak the language of ethical aspiration."

You need us because pro-Israel advocacy that does not take human rights seriously will fall on deaf ears among our peers. We refuse to ignore or dismiss a human rights

catastrophe in the Palestinian territories that, were it to happen anywhere else in the world, would be denounced by Jews everywhere. We refuse to equate the entirety of the Palestinian population with its extremist fringes, just as with Israelis. We will not dismiss a system of legal inequality nor an infrastructure of military rule that denies basic democratic freedom to those who live under it.

You need us because we reject the view that peace is impossible. When our peers approach this issue and say, “Israel is too complicated,” we embrace its complexity with nuance and passion. At a time when each side says the other is no partner for peace, we believe that Israelis, Palestinians, the international community and the United States can and must work together toward a lasting solution.

You need us because, while we are idealists, we are also not blind to the threats Israel faces. Many of us have family and friends in Israel. We understand that the threats are real. Yet just as real are the facts on the ground that threaten any chance of Israel surviving as both a Jewish and democratic state. So long as Israel rules over a people that cannot vote in its elections, the promises we so admire in its Declaration of Independence ultimately remain a dream unfulfilled. We were taught to be a light unto the nations, and we believe in challenging ourselves to answer that call. It is for Israel’s sake that we address its most deep and painful flaws.

We cherish the two great Jewish achievements of our time: the birth of Israel and the success of the American Jewish community. We aim to use our power responsibly. We recognize our privilege and our obligation, and so we relentlessly defend Israel. Yet we know that the right of self-determination is valid for all or not valid at all. We demand for Palestinians the right that we defend for ourselves.

Over the last month, hundreds of J Street U students in Boston; Washington, D.C.; St. Paul, Minn.; and Chicago gathered for assemblies just like ours, and in March, more than 500 more will come to the National J Street Conference in D.C. We invite you to attend. We at J Street U are your children, friends, classmates and fellow citizens, and we are the future of the pro-Israel community. You need us. And Israel needs us all.

# **Israeli Media Coverage**

## **Jerusalem Post: A J-Street convention fantasy: What they needed to hear**

*Gil Troy (3/28/2012)*

<http://blogs.jpost.com/content/j-street-convention-fantasy-what-they-needed-hear>

The J-Street convention just ended with limited media coverage. This reflects the growing realization that despite its self-promotion, this political organization is marginal, dwarfed by the 13,000 liberals, moderates, and conservatives at AIPAC's policy conference. Not having heard much about what was said or not said, applauded or booed, here is what I wish the J-Streeters heard – and how I hope the participants reacted.

I write as someone who believes in Big Tent Zionism, welcoming a vigorous Zionist Left and Right, and who endorses a two-state solution. But I also write as someone who heard the rumor that at last year's J-Street convention, the Israel bashers consistently received the most enthusiastic applause. Although I hope the rumor is false, it is believable; I have seen such politically correct, enthusiastic self-loathing in too many corners of the Jewish Left too frequently over the last decade.

Were the names of Rav Yonatan Sandler, age 30, his sons Aryeh, 6, and Gavriel Yissacher, 4, on everybody's lips, three of the Toulouse terrorist's victims? Was the image of the Islamist terrorist pulling eight-year-old Miriam Monsonogo by the hair, then executing her at point blank range, burned into attendees' consciousnesses, as it is into mine? Did they struggle with the problem of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist hatred that transcends the rational, that spawns such barbarism, that won't be solved by border swaps or apologies, and is not our fault?

Did they mourn the three French paratroopers, two of Arab descent, noting that Arabs frequently suffer from the brutality of fanatic Islamist terrorists?

I wonder if Yasir Arafat and his war against Oslo were discussed honestly, fully. So many of us wanted the Oslo peace process to work, and felt betrayed when Arafat led his people away from negotiations back to terror. A frank conversation would not just list Israel's mistakes. It would acknowledge Palestinian responsibility for the current stalemate too, starting with Palestinians' bloody repudiation of Oslo. True liberals should respect Palestinians as real people, who can affect their fates, rather than reducing them to stick-figure victims, always bystanders never actors, condescendingly freed from any moral obligations or historical responsibility by a self-involved narrative that only sees Western and Israeli sins.

I hope there was some discussion of the Boycott Boomerang. Historically, calls to boycott Israel, and the broader delegitimization campaign, jinx peace efforts. The 1975

Zionism is Racism resolution emboldened Palestinian terrorists, encouraged more settlements, and hurt the United Nations – which continues sacrificing its credibility with its biased anti-Israel obsession, expressed this week through the UN Human Rights Council’s “fact-finding” farce scrutinizing the settlements. Sweeping categorical attacks demonize, polarize, alienate. They encourage extremists not compromisers, haters not reconcilers. Fighting delegitimization, like fighting anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, is fighting for peace, for the mutual dignity of all parties.

Was there a mature conversation about Iran? Did anyone ask why the Iranians want nuclear weapons, why do Ahmadinejad and the mullahs threaten the United States – Big Satan – and Israel – little Satan? Did anyone wonder why fighting nuclear proliferation, long a core value on the left, somehow has not stirred passion when it comes to fighting Iran’s rush to go nuclear?

Was any good news about Israel allowed into the convention hall? Did J-Streeters hear about the miracle of Hadassah Hospital that has Arabs and Jews healing together and working together so naturally? Were J-Streeters aware of the 90th birthday celebrations last week of the pioneering Zionist entrepreneur David Azrieli, who proudly proclaims himself a Zionist and expresses his Zionism by helping Israel thrive economically and culturally, on par with the best of the West, while donating much of his fortune to the Jewish people and humanity via his foundation? Was there room on the program to discuss Identity Zionism or Israel as Values Nation – how the existence of the State of Israel can root modern Jews in an idealistic project that is a counter to the selfish, self-involved, I-ness of our iPad, iPod, iPhone era?

These issues are not frivolous sidesteps from the only “real” issue, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As with any country, some balance, some context, is essential. And, as with any real mess, acknowledging complexity rather than simply sloganeering is important. Just as we do not define the United States solely by racism, and we have to understand that an unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin can be gunned down unjustly in the same country which elected a black man president, so too, we do not define Israel solely by its troubles with the Palestinians. Moreover, we see the multiple dimensions there, too. If the solution is so clear, why do so many Palestinian Jerusalemites want Israeli identity cards? And why are the radical Islamic Israeli Arab citizens of Umm al-Fahm offended whenever someone suggests they should join the Palestinian state they demand so aggressively?

Finally, I hope the J Street convention emphasized what unites us as Israel lovers not just what divides us. My conversations both formally and informally with J-Streeters have affirmed our common belief in the Jewish right to a state and in Israel’s need to survive. As J-Streeters evaluate what they heard as they return home, and think about what stirred the crowd, they should think about the messaging that occurred during the convention. Was the right tone, the right balance, struck? Did the group dynamic pull out the shared love of Israel or a harsher, distorted view of the Jewish state?

All conventions encourage groupthink and mass messaging. I hope the J-Street convention showed a maturing organization, not afraid of complexity, willing to embrace

the positive as well as the negative, understanding nuance. That is what the Jewish world and the Middle East need, not self-righteous posturing or supercritical Blame Israel Firsters.

## **Jerusalem Post: J Street Partisans**

*Hilary Leila Krieger (3/28/2012)*

<http://blogs.jpost.com/content/j-street-partisans>

The preamble to the letter to President Obama that J Street activists lobbied their Capitol Hill representatives to sign on Tuesday purports to take to task those who inject partisan politics into the effort to forge a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians.

The “Dear Colleague” warns that “broad and bipartisan support” for American leadership toward a two-state solution is “under unprecedented attack by those seeking to politicize the issue.”

The letter continues: “In recent months, politicians on the national stage have said that the United States should not take a leadership role in the peace process, and even denied the existence of Palestinians as a people.” The text of the letter to Obama itself makes the same point.

So who is it that denied the existence of the Palestinians as a people? That would be Newt Gingrich, candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. So who would that be launching a partisan political attack? That would be J Street.

For all that the lobby spent its multi-day annual conference urging that the peace process not be turned into a partisan issue, the forum – like the letter to Obama – itself was replete with partisan jabs.

The three Congressmen sponsoring the letter are all Democrats, and the plenary session dealing with the US role in the peace process featured two speakers from the Obama administration, a former member of the Obama administration and a peace process expert who supported the Obama campaign, with no GOP representatives to be found.

At that session, White House Senior Advisor Valerie Jarrett received the biggest applause when listing the administration’s policies on issues deeply intertwined with party affiliation.

More than anything she said on Israel, Iran or the peace process, her loudest applause lines were two examples of domestic politics strongly embraced by Democrats, which she phrased as Obama implementing his vision of change: “Change is passing comprehensive healthcare reform,” and “Change is protecting a woman’s right to make her own choices about her own health.”

After the administration speeches, a panel conversation was held on how to implement a peace agreement. J Street head Jeremy Ben-Ami pointed to the possibility of the next administration presenting its own framework for a peace accord, and referred to them as the “Obama parameters,” before adding, “We can call them the Romney parameters, but it’s hard to imagine.”

The lack of Republican affinity was further made clear at a panel on the Jewish vote in 2012. One member of the audience who rose to ask a question began by noting, “I’m a Jewish Republican and I come in peace.”

His remark received kind laughter from the crowd, but that he felt moved to present such a disclaimer is more than telling.

## **Arutz Sheva: Rep. Allen West: J Street is Pro-Palestinian Jewish Organization**

West: 'I take a man at his word when he says he wants to kill me, I ain't suicidal.'

*Rachel Hirshfeld (3/28/12)*

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/154247#.T3OFE2EgfY8>

In a statement published on his Facebook page, Congressman Allen West called the politically Left-leaning JStreet a "Pro-Palestinian Jewish Organization."

"Today on Capitol Hill there are lots of J-Street (Pro-Palestinian Jewish Organization) representatives, of course several have recognized me and wanted to chat," he stated. "I just have to shake my head when these citizens ask me to believe in Iran and support a two-state solution. When I ask them if there is a willing peace partner on the other side, they respond by saying yes. When I ask them how does one negotiate with leaders who do not even recognize your existence, they respond with, you have to believe in them. Well, looks like I will have to save these people from themselves. I take a man at his word when he says he wants to kill me, I ain't suicidal."

Rep. West is known to be a great friend and steadfast supporter of the Jewish state and has repeatedly affirmed his commitment to ensuring the safety and security of the State of Israel. His recent statement came in response to the organization's policy conference, which took place from March 24 through March 27 in Washington, D.C.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert appeared as the key-note speaker at the conference, while Valerie Jarrett, senior advisor to President Barack Obama, represented the American administration.

While the dovish organization prides itself on being "pro-peace" and "pro-Israel," many prominent Jewish leaders have distanced themselves from the organization for, what are often seen as, its anti Israel policies.

## **Jerusalem Post: 'Loud rhetoric on Iran is counter-productive'**

*Hilary Leila Krieger (3/27/12)*

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=263551>

WASHINGTON – The White House upped the stakes Monday in the battle over the rhetoric surrounding a possible military strike on Iran’s nuclear program.

Tony Blinken, Vice President Joe Biden’s national security adviser, declared that the “loud talk about Iran” was “incredibly counter-productive,” echoing comments made by US President Barack Obama on the same issue.

“It dilutes the impact of sanctions,” he charged, appearing at the J Street annual conference. “And it feeds false hope that it’s possible to drive a wedge between the United States and Israel.”

In regard to dangers facing the US-Israel relationship, he warned, “Here’s what could actually harm US-Israeli relations and the security of the Jewish state: To subject either to the vagaries of partisan politics or turning them into election- year talking points.”

His words elicited loud applause, with some giving him a standing ovation. The same point made by others in the administration, however, has been less well-received among Republicans, who see themselves as the butt of that argument, and have pushed back that such a perspective limits open debate.

“This is not about stifling discussion or disagreement or dissent,” Blinken countered Monday. “It’s about a very simple proposition: When it comes to discussing US policy toward Israel... by all means, let’s question each other’s judgments. But let’s not question each other’s motives.”

Blinken said that he welcomed a debate on the topic, and that there would occasionally be differences between how Israel and America view issues.

“It doesn’t mean we’re always going to see eye to eye with Israel. Even the closest of allies disagree – and I know this will come as a surprise to you – just as Israelis disagree amongst themselves,” Blinken told J Street. “When we disagree, we make our views clear. It’s a sign of mutual respect. It’s a sign of a relationship robust enough and mature enough to overcome whatever tactical differences we may have.”

He also said that he welcomed a debate with the progressive lobby itself on how to resolve the impasse between Israelis and Palestinians.

“It is a daunting challenge,” he said. “There is no shortcut to peace. These issues can only be resolved through negotiations.”

A few members of the audience booed at that comment, to which Blinken remarked to laughter, “Some of you may disagree, but that’s our position.”

He described the current point as a “period of assessment,” but stressed that, “Just because we don’t say something or you don’t see something doesn’t mean we’re not doing anything.”

He said the US remained “deeply engaged” on the issue and works “day in and day out” toward achieving peace.

Blinken praised J Street as an important organization reinforcing that effort.

“J Street has emerged as an influential and constructive voice not just here in Washington but far beyond,” he said. “That voice, your voice, strengthens American foreign policy.”

Blinken spoke following White House senior adviser Valerie Jarrett, the other representative of the Obama administration to address the J Street annual convention.

She acknowledged that there can often be “fierce disagreements over what path to take,” but that remaining committed to progress was key.

“We know that many of you are sometimes frustrated with the state of the peace process. We have a lot of work ahead,” she acknowledged.

But Jarrett reaffirmed the American commitment to the peace process, an issue also raised by President Shimon Peres, who delivered a video message before she and Blinken spoke.

“Peace is in the long term interest of Israel. It is in the long term interest of the Palestinian people. And it is in the interest of the region. And it is in the interest of the United States and it’s in the interest of the world,” Jarrett said to enthusiastic applause.

# HAARETZ

## **Haaretz: Olmert to U.S. Jews: Israel has a partner for peace**

Former PM speaks before the J Street Gala in Washington and says peace with Palestinians is not just Israel's responsibility.

*Natasha Mozgovaya (3/27/12)*

<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/olmert-to-u-s-jews-israel-has-a-partner-for-peace-1.420929>

Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Monday at the J Street Gala in Washington that Israel has a partner in Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for peace negotiations.

"Abu-Mazen (Abbas) wants peace with Israel. It may not be the same peace we want, but that's why we negotiate," Olmert told hundreds of U.S. Jews.

Participants at J Street's second annual conference in Washington.

On Tuesday, following two and a half days of intensive debates and mingling, about 700 attendants of the leftist J Street lobby's annual conference will crowd Capitol Hill in an effort to deliver their message to 225 Congress offices.

"The main message is about the urgency of the two-states solution", J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami told Haaretz, adding that despite the fact that the number of J Street congressional meetings this year remained pretty much the same as last year, he does not see Congress as a "lost cause" for "pro-Israel, pro-peace" lobbying. "I think a large portion of Congress understands this issue well, they want to hear from us - and we just need to give them political space to say it out loudly."

In his speech, Olmert spoke in length about the prospects of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process - and his own peace plan, which is considered to be the most far-reaching proposal to the Palestinians so far but failed, or did not come to fruition, as the former prime minister spent months as a lame-duck premier under investigation for corruption charges.

"Prospects of making peace aren't exclusively on the side of the State of Israel," Olmert told J Street. "When we try to look at the entire picture, no one should relieve the Palestinians from their responsibilities. I might receive a standing ovation from you for saying we are guilty. But I spent more time in meetings with Palestinians - I met with Abu-Mazen (Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas) 36 times, for hours each time. I don't know if any other prime minister did that to discuss one thing: the two-state solution.

"There is one thing to say: there is a partner," continued Olmert." Abu-Mazen never said he supports terror, not even when (former Palestinian President Yasser) Arafat was in charge. Don't tell me there is no partner. There is a partner. Abu-Mazen wants peace with Israel. It may not be the same peace we want, but that's why we negotiate. And I don't need Abu-Mazen to make declarations on the nature of the State of Israel. When there will be a Palestinian state, there will be Jewish democratic state of Israel, and that's it."

Olmert said it was hard for him to offer his peace plan to Abbas. "It was heartbreaking. And I said to Abu-Mazen, "It breaks my heart." It was hard to sit in front of the president of the Palestinians and say, "There should be no sovereignty over the Temple Mount - not yours and not ours." Don't applaud; cry with me. For a Jew to offer this is possible only if you reach an inevitable conclusion that to secure an independent democratic Jewish state, you have to reach this conclusion." Olmert said there will be an agreement, based on 1967 lines with mutual swaps.

"Unfortunately, the Palestinians never said yes to this plan. I pray to God that the leadership of the Jewish people will have the courage needed in order to depart from the dogmas of the past into the challenges of the future, accept it and move forward. As an Israeli, I won't tell you: go to your government so that your government will tell the government of Israel to do something. It's our interest to move forward. Time is running out for us; not for them."

Maen Rashid Areikat, head of the General Mission of PLO in the U.S., also attended Monday's J Street Gala.

The Israeli Embassy, which ignored last year's gathering, delivered this year Deputy Ambassador Baruch Binah, a veteran diplomat, who arrived at Washington only recently. Binah started very openly, admitting he has only been on the job for two months and that this was his first public appearance in the U.S. But soon after, he started lecturing the crowd in a style resembling that of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, mentioning the prophets, the holocaust and the threats Israel is facing.

"Nobody is perfect, I know what needs to be fixed in our society, I personally attempt some corrections every four years when I cast my vote," Binah said. "But, the young and energetic country we are, shouldn't forget lessons of history. [Those lessons] shouldn't shackle us, but guide us."

Binah reminded the audience that the relations between Israel and the U.S. Jewry "are of utmost importance," but nonetheless must be guided by "principles that will ensure our partnership."

And then, the reproach came. "Unlike your secure existence at these happy shores, at our borders there are missiles and mayhem. Unlike you, sometimes we have to make decisions of life and death. We welcome your opinion, but we must pay the ultimate price. We have no margins of error. We need you to stand with us."

Binah also spoke of the countries that underwent an Arab Spring. "We wish them well," he said, but reminded that Israel needs to be careful in a changing environment. He assured the audience the Israeli government is committed to peace with the Palestinians - but called them "rejecters of peace."

"While we cling to a quest for peace, we have to be careful. The proof of the pudding is in the eating - and we are fed with anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli slogans as if nothing has changed. The negotiating table was repeatedly removed or cut in flames of terror," said Binah.

Binah reminded J Street activists that they are "not just exercising free speech," but trying to influence the legislative agenda of the U.S., urging them to be balanced. "If you show them (Congressmen) checkpoints, make sure you show them the grief of the families of victims of terror. Show them the aliya from Ethiopia. I urge you to strive for balance. We appreciate your opposing BDS and your activity on campuses. I hope and trust you won't oppose again a veto of a resolution condemning settlements."

Binah was greeted with a polite applause.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, who spoke next, reminded the audience that the lobby was established to express positions of those Jews who didn't think Israeli security and Palestinians rights were mutually exclusive. "We found our voice," he exclaimed.

Olmert, a special guest of the J Street Gala, spoke next, opening his remarks by saying the presence of an official representative of the State of Israel is an historical landmark in the life of the Jewish community in the United States.

"Maybe not every one of you agreed with everything Mr. Binah said (laughter in the crowd) - but everything is in the family. The fact that the government decided to send him is the most important thing. Divisions are natural. J Street is a legitimate organization that is dedicated to the well-being of Israel," he said.

Olmert went on to discuss Iran, saying he agrees with those who think Israel cannot the country becoming nuclear. "No other country that possesses nuclear weapons talks about the liquidation of the State of Israel as a primary objective, except for Iran. To disengage Iran from the international banking system is the first step, but no options should be ruled out. Israel also has to build capacities to deal with this situation in the event that we have to secure the existence of the State of Israel - as a last resort, not the first one." As these words were uttered an activists in the crowd shouted "No war!"

Talking about the Arab Spring, the former prime minister described it as "a process," adding, "We should follow it with great hope and care, particularly in those countries that made peace with Israel. Egypt is an important country for the security and future of the state of Israel. We pray and hope to build friendly and peaceful relations with Egypt."

## **Arutz Sheva: Israel Takes On J Street**

A senior Israeli diplomat told a silent J Street audience Monday that unlike Americans, Israelis face life and death decisions every day.

*Tzvi Ben Gedalyahu (3/27/12)*

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/154199#.T3OeUmEgfY9>

A senior Israeli diplomat told a silent J Street audience Monday that unlike Americans, Israelis face life and death decisions every day.

Baruch Binah, Deputy Chief of Israel's Mission in Washington, spoke to the annual J Street conference after a government policy of shunning the group, which has been a constant critic of the Netanyahu government and which promotes "engagement" with Hamas and Iran.

His appearance brought a round of applause, but the crowd quickly sank into silence after Binah began to speak. "Unlike your secure existence at these happy shores, at our borders there are missiles and mayhem," Binah told an unresponsive crowd.

"Unlike you, sometimes we have to make decisions of life and death. We welcome your opinion, but we must pay the ultimate price. We have no margins of error. We need you to stand with us."

Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who faces a series of indictments and court hearings on charges of bribery and abusing public trust, was the star speaker and reiterated his belief that Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas is a "peace partner" for Israel.

J Street's choice of Olmert to deliver the keynote address was roundly criticized in an article in the left-wing Forward, not because of Olmert's legal scandals but because he "orchestrated the punishing siege on Gaza, launched two wars, killing 2,500 Lebanese and Palestinians and pulverizing their infrastructure."

Nicolas Pelham, a journalist for The Economist, also noted that J Street's invitation to Olmert gave a platform to "a man indicted for corruption" and who "has not come to J Street to promote the cause of peace. More likely, he has come to whitewash his reputation and airbrush his past. Israel's public will see through the charade, even if J Street, in a far-off fantasyland, cheers."

## **Jerusalem Post: Olmert at J Street insists Abbas is peace partner**

*Hilary Leila Krieger (3/27/12)*

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=263689>

“No one can say to me after hundreds of hours of discussing peace with Abu Mazen that he is not a partner because he doesn’t want peace.” By Reuters/Oleg Popov

WASHINGTON – Former prime minister Ehud Olmert insisted on Monday night that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas was a partner for peace despite years of negotiations between the two men that failed to clinch a deal.

“No one can say to me after hundreds of hours of discussing peace with Abu Mazen that he is not a partner because he doesn’t want peace,” Olmert said at the J Street annual conference’s gala dinner, using Abbas’s nickname.

“He wants peace with Israel and he accepts the existence of Israel as Israel declares itself to be. I don’t need Abu Mazen to make declarations about the nature of the State of Israel.”

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s government, which replaced the Kadima-led coalition when Olmert was forced out of office on corruption charges three years ago, has pushed for Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state to demonstrate commitment to the concept of two states for two peoples.

Olmert maintained that he knew better than anyone the sincerity of Abbas’s desire to make peace, since he had held 36 meetings of several hours with him over the course of years.

Given the lengthy negotiations and their ultimate failure to reach an agreement, which in the past Olmert has said was a result of Abbas not accepting the most far-reaching offer Israel had ever made the Palestinians, it was somewhat of a departure to hear him speak of the Palestinian president’s dedication to peace rather than his role in the failed talks.

“He is saying the truth here,” Maen Areikat, chief PLO representative to the US and an attendee of the J Street gala, told The Jerusalem Post of Olmert’s comments that Abbas wants peace. “To come from an Israeli prime minister who had the chance to talk and to meet with President Abbas like he said 36 times, I think this strengthens the idea that there is a genuine Palestinian partner who wants to put an end to this conflict.”

In his address, Olmert alluded to some of the parameters that he had laid out, including that the lines between the states would be based on the 1967 borders with land swaps, that Jerusalem’s Arab neighborhoods would go to the Palestinians and that there would be no sovereignty over the Old City’s holy sites but rather a five-country administrative body comprised of Israel, the US, the PA, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

“There is no alternative,” Olmert contended. “One day when we will celebrate with the Palestinians, this peace will be identical to what I proposed.”

He stressed, however, that the imperative for peace was a central Israeli interest to maintain its Jewish and Democratic character and not one that outside groups needed to dictate, a notion that runs up against J Street’s call for American guidance on the issue.

“I don’t need anyone from America or from anywhere else to tell me what I need to do for myself, for my people, for my children, my grandchildren and the future people of the State of Israel,” he said.

Olmert also speculated that if he was willing to blame only Israel for the breakdown in the talks, he might receive a standing ovation from the crowd.

But he said, “No one should and can relieve the Palestinians of their responsibilities. They have responsibilities and they don’t always meet their responsibilities and it has to be mentioned if we want to be fair to the issue.”

Still, Olmert did receive standing ovations at the beginning and conclusion of his remarks.

His comments overall were wellreceived by audience members, particularly when he told them: “J Street is a legitimate organization which cares for the State of Israel, which is dedicated to the well-being of the State of Israel.”

He added, “If we’re entitled to have disagreements, why are you not entitled to have disagreements.”

In contrast, the deputy chief of mission of Israel’s US embassy, received a much cooler reception.

Though Barukh Binah was enthusiastically welcomed when introduced, his address detailing the differences that the Israeli government has with J Street was met throughout with silence and only respectful applause at the end.

Binah lauded J Street for rejecting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement and the group’s support for the US-Israel relationship. But he urged the progressive lobby to support the US and Israeli position that all options should be on the table for preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon and warned against the group giving any exposure to those who support BDS even if the organization’s leadership does not.

“We need you to stand with us,” he said. “It is as simple as that, and someone ought to say it. Internal activism is a central part of democratic societies, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem when... we need you the most.”

J Street executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami took the stage immediately after Binah, and while he thanked Binah for his participation, he also indicated that his organization would not stay silent.

“As with all good families, we have our disagreements,” he said.

“What we have in common is too important for us not to speak and, if necessary, to argue,” he continued. “That’s the Jewish way. It’s the spirit of our people. **It should be part of the relationship between the American Jewish community and Israel.**”



## **Ynet: Olmert to J Street: Abbas a partner for peace**

At liberal advocacy group's gala dinner, former PM says return to pre-1967 borders, coupled with land swaps only way to achieve peace. On Iran: Let global powers lead anti-nuke campaign

*Yitzhak Benhorin (3/27/12)*

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4208585,00.html>

WASHINGTON - "Don't tell me there is no partner. There is a partner. (Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas) wants peace with Israel," former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said during a J Street gala dinner on Monday.

The former Israeli premier said Abbas was against terror during the Yasser Arafat era and was in favor of peace negotiations during Ariel Sharon's tenure as prime minister, as well as during his own.

"It may not be the same peace we want, but that's why we negotiate," he said, but added "when we try to look at the entire picture, no one should relieve the Palestinians from their responsibilities."

Olmert criticized current Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu over the stalled peace process, saying that any future peace agreement with the Palestinians will be based on what he had offered to Abbas in 2008 – a return to the pre-1967 borders with land swaps. There is no alternative to this solution, Olmert claimed.

The former PM, who faces a series of indictments and court hearings on charges of bribery and abusing public trust, rejected the Netanyahu government's demand for Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state and reiterated his proposal for dividing Jerusalem.

He said the capital should be divided in such a way that Israel would maintain control over its Jewish neighborhoods, the Palestinians would control the Arab areas, while the so-called "Holy Basin" - which includes the area of the Temple Mount, the Mount of Olives, Mount Zion and a variety of Christian holy sites - would be administered by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Palestinians, Israel and the US.

Turning his attention to the Iranian threat, Olmert said Israel must allow the world's superpowers to lead the campaign against Tehran's nuclear program, but stressed that Israel must not relinquish any option and ought to build capacities to deal with the situation in the event that "we'll have to secure the existence of the state of Israel – as a last resort, not the first one."

## **Jerusalem Post: Encountering Peace: J Street is my street**

*This amazing outpouring of support for a Jewish, democratic and peaceful Israel is a remarkable boost for the soul*

*Gershon Baskin (3/26/2012)*

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=263528>

I am writing from J Street in Washington, DC. Two thousand five hundred American Jews, including more than 650 university students, have come together for J Street's annual conference, under the title "Making History."

This amazing outpouring of support for a Jewish, democratic and peaceful Israel is a remarkable boost for the soul of a lonely Israeli, Jewish, Zionist, peace activist. Invited to inspire this part of the American Jewish community, instead I am inspired by them.

Amos Oz was the featured speaker at the conference's opening. He was brilliant, eloquent, forceful and so clear in his vision of a just, democratic and Jewish Israel where social justice also means peace with our neighbors and a determination to not allow anyone to miss what very well may be the last opportunity for a fair two-state solution.

An elated Oz received a standing ovation, in response to which he commented to the people sitting with him, "it is hard to imagine this kind of response in Israel today."

He is so right, and Oz, one of the most inspiring Israelis I know, was inspired himself by what he heard and saw at J Street.

There are some members of Knesset, such as Danny Danon from the Likud, Otniel Schneller from Kadima and others, who have the chutzpah to accuse J Street of being anti-Israel. Shame on them. J Street is more pro-Israel in its real and honest concern for Israel's future than the likes of Danon, who wage war on Israel's democracy, advocate the suicidal policies of unilateral annexation of vast parts of the West Bank and call on the government to bypass the Supreme Court.

J Street and its thousands of supporters across the United States say proudly: We come together as proud supporters of the two-state solution. We believe to our very core in Israel's right to exist as a Jewish homeland and a democracy that guarantees equality to all its citizens.

We fight for an Israel whose people live in security with recognized borders, an Israel living in peace and prosperity alongside a Palestinian homeland, where citizens can thrive and build their own country.

We believe in an Israel that is guided by its principles, its ethics, and its values, as enshrined in its founding documents. We believe that “tikkun olam” is part of building a Jewish homeland, not separate from it.

This should be the platform of every political party in Israel. This should be the credo of our prime minister.

What is anti-Israel in this platform? If you truly care about Israel, how can you not support this doctrine of belief in Israel and the role of the Jewish people around the world in helping to secure Israel’s future? It is really heartening to feel the passion of support for Israel, for peace and justice expressed by J Street participants through their deep sense of commitment to Jewish communal life, Jewish organizational participation and activism for a just and democratic Israel.

There is no despair here, hope is still alive. J Street members personify the belief in Israel and an allegiance to the classical Zionist dream of building an exemplary state that we can all be proud of.

J Street activists, not surprisingly, are also on the front lines of the struggle for social justice in the United States. They have taken to the streets in the “Occupy Wall Street” movement that has spread across America because the same values and moral fabric which shape their views on Israeli political issues puts them in the forefront of progressive politics in the United States.

The Jews who marched with Martin Luther King for equality in the 1960s and were on the front lines of the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and then cried in joy with Israel in 1967 have been reincarnated into the movement of thousands of American Jewish voices of J Street. I was a child living in the United States when I first linked arms in demonstrations and sang with Peter, Paul and Mary and Joan Baez that “We Shall Overcome.” Those experiences of fighting for justice then shaped my identity and my memories.

When, at the age of 14, I joined Young Judaea, and at 16 decided to make aliya, and when I completed my undergraduate education, these experiences were part of my Jewish soul and Zionist identity.

It was then, in 1975, when I first came to the awareness that being Jewish, Zionist and Israeli meant that we had to share our land with the other people living on it. The only way to be pro-Israeli is to be pro-peace.

If you are not, you cannot claim that you really care about Israel’s future. Being pro-Israeli means that one must also be pro-Palestinian. Israel’s survival and Israel’s very soul is invested in its ability to live in peace in our part of the world. This is not a hippyish “Kumbaya” – let’s hold hands and make believe that everyone loves us. In the words of Amos Oz, we need to make peace, not love. He is so right.

I thank J Street for existing, for bringing together this proud and loud critical voice of American Jews.

Every American Jew and every single Israeli citizen should be a supporter of J Street! If you are not, then what are your values that prevent you from supporting tikkun olam, peace and democracy for Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people?

**Jerusalem Post: J Street calls for action in face of challenges**  
*Participants, activists urge Congress members to sign letter supporting two-state solution in Washington conference*

*Hilary Leila Krieger (3/26/2012)*

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=263415>

WASHINGTON – The progressive lobby J Street opened its third annual conference Saturday night with its leadership trying to console and rally an activist base whose central action item – the Israeli-Palestinian peace process – has ground to a halt.

J Street executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami urged the 2,500 activists who turned up to the organization's opening session Saturday night not to become despondent.

“There is much cause for despair. There is no viable peace process,” he said, and then pointed to what he saw as obstacles, including the current leadership in Israel and continued settlement construction.

“I understand and I sympathize that all this is enough to make some give up and stay home,” he told the audience.

“But we know that the present we're living in is not the future that we want, and history doesn't record the inaction of those who stay home. History belongs to those who stand up and do.”

In addition to the lack of progress in the peace process, Ben-Ami pointed to the additional challenge of world attention being focused overwhelmingly on the threat of Iran.

“While the potential of a nuclear-armed Iran presents a grave threat, Israel does not have the luxury of choosing which existential crises to address or not at any given time,” Ben-Ami said ahead of the opening of the conference.

“Moreover, preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and achieving a two-state solution are not mutually exclusive.”

As part of the effort to draw attention and urgency back to the peace process, J Street activists will ask members of Congress to sign a letter reaffirming support for a two-state solution when they lobby their representatives on Tuesday.

“Israel cannot afford an absence of diminution of US leadership in the urgent quest for peace,” states the letter, which will be sent by signers to US President Barack Obama.

The letter was cosponsored only by Democrats – Steve Cohen of Tennessee, John Yarmuth of Kentucky and Gerry Connolly of Virginia – and includes an oblique swipe at Republicans.

“Broad American political support for the two-state resolution is under serious attack in the increasingly polarized political environment,” the letter states.

“In recent months, some of the national political stage have argued that the United States should not play a lead role in the peace process, even denying the existence of the Palestinian people,” said the letter in a reference to a statement made by Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the US House of Representatives and Republican presidential candidate, who recently described the Palestinians as an “invented” people.

Though the letter speaks to the pressing need to achieve a peace agreement, many conference organizers and participants acknowledge they face an uphill challenge.

During one panel called “Two States When?” on Sunday morning, moderator James Traub baldly asked, “Do you see any reason to be hopeful for progress on a two-state solution?” Panelist Labor MK Ghaleb Majadle answered negatively, saying, “There’s no possibility to begin negotiations.”

He blamed the Netanyahu government for that situation despite assessing that majorities among both Israelis and Palestinians back the idea of carving out two states.

Fellow panelist Leila Hilal, the co-director of the Middle East Task Force at the New America Foundation, also said that “the conditions aren’t ripe for peace.

You can’t force a government or a people to accept [steps] if there isn’t a context in which to do that.”

Still, several of the panelists affirmed the importance of the two-state concept as the only viable solution to the conflict and the seeking out of creative options for moving toward that vision.

Majadle also stressed the importance of staying hopeful in a later plenary session featuring MKs from the Labor and Meretz parties.

“We must not be discouraged.

We must win the battle against those who are hopeless and those who seek war,” he said.

MK Zehava Gal-On, the leader of Meretz, admitted that “it’s very hard not to be in the consensus.” But, she said, “I don’t think we have the luxury to be depressed. So I’m optimistic.”

## **Jerusalem Post: Reporter's Notebook: J Street evolution**

*Hilary Leila Krieger (3/26/12)*

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?ID=263508&R=R1>

The "pro-Israel, pro-peace" lobbying group is setting aside its differences with other groups at this year's conference.

WASHINGTON – When J Street debuted four years ago, one of the established Jewish organizations with which it had one of its early open spats was The Israel Project.

Over its first couple of years, J Street continued to tangle with TIP over settlement policy, terms of reference and polling on attitudes toward Israelis and Palestinians. The arguments were often heated and occasionally nasty.

“I know that they have a constituency that’s interested in models for peace,” explained TIP President Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi of the decision to participate, which she said came at her initiative. “I want to engage them with our engagement with Palestinians and the Arab world.”

It is unusual for J Street to have centrist Jewish organizations like TIP appear at its conferences, and Mizrahi noted that she received criticism from her funders over the decision.

Several Jewish groups have charged that the progressive lobby is far outside the mainstream on its policy toward Israel and hurts the Jewish state by calling for American pressure on the Israeli government.

In some instances, members of such organizations have declined to participate in events with J Street officials.

“A lot of people were surprised,” Mizrahi acknowledged. “We had some donors who complained, ‘Why are you talking at J Street?’”

While she doesn’t agree with everything J Street stands for, “We do agree that we care about Israel and we do agree that more can be done to create a two-state solution, so I think it’s important to exchange ideas,” she said.

J Street executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami said it was important to reach out to groups across the ideological spectrum even if they have differences with his organization.

“It would be a cheap conference to pull off if we only allowed people who agree with everything I say. It would be in a phone booth somewhere,” he said.

This year's conference more than in the past has included other panelists who say forthrightly that they don't agree with J Street. Jewish Journal President David Suissa told the audience Monday morning that he was an American Israel Public Affairs Committee supporter on the right side of the spectrum and that he disagreed with J Street's overall strategy on the peace process.

But while there are also leftwing voices at the conference that contrast with J Street's own positions – including Peter Beinart, who recently called for a settlement boycott that Ben-Ami publicly rejected – there are fewer groups and representatives from the far Left included in the program than at the first two conferences.

During the first conference, room was provided for an unofficial session where voices that opposed the two-state solution were given free rein. Last year, a panel on the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement featured a member of the Jewish Voice for Peace who endorsed BDS, in addition to opponents of that position.

“We just got slammed,” recalled J Street Education Fund vice president Rachel Lerner of the reaction in the broader Jewish community to last year's BDS panel. “It seems so bizarre to me that you can't even have a debate, you can't even have a disagreement,” she said, speaking at the same panel Suissa participated in.

Lerner explained that she felt it was important to include that panel last year given the large number of students who were attending the conference and grappling with BDS drives on their own campuses.

This time, that issue and groups representing those positions are not on the agenda.

Ben-Ami attributed this to a desire “to find new things to talk about” rather than to a decision made by J Street not to include those perspectives.

“It's great that people come here who have a range of views,” he said. “It should be a place that people come and air them out. It doesn't change what J Street stands for. There's a benefit to the Jewish community having that argument.”

## THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

### **Times of Israel: At J Street, Peter Beinart warns against the overuse of anti-Semitism**

*The pro-settlement boycott pundit claims that those who equate policy disagreement with anti-Semitism should 'lose their job'*

*Ari Ben Goldberg, Bracha Kurtzer (3/26/2012)*

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/peter-beinart-warns-against-the-over-use-of-anti-semitism/>

American pundit and pro-settlement boycott champion Peter Beinart warned against the excessive mentioning of anti-Semitism, in a speech during J Street's annual conference, late Sunday evening.

"Leaders who desecrate the suffering of our ancestors by conflating policy disagreements with anti-Semitism should lose their jobs," said Beinart, according to J Street's official Twitter feed.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street's director, warmly welcomed Beinart to the stage, saying he is "thrilled to introduce Peter Beinart for his book release. I deeply admire him even though J Street doesn't agree on boycotts."

"We are open to airing opinions with which we disagree," Ben-Ami continued.

Beinart recently took to the pages of The New York Times calling for a boycott of Israeli goods from the West Bank. The former editor of The New Republic's new book, "The Crisis of Zionism," was being launched at the J Street conference. In it, Beinart argues that the American Jewish community's traditional approach to supporting Israel is alienating young liberal Jews from Zionism and threatens to erase the liberal Zionist dream entirely.

# HAARETZ

## **Haaretz: Having 'real conversations about Israel' at J Street's conference**

*Peter Beinart's call to boycott Israeli settlements causes controversy, while Israeli social protest leader Stav Shaffir finds common cause with the younger generation of American Jews*

*Natasha Mozgovaya (3/26/2012)*

<http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/focus-u-s-a/having-real-conversations-about-israel-at-j-street-s-conference-1.420751>

Left-wingers are often accused of being naive and all talk, as their aspirations are often incompatible with reality, at least in the short term. Aaron Weinberg, a Brandeis student whom I met at last year's J Street conference, is well aware of this stereotype - and is ready to confront it this year. "I can tell you that I did a lot this year," says Weinberg. "I started a J Street branch at our campus at the beginning of the year, and through community organizing, one-on-one meetings, the Brandeis delegation to the conference is now one of the biggest: 20 people. There is a great appetite for J Street's views, and we are changing the dialogue on campus; we are making it depolarized."

Weinberg says the Jewish community should embrace nuances, and that, yes, it can still love the imperfect Israel, exactly as Weinberg does. "I love Israel deeply, I am committed to the Zionist project - I just don't like the occupation of the Palestinian land," he says. Weinberg goes on to add that he feels "incredibly at home" at the conference, and - as uncomfortable as he felt last year over the lobby's decision to call for the Obama administration not to veto the UN Security Council resolution condemning the Israeli settlements - this year, he is proud.

This year, J Street founder Jeremy Ben-Ami clarified that he admires Peter Beinart, but rejects his calls to boycott settlements. Beinart himself, who on Sunday night presented his book, "Crisis of Zionism," explained that he called to boycott settlements because of the need to challenge the threat of the one-state solution, also saying that he doesn't think donations to the West Bank settlements should be easy. He even gave Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a chance to absolve himself, saying he doesn't believe the Israeli prime minister is a "hopeless case." "He just hasn't had the epiphany that [Former Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert had yet."

Olmert is due to speak at the J Street Gala on Monday night (some unfriendly people have wondered what this says about his relations with AIPAC). But his brother Dr. Josef Olmert, who is currently teaching at the University of South Carolina, was so angry at Beinart over his recent New York Times op-ed that he offered to come to Washington to debate against him at a forum. But he didn't make it to the J Street conference.

"Beinart's article and his book clearly require a response, even if it is doubtful whether free-speech, good-hearted liberals like him are even interested in a debate, as they believe in a boycott of hundreds of thousands of settlers," Joseph Olmert told Haaretz. "It's collective punishment, and I was under the impression that peace-lovers hate collective punishments. Well, apparently only against Palestinians," he said.

Josef Olmert wondered where a proper settlement boycott ends. "What is the case with those who believe in the right of Jews to live in their historic homeland, while they themselves still live inside the Green Line borders?" he asked. "Are they not more dangerous than the settlers themselves, for it is their political support which brings pro-settler governments to power in Jerusalem? And what about those who vote for these governments even if settlements are not necessarily their main agenda? Don't they deserve to be boycotted by virtue of their political blindness?"

"And last, but not least," Joseph Olmert continued, "What about those, like me, who believe that Jews have a right to live in Judea and Samaria - but also believe, as painfully as it is, that most of these territories will have to be under Palestinian control, if and when the latter will be ready to compromise on 'just' 95% of the disputed lands? Should not we be boycotted for the sin of using Biblical names, thus cultivating, though inadvertently, support for the settlers? Boycott, Beinart should know, is something that you know how it starts; you never know how it ends." He went on to say that that political scientist and activist Norman Finkelstein called upon the organizers of the BDS campaign to "say the truth: that it is their goal to destroy Israel, not just to boycott it."

Another question Joseph Olmert had for Beinart was how effective the boycott would really be. "Take the Arizona example," said Olmert. "Governor Jan Brewer was reelected in 2010 with a landslide. Her voters were not impressed with the boycott." (During my last visit to the West Bank, some business owners boasted that their sales had skyrocketed since the calls to boycott their products).

Some J Street conference participants do support the idea of a settlements boycott. Jacob Silverman, a student at UC San Diego, is still trying to figure out what he thinks about it. I meet him near the J Street U merchandise, which included t-shirts with messages like "I [heart] two states." He isn't wearing one of those, but does have a black yarmulke on his head - certainly not typical for this conference.

"It's important to put pressure on the settlements enterprise," says Silverman. "That's also what the Palestinians at the conference said. I do believe that economic pressure is a way to fight occupation. But I am still trying to figure this out, and there is always room for conversation and disagreements. That's how we have healthy Judaism."

Silverman comes from a Conservative background and became more involved in Judaism at college. He admits his political positions are not necessarily typical for the Orthodox movement, but that his religious and political views "developed quite independently," of one another. However, Silverman sees no contradiction between the values in the Torah and his support for a Jewish state alongside Palestinian aspirations.

"The peace prospect this year is compromised," he says. "But this is the place where people have real conversations about Israel. It's not restricted, like in many others. And for me it's very exciting."

Michael Biton, mayor of Yerucham, who told the audience at the opening plenary Saturday night that he is proud to be J Street's partner, told Haaretz he hesitated when he got an invitation to attend the conference.

"Peace is not terribly popular in Israel now," said Biton. "This organization was heavily delegitimized in Israel. But one needs to come here and to see all these young people, involved and highly motivated, that want to act for peace - you understand they were just looking for a moderate home. If J Street existed when Yitzhak Rabin was prime minister, no one would dare to delegitimize it, and it would back the peace process with serious grassroots support. Basically they say the same as Netanyahu: a two state solution. The trick is how to get there".

Biton says the biggest danger for J Street is getting involved with people that hold extreme views. "J Street is in a much better position this year. It used to be presented as extreme, but it is becoming mainstream. That said, I don't like the idea of a boycott. This lobby needs to be moderate. Those who do not agree that Israel needs to be Jewish and Zionist shouldn't be at a pro-Israeli organization, period. As for the settlements - leave this issue to the actual negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians".

Of course, there was the inevitable question of Israel as a wedge issue in the U.S. presidential elections of 2012, discussed at one of the panels. Jim Gerstein, a partner at the firm GBA Strategies, said only about 15% of Jews might vote on the issue of Israel - although they are "really vocal ones." As for support for Israel, he said, "for candidates, the threshold is so low they have no difficulty passing it."

And finally for this second day of the conference, I was personally curious how Stav Shaffir, one of the leaders of the Israeli social protests of 2011, felt about J Street's reaction to her speech regarding Israel's domestic troubles. Are American Jews really interested in hearing about the Bedouin villages and cottage cheese? What sort of support did she come to ask for?

"First of all, we came to tell our story," she told me, after speaking at three synagogues and several panels and before making her way to TribeFest, Nevada, San Fransisco, and other places.

"Because it's rarely told here. Netanyahu comes here to talk about the successful economy and blooming democracy in Israel. We want to get people out of this box. It was hard for us to find time for this visit, we rejected many invitations from abroad, because in Israel we are spending 20 hours a day meeting people, getting to every possible corner; we are obsessed with this idea that if we don't take advantage of this awakening, in several years it might be too late to change the direction of this country. And here, there is a community that is concerned about Israel too. And people here in the U.S. are excited to see the young generation in Israel getting involved - and at J Street,

you see the young American Jews that are getting involved. And you know what we hear from people we meet in the U.S.? 'We feel we have the same problems.'"

# HAARETZ

## **Haaretz: Obama administration to J Street: Peace is 'long-term interest' of Israel, Palestinians and world**

In remarks echoing AIPAC speeches, Obama's advisers say administration is committed to a 'just and lasting peace;' former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer calls on Israel to freeze settlement construction.

*Natasha Mozgovaya (3/26/12)*

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/obama-administration-to-j-street-peace-is-long-term-interest-of-israel-palestinians-and-world-1.420859>

U.S. President Barack Obama's senior adviser Valerie Jarrett spoke to the J Street conference participants on Monday about the administration's "commitment to a just and lasting peace". Like Obama several times before, she acknowledged on the second day of the conference that some people were frustrated with the state of the peace process. "We have a lot of work ahead, but peace is the long-term interest of Israeli and the Palestinian people, region, US, world," she said.

Some remarks sounded exactly like those made at the AIPAC conference - Jarrett spoke about Obama's "ironclad" commitment to Israel's security, closer cooperation with Israel, joint exercises, and more. "I've known this president for 20 years - he means what he says and says what he means", she said.

U.S. President Barack Obama's senior adviser Valerie Jarrett speaks at the J Street conference, March 26, 2012

Speaking about Iran, Jarret said that "the president is determined to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon." Another U.S. administration official, Vice President Joe Biden's National Security advisor, stressed the importance of preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. However, Tony Blinken warned against "loose talk of war [that is] incredibly counterproductive... it benefits Iran, because the price of oil goes up and the money goes from our pocket to Iran's pocket." He added that "our approach is different - we believe now it's time to talk softly. It's possible to be smart and tough. Israel and the U.S. both assess Iran doesn't have yet the nuclear weapon."

Former US ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer called for a freeze on Israeli settlement construction. "Freeze the settlements. Destroy the infrastructure of Palestinian terrorism and build the infrastructure of the state," he said. "These critical issues need to be debated. I wish you Godspeed, take the magic from this room to the outside world, win the argument for peace," he concluded.

J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami told Haaretz he hoped to hear from Obama Administration officials a more pro-active approach - more similar to the one voiced by the former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer.

"They did a very good job in representing the administration's position, but we hoped for more - and we'll keep pushing them to do more," he said. "In our opinion, if this president wants to get serious about the peace process, he'll need to go there by himself and become engaged personally".

Reacting to claims that Jarrett's and Blinken's were quite AIPAC-style speeches, Ben-Ami laughed: "Well, imagine the outcry had the administration officials expressed different views here and at AIPAC conference".

Meanwhile, the Department of State announced that next week the Middle East Envoy David Hale will make yet another trip to Israel, the West Bank and Jordan.

# HAARETZ

## **Haaretz: J Street founder: Israel paying lip service to peace process**

*The title of the conference - 'Making history - seems quite ambitious in a year in which the peace process is in a deep coma, and even the relevance of the axiomatic two-state solution is being questioned*

*Natasha Mozgovaya (3/25/2012)*

<http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/focus-u-s-a/natasha-mozgovaya-j-street-founder-israel-paying-lip-service-to-peace-process-1.420581>

Nearly 2,500 peaceniks came together Saturday night at the Convention Center in Washington, D.C., for the third annual conference of leftist pro-Israel lobby, J Street. In the upcoming two days, the participants will listen to speeches, participate in debates, pray, and brainstorm together - until the traditional finale – the storming Congressional offices on Tuesday, trying to make the case for both Israel and peace.

The title chosen for the conference - "Making history" seems quite ambitious in a year in which the peace process is in a deep coma, and even the relevance of the axiomatic two-state solution is questioned more than in the past.

J Street is still young, although some conclusions can be already be made about the organization. They did help change a discourse on Israel in the Jewish-American community –less so on Capitol Hill and the White House. Hopes were high for their success in 2008, with a new liberal president in office. A president who visited Sderot but also seemed well-aware of the Palestinians' woes. J Street claimed to be aligned with Obama's values. But changing the course proved to be difficult, with some mud fights along the way and some possibly faulty moves.

In 2012, during a very different election year, Barack Obama made a speech at the annual AIPAC conference, attended by 13,000 people. At J Street's conference, the U.S. administration will only be represented by Vice-President Joe Biden's National Security Advisor and President Obama's senior advisor Valerie Jarrett. At the AIPAC conference, both Israeli President Shimon Peres and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke. J Street conference attendants will have to make do with Peres's video address complemented by one by deputy head of the mission of the Israeli Embassy in Washington. This is certainly an improvement, since last year there was no one representing the embassy.

But the crowd at J Street did not come to hear officials' speeches and the repetition of the slogans regarding "ironclad," "sacrosanct" or "unshakeable" support for Israel. They came to hear activists like Stav Shaffir, one of the intrepid leaders of Israel's social protest movement. They came to hear about the real Israel, with its internal struggles, threats and fears.

Lobby founder, Jeremy Ben-Ami, boasted that this year, there was 25% increase in registration for the conference. Student activists opened the conference, calling out the names of the universities that sent young Jewish activist to Washington this weekend. However, Ben-Ami admitted that many stayed home this year as it is hard to have hope under the current conditions.

"We are dissatisfied with the status-quo. The status quo is simply not sustainable," Ben-Ami says. "Give the land for the Palestinian state, or keep the land and sacrifice the democratic and Jewish nature of Israel. The history of our era rests in no one's hands, but our own. What we are going to do with the closing window of the two-state solution? There is a cause for despair - the Israeli government is paying lip service to the peace process - undermining it on the ground with settlements expansion."

Ben-Ami also spoke about the U.S. elections: "We know how high the stakes are in terms of social justice, economy, status of women, healthcare. In terms of the U.S. and Israel, some say being pro-Israel requires supporting every policy of the present Israeli government or going further to the right. And some congressmen are introducing legislation supporting the annexation of Judaea and Samaria in the name of being pro-Israeli, but this is the end of the democratic Israel."

"In 2012, we have to fight this trend. It's up to us to inspire our community leaders to do what's right. We have the power to rewrite the rule book of the US politics," Ben-Ami said.

Leading Israeli Author Amos Oz didn't go light on complementing his hosts. "J Street, I've been waiting for you all my adult life," he said.

"I've been traveling in the U.S. for 45 years and they always tried to hush me that in Israel you can have your difference, but here we should be united. I say, yes, but why united under militaristic hawkish banner of AIPAC, and not peace-loving J Street? There is more than one way to be a good Jew, a good Zionist, to stand for Israel. No one can claim Zionism to themselves."

"Compromise is lack of integrity? Oz asked. "Not in my vocabulary. In my vocabulary it's synonym of life. The opposite of compromise is fanaticism and death. It's unreasonable after 100 years of bitterness to expect that Israelis and Palestinians will jump into honeymoon - but painful divorce. And nobody is moving out. We are destined to split our house into two smaller apartments. Czechoslovakia should be our example."

"One day," he predicted, "there is going to be a Palestinian Embassy in Israel and the Israeli Embassy in Palestine, and they are going to be in a walking distance from one another, because they will be in East and West Jerusalem. We are not seeking a happy ending. We are seeking Chekhovian, not Shakespearean ending."

"There will be a dispute on Holy places. My grandmother explained it in simple words. Why can't everybody just wait and see until the Messiah comes and see who was right? Until then, live and let live."

Oz compared the two-state solution to "painful surgery," where "the doctors are cowards." "The problem is the leadership on both sides. If beloved Mr. Netanyahu and his right-hand Mr. Barak said, yes to the two state solution and 67 borders with modifications - they have majority at the current government and the people."

Peace will come, he assured the audience. "The leaders who will make peace are alive - I wish I knew how old they are. As for the Palestinians, my slogan has always been - make peace, not love."

He said that an Israeli strike on Iran would be a mistake. "The Iranian regime is one of the worst, but it's not true of the Iranian people. They have a secular pragmatic middle class, they are enemies of their own regime, not Israel."

Last summer's social protest leader Stav Shaffir took on Netanyahu's AIPAC speech: "He shamefully compared our life to life of our grandparents in ghetto. We don't want this. We want hope. Our grandparents built under far greater threats a country. Many of our friends who live abroad came to stand side by side with us, to take back Israel. They came back to fight for our future. We are fighting for a society's values, mutual respect and concern. Our grandparents came to the Middle East with their great beautiful dream - we must remember them and have no fear.

We will never give up. Sleep is not an option. Despair is not an option. We are here to stay and we plan to be everywhere - the streets, the Knesset, the government."

She concluded her speech by telling her audience of Jewish-American peaceniks: "You are the missing link and the cross-communities work. Let's work together toward a crazy and beautiful dream of the new Israel," and was greeted by applause.

Michael Biton, Mayor of Yerucham, a city with a population of 9,500 in southern Israel's Negev desert, spoke about the corruption and the neglect of the Israeli periphery. Biton also discussed the way in which Israel's external threats and the Arab spring are "used to marginalize seekers of peace."

Those opposing peace, he said, have no answers for the burning questions Israel is faced with. Most Israelis, he said, actually agree with J Street's ideals and goals.

Biton advised his audience to "show empathy," while at the same time being unequivocal on the issue of Israel's security. "You are the only ones brave enough to have this difficult conversation with us," he said. "I am proud to be your partner."

The conference kicked off nicely. Nuances so often lacking from the Jewish-American discourse on Israel on Israel were heard. Some inspirational words were uttered. The

question that still remains unanswered after the evening drew to a close is: What change J Street can effect in the short term.

One speaker featured in the video screened at the beginning of the plenary session said J Street activists want to help Israelis open a conversation about peace. In Israel, such conversation is going on for years - with the left wing bleeding since the Second Intifada. In the Jewish-American community it is quite a different story.



## **Ynet: Amos Oz: Don't take ownership of Zionism**

Israeli author addresses J Street conference, says there's more than one way to love Israel

*Yitzhak Benhorin (3/25/12)*

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4207353,00.html>

WASHINGTON - Israeli writer Amos Oz said Saturday that "there is more than one way to be a Zionist and more than one way to love Israel" stressing that no one can be allowed to take ownership of Zionism. Speaking at the J Street Making History Conference, Oz said that "compromise is the basis for life and where there is compromise there is life."

The author listed Israel's greatest achievements and declared that if it achieves peace with the Palestinians and enhances social solidarity it would be "heaven on earth." He said that there is a majority in favor of the two-state solution among both peoples but that leaders are afraid to take the necessary action.

Other Israeli speakers who addressed the conference on Saturday were social protest leader Stav Shafir and Yeruham Council head Michael Biton. Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is set to speak on closing night. Other participants include MKs Avishai Braverman, Raleb Majadele (Labor) and Zehava Gal-On (Meretz) as well as various former senior IDF officers and social leaders.

The Israeli Embassy in Washington, who had previously boycotted the event, sent Deputy Ambassador Baruch Bina. Some J Street members have in the past backed the Goldstone Report, which accused Israel of committing war crimes, and called on US President Barack Obama not to veto a Security Council resolution on settlements.

The US administration sent senior advisor to the president Valerie Jarrett and national security advisor to the vice president Tony Blinken.

# THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

## **Times of Israel: Amos Oz slams AIPAC at J Street opening**

J Street conference aims ‘to put two-state solution back on map’

*Gabe Fisher (3/25/12)*

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/amos-oz-slams-aipac-at-j-street-opening/>

Famed Israeli author Amos Oz slammed AIPAC during his opening remarks at the J Street annual conference in Washington, DC, on Saturday night, calling the pro-Israel lobby group “militant” and “extremist.”

Oz was quoted in New Voices as saying, “Let us all be united, but why unite under the militant, hawkish, extremist manner of AIPAC?... There is more than just one way to be a good Jew. There is more than just one way to be a good Zionist.”

Oz was joined by fellow Israelis Stav Shaffir, a social protest leader, and Yeruham mayor Michael Biton in opening the J Street Making History conference, which runs from March 24-27 in Washington DC. The left-leaning Jewish advocacy group was formed in 2008 as a counter to AIPAC.

Over 2,500 people are expected to attend the conference, including over 600 college students from 125 universities in five countries, according to New Voices.

Other Israeli participants include former prime minister Ehud Olmert, MKs Avishay Braverman, Raleb Majadle and Zahava Gal-On, and retired general and former Haifa mayor Amram Mitzna. The Israeli Embassy in Washington, which has in the past boycotted the conference or sent an observer, is this year sending deputy ambassador Baruch Binah as an official representative.

Valerie Jarrett, a top adviser to US President Barack Obama, will also address the J Street conference. She will join Tony Blinken, the national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, in a session on Monday on the US role in advancing Middle East peace.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, the group’s director, had complained in an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of the Atlantic that sending Blinken signaled that the administration feared sending a higher-ranking official to the liberal pro-Israel group’s conference, and that it was succumbing to pressure from some centrist and right-wing groups to isolate the lobby.

“This decision is really indicative of the problem we started J Street to fix,” Ben-Ami said. “This is precisely the kind of calculation that shouldn’t be made.”

But in an interview with the Times of Israel, Ben-Ami said that “this level of representation by the Administration is a strong re-affirmation of its support for the role

that J Street plays in representing many Jewish Americans in the debates over Israel in the political and policy worlds.”

In a statement Friday announcing Jarrett’s participation, Ben-Ami said that along with a video message from Israeli President Shimon Peres and a first-time participation by an Israeli diplomat, Jarrett’s attendance was a sign that J Street has arrived.

“I think it’s clear that J Street has established itself as a permanent and important part of the mainstream American dialogue on Israel,” he said.

“In our early years J Street’s challenge was to prove that one could be both pro-Israel and pro-peace,” he continued. “Now our challenge is to lead the pro-Israel movement into the future under the only banner that can give Israel security as the democratic, Jewish homeland: Bold action in support of a two-state solution.”

In his interview with the Atlantic, Ben-Ami also said that J Street would next year apply for membership in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

# HAARETZ

## **Haaretz: J Street stresses urgency of peace in opening of annual conference in Washington**

Among the speakers at this year's conference are former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Israeli author Amos Oz and American-Jewish journalist Peter Beinart.

*Natasha Mozgovaya (3/25/12)*

<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/j-street-stresses-urgency-of-peace-in-opening-of-annual-conference-in-washington-1.420537>

WASHINGTON - The left-leaning pro-Israel lobby organization J Street was scheduled to kick off its third annual conference in Washington late last night Israel time, under the banner "Making History." The commitment to making history comes in a year in which the stalemate in the peace process has become an established fact and increasing doubt is being expressed about a two-state solution. Nonetheless J Street, which is seen as a renegade organization by some in the Jewish community, is convening in Washington for four days of speeches and workshops followed by the usual lobbying visits by delegates to members of Congress. Their message on Capitol Hill will include the urgency of peace.

Among the speakers at this year's conference are former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Israeli author Amos Oz and American-Jewish journalist Peter Beinart. The latter has attracted a lot of controversy in recent weeks in the Jewish community over his new book, "The Crisis of Zionism," and a column in The New York Times calling for a boycott of West Bank settlements.

When U.S. President Barack Obama was elected in 2008 expectations ran high that he would be receptive to J Street and similar organizations like it. Obama was seen as a liberal who, although he visited the rocket-battered Israeli town of Sderot, also acknowledged the plight of the Palestinians.

Four years later, in another election year, it is clear that the veteran pro-Israel lobby the American Israel Public Affairs Committee is the default choice for every U.S. administration, Democratic and Republican alike. This year's AIPAC conference attracted about 13,000 people. Obama came to speak to them personally, right after Israeli President Shimon Peres.

The J Street conference, by contrast, is expected to attract about 2,500 people. The Obama administration is scheduled to be represented by Antony Blinken, national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden.

Blinken is well-regarded for his analyses and has his share of friends in Washington, but his scheduled appearance at the J Street convention was not necessarily viewed as enhancing its standing. After some critical press on the subject, the White House decided to also dispatch Valerie Jarett, who has strong ties with the American Jewish community and is a senior presidential adviser.

The official Israeli presence at the J Street conference is more prominent this year than usual. At the group's first policy conference the Israeli government made do with an observer from the embassy in Washington, who did not speak at the event. Last year the embassy stayed away altogether after the organization called on the U.S. administration not to veto a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlements. This year the embassy will be represented by its second-ranking diplomat, Baruch Bina, who will actually address the group. Bina has ambassadorial ranking and was until recently in charge of relations with the United States in the Foreign Ministry.

Peres will address the group in a recorded video message.

J Street staffers have expressed some disappointment that Jerusalem did not send a higher-ranking official. Founder Jeremy Ben-Ami, called it part of the problem his organization was created to address. Spokeswoman Jessica Rosenblum said J Street's supporters are eager to strengthen ties with Israeli representatives in the United States.

**Jerusalem Post: J Street kicks off annual Washington conference**  
*Valerie Jarret added to speakers list; Danon: Lobby serves Iranian interests, tells MKs not to attend*

*Hilary Leila Krieger (3/25/2012)*

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=263244>

Senior White House adviser Valerie Jarrett was added on Friday to the list of speakers to address the J Street conference opening here this weekend.

She joins Tony Blinken, national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, in representing the administration before the 2,500 activists the progressive Jewish lobby is expecting to host at its third annual conference.

They will appear at a plenary session Monday asking whether the US can help to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though Jarrett usually focuses on domestic issues in her role at the White House.

Later that day, at the gala dinner, J Street activists will hear from former prime minister Ehud Olmert, who joins four current Labor and Meretz members of the Knesset at the conference as well as a handful of other Israeli political and social leaders.

In addition, for the first time the Israeli Embassy will send a high-level participant. Barukh Binah, the deputy chief of mission, will offer opening remarks at the gala dinner.

An Israeli official pointed to recent steps that J Street has taken that show a “positive trend” in its positions, which have often been criticized by the Israeli government. He pointed in particular to J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami’s rejection of journalist Peter Beinart’s call for a boycott of West Bank settlements – in contrast to Israel proper – published on Monday in The New York Times.

Beinart, however, is still being welcomed at the conference and will hold a book signing for his new work, *The Crisis of Zionism*.

Novelist Amos Oz will be another participating offer, and he is set to speak at the opening session Saturday night.

The conference runs through Tuesday, when the participants will head to Capitol Hill to lobby their members of Congress on the need for the US to continue pushing for a twostate solution and to push back against those would question the US role for political

purposes – understood to be aimed at Republican presidential candidates who have criticized many of President Barack Obama’s policies on Israel.

A J Street spokeswoman would not specify whether J Street constituents would have a letter making these points for members of Congress to circulate and sign on to, which is traditionally a component of such lobbying.

Five members of Congress are scheduled to address the gathering, including Democrats Barbara Lee of California and Jim McGovern of Massachusetts.

J Street estimates that about 60 members of Congress will participate in the conference, including at the panels, the gala and the pre-lobby welcome event on Capitol Hill on Tuesday morning, roughly the same as last year.

MK Danny Danon (Likud) sent a letter to all 120 members of Knesset on Friday, telling them to stay away the J Street conference.

“Promoting Iranian interests in the US, working against the state in its battle against the Palestinians in the UN and censuring the Israeli government while supporting the Palestinians are only the tip of the iceberg for the anti-Israel organization called J Street,” Danon wrote.

The Likud MK said that it is the duty of all MKs to reject any connection with an organization that works against Israeli interests.

Senior officials’ participation legitimizes J Street’s “destructive messages,” Danon said.

Interior Minister Eli Yishai last week urged Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman not to allow high-ranking officials to attend the conference.

## THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

### **Times of Israel: J Street conference aims ‘to put two-state solution back on map’**

The ‘pro-Israel, pro-peace’ lobby kicks off its third annual meet on Saturday

*Ari Ben Goldberg (3/23/12)*

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/j-street-conference-aims-to-put-two-state-solution-back-on-the-map/>

When J Street’s annual conference begins on Saturday night March 24 in Washington, DC, the self-described ‘pro-Israel, pro-peace’ lobby will host fewer than a quarter of the number of participants who attended AIPAC’s convention three weeks ago (in the same space). But the gathering is likely to produce an equivalent amount of attention.

Take, for instance, one of the American Jewish community’s most polarizing figures, Peter Beinart, who recently took to the pages of the New York Times calling for a boycott of Israeli goods from the West Bank. The former editor of The New Republic will launch his most recent book, ‘The Crisis of Zionism,’ at the J-Street conference. In it, Beinart argues that the American Jewish community’s traditional approach to supporting Israel is alienating young liberal Jews from Zionism and threatens to erase the liberal Zionist dream entirely. (See positive reviews [here](#) and [here](#). Critical reviews [here](#) and [here](#)).

Former prime minister Ehud Olmert headlines the Monday gala dinner along with Anat Hoffman, who heads the legal and advocacy arm of the Reform Movement in Israel. The conference gets underway Saturday night with three Israelis from three generations who, according to J Street, “are shaping the history of their country”: author Amos Oz; Yeruham Mayor Michael Biton; and Stav Shaffir, one of the leaders of last summer’s social protests in Israel.

J Street has also announced that a senior advisor to President Obama, Valerie Jarrett, will deliver a keynote address on Monday. The administration will also be represented by National Security Advisor to the Vice President, Tony Blinken.

“This level of representation by the Administration is a strong re-affirmation of its support for the role that J Street plays in representing many Jewish Americans in the debates over Israel in the political and policy worlds,” says J Street founder and President Jeremy Ben-Ami.

But the conference, and J Street generally, has its critics in the American Jewish community, particularly on the right. The Emergency Committee for Israel (ECI), an

advocacy group backed by noted neoconservative and The Weekly Standard editor William Kristol, openly questions J Street's pro-Israel bona fides.

"J Street still has not managed to find solutions to a couple of basic problems," says ECI Executive Director Noah Pollak, whose group is perhaps best-known for its full-page ads in The New York Times and bus-stop billboards attacking President Obama's Middle East policies. "The first is the group's anti-Israel instincts, which were again on display when J Street's statement on the recent flare-up between Israel and Gaza falsely accused the IDF of killing a dozen civilians — when in fact, as was widely reported at the time, only terrorists were killed. You have to have pretty awful feelings about Israel to make such an assumption."

"Another problem is that the group's base ranges from anti-Israel to ambivalent-about-Israel, and there just isn't much desire in Washington or in the Jewish community to make common cause with such people. You can paper over this reality by saying you're pro-Israel, but as evidence piles up to the contrary people stop believing it," says Pollack.

But Ben-Ami says J Street has established itself as a permanent part of the Jewish American landscape.

"In our early years J Street's challenge was to prove that one could be both pro-Israel and pro-peace," he says. "Now our challenge is to lead the pro-Israel movement into the future under the only banner that can give Israel security as the democratic, Jewish homeland: Bold action in support of a two-state solution."

"Combined with the welcoming video from President Shimon Peres and the presence of a senior representative of the Israeli Embassy at the conference, I think it's clear that J Street has established itself as a permanent and important part of the mainstream American dialogue on Israel," adds Ben-Ami.

Organizers say there will be 40 workshops at the J Street conference on issues such as Iran, the American Jewish vote, settlements, human rights, and Palestinian perspectives on the conflict.

Other notables participating in the four-day conference, which is expected to attract about 2500 people, include: Members of Knesset Avishay Braverman, Zehava Golan, and Raleb Maja; former Labor Party leader General Amram Mitzna; The Embassy of Israel's Deputy Head of Mission, Barukh Binah; former US ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer; former US State Department official Anne-Marie Slaughter; Rabbi Donniel Hartman of Jerusalem's Shalom Hartman Institute; and veteran Hollywood icon Theodore Bikel, who will be the master of ceremonies.

**Jerusalem Post: Eli Yishai to Netanyahu: Boycott J Street**  
*Interior minister calls on Netanyahu, Liberman to prevent senior official from participating in left-wing group's conference*

*Gil Hoffman (3/22/2012)*

<http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=263042>

Binyamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman on Thursday urging them to reconsider the decision to send a senior diplomat to next week's J Street conference in Washington.

In years past, official Israeli representatives in Washington boycotted events organized by the lobby that bills itself as "pro-Israel and pro-peace."

But this year, the deputy head of the mission, Barukh Binah, will attend and even speak at the conference.

Binah, who holds the title of ambassador, just finished a four-year stint as the deputy director-general for North America and before that held the prestigious post of Israel's consul-general to the Midwest in Chicago.

"I am asking you to intervene immediately and prevent the deputy mission head from participating in the J Street conference," Yishai wrote.

"This organization is not pro-Israel. It is more similar to organizations that have a goal of harming the state. The organization is at the very least pro-Palestinian, acting systematically against the State of Israel, its army and its citizens."

Yishai noted that while the IDF was recently taking steps to protect Israel from terrorists' rocket fire, a J Street press release expressed concern about "air strikes on Gaza that have killed over a dozen Palestinian civilians."

Israeli officials have said that approximately 26 Palestinians were killed in Gaza during the operation and all were terrorists launching attacks, except for two or three. When J Street issued its statement, 16 terrorists and two civilians had been killed.

J Street subsequently revised the statement on its website by removing the reference to the "dozen Palestinian civilians."

A spokeswoman for the organization expressed regret over the error and said J Street had misreported the number of civilian casualties "based on an unfounded report." She

emphasized that the mistake was corrected “within a couple of hours of the publication of the original statement.”

In his letter, Yishai made reference to controversial statements attributed to left-wing activists affiliated with the organization and steps taken by J Street that were seen as problematic by Israeli government officials.

Yishai said it was wrong to legitimize J Street by sending Binah to the conference, and said that there should be no contact between Israel and the organization.

J Street declined to comment.

# HAARETZ

## Haaretz: Iran and Peter Beinart Roil the American Jewish Pot

Beinart is cementing his role as U.S. Jewry's enfant terrible even as J Street, which will host him this weekend, is engaged in detente with the Israeli embassy. Meanwhile, Iran is proving a boon for Jewish fund-raising.

*Natasha Mozgovaya (3/22/12)*

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/iran-and-peter-beinart-roil-the-american-jewish-pot-1.420079>

1. Pro-Israel organizations rarely have good news to share; alarming news about Israel is good for fund-raising. For example, the Simon Wiesenthal Center sent a letter to supporters in mid-February titled "Breaking news: Iranian calls to destroy Jewish people." It gave examples of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei's vitriol, along with a detailed plan to annihilate Israel posted on a website run by the head of the Iranian parliament's research center.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, the center's founder, asked supporters for an emergency contribution as soon as possible, because "there is not a moment to waste as we confront the rapidly evolving situation in the Middle East." He urged donors to fight "Iran's genocidal threats against Israel and the Jewish people worldwide" with contributions starting at \$50 and ending with an open bracket, left to the donor's generosity. The center's spokesperson didn't respond when asked how the fund-raising effort is going.

Peter Beinart. 'The achievement of Israel is not just the creation of a Jewish state, but the creation of a liberal democratic Jewish state.'

Across the ocean, meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was busy downplaying the Iranian threat. "We categorically condemned" the statements made about Israel by Iran's president and other Iranian officials, Lavrov told Russia's Kommersant newspaper. "It's uncivilized and unworthy of such an ancient country and people with their great culture." He said he sees anti-Israel rhetoric mainly as serving domestic and foreign policy goals, "to keep in an anti-Israeli orbit those on whom Iran wishes to rely in the neighborhood."

But, Lavrov added, "I am absolutely convinced that Iran would never do it," if only because the region is so small: "Israel and Palestine. To threaten to destroy Israel and spare Palestine is probably unrealistic."

2. There was one tiny bit of good news: The Israel Project's European staffers, visiting Washington, DC, proudly told Haaretz that during meetings with 21 high-ranking European diplomats serving in the U.S. capital, they were surprised to find a much more positive attitude toward Israel than ever before.

One possible reason, they speculated, is that the Iranian issue has reached "a critical point" for the European Union, which is very preoccupied by it. Another is that the Palestinian-Israeli peace process is in hibernation - until the end of the U.S. presidential election, until after the Israeli elections, or until the Iranian issue is resolved.

Do these diplomats really reflect the atmosphere at home, I asked, or is it more the Washington influence?

Well, the TIP staffers said, in the past, European diplomats were not shy about making these meetings utterly uncomfortable, with long tirades against Israeli policies. This time, even the settlements were paid no more than lip service, and not mentioned at all in many meetings.

Some diplomats were worried that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas might leave the stage, with no clear alternative. On Syria, no big surprise, nobody really knows what to do. And they fear a strike against Iran might prove disastrous to their economies. Therefore, sanctions are preferable.

3. But sanctions are easier said than done. On Tuesday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sent a message to Congress that Washington has granted exemptions from sanctions to financial institutions in 11 of the 23 countries that import Iranian crude, due to "significant cuts" in their Iranian oil imports.

Japan was presented by a senior administration official as a model for making efforts to put pressure on Iran: Despite its own extremely troubled year, including the tsunami and the Fukushima reactor meltdown, it cut its oil imports from Iran by 15 to 22 percent.

Now, for 180 days, financial institutions in these countries are exempt from the threat of being cut off from the U.S. financial system. The U.S. administration hopes Iran's other customers will follow suit - including top crude importers like India and China.

But when IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde warns that oil prices could jump 20 to 30 percent if Iran's crude supply is disrupted, such hopes can only go so far.

4. J Street still has its detractors, but at least Israel's embassy in America finally seems to be mending fences with the dovish pro-Israel lobby - to some extent. The lobby's annual conference is titled "Making history," but Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren won't be making history by setting foot in the Convention Center in Washington this weekend. Still, unlike last year, when no official embassy representative was sent, or the year before, when the embassy representative kept as low a profile as possible, this time, Deputy Head of Mission Barukh Binah will attend and even speak.

An embassy source said relations with the lobby have improved, because it has recently taken positions that are more acceptable to the Israeli government - even rejecting the recent call by one of its featured conference speakers, Peter Beinart, for boycotting Jewish settlements. "Israel prefers 'critical dialogue' to no dialogue," stressed the source. "We never actually boycotted them. Binah has the title of ambassador, and until recently used to be responsible for U.S.-Israeli relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He's a serious representative."

J Street seemed quite content. "We are pleased to have the opportunity to hear from Israeli Embassy Deputy Head of Mission Barukh Binah," said Jessica Rosenblum, director of media and communications. "Our leadership and activists are interested in further strengthening our relationship with the Government of Israel's official representatives in the United States, and we appreciate that the embassy is sending such a high-ranking diplomat to attend our conference."

The Obama Administration will send Tony Blinken, national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden. It seems that President Barack Obama has decided to bet on AIPAC after all.

One of the major challenges for this year's J Street conference will be to prove that the two-state solution is not dead yet. This year, just keeping the drumbeat of peace alive is not trivial.

One of my web friends who had planned to go to the conference told me he decided to skip it after a week-long visit to Israel. "After speaking with many of my friends and family I realize that the so-called 'two-state solution' is no longer a viable option," he wrote.

"Most Israelis truly believe - time will tell if rightly or wrongly - that there is no partner on the Palestinian side. They understandably perceive Israel's biggest pressing challenge as a nuclear Iran. The Likud party is expected to win 35-37 seats in the next parliamentary election, which is not exactly a ringing endorsement for any compromises in the foreseeable future.

"A new bold idea is desperately needed and I don't see it coming on the horizon. I therefore must honestly conclude that at the moment, J Street's ideas, though theoretically sound, are realistically unattainable. Therefore, I've decided to skip the upcoming conference in DC."

5. If the two-state solution proves unexciting this year, at least Beinart has firmly established his credentials as the Jewish establishment's enfant terrible, repeatedly stirring up stinging conversations on Zionism and why the heck the younger generation of American Jews should care.

Not for attribution, Israeli officials castigate Beinart as someone "who found his profitable niche and continues to dig himself deeper into the controversy." There are also some angry on-record attacks against his new book, "The crisis of Zionism," for being biased, not offering a real alternative, etc. His recent New York Times op-ed provoked a storm as well.

Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren wrote on his Facebook page: "Peter Beinart's call ("To Save Israel, Boycott the Settlements," New York Times, 3.19.12 ) places him well beyond the Israeli mainstream, the moderate left, and the vast majority of Israelis who care about peace. The call for boycotting all products made by Israeli communities outside of Jerusalem and beyond the 1949 Armistice Lines is supported only by a marginal and highly radical fringe. Beinart's position, moreover, absolves the Palestinians of any responsibility for the current situation, including their rejection of previous peace offers, their support for terror, and their refusal to negotiate with Israel for the past three years. By reducing the Palestinians to two-dimensional props in an Israeli drama, Beinart deprives them of agency and indeed undermines his own thesis. Without an active Palestinian commitment to a two-state solution - irrespective of boycotts - the peace Beinart seeks cannot be achieved."

But who wants to revive this boring, 20-year-old peace process? It's much more exciting to criticize Beinart.



## **Ynet: Olmert to address J Street conference**

***Former PM to be guest of honor at leftist lobby's annual conference later this month***

*Yuval Karni (3/4/2012)*

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4198040,00.html>

Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will appear before the J Street organization at the end of the month, Yedioth Ahronoth reported Sunday.

The liberal advocacy group is scheduled to hold its annual conference in Washington at the end of March. The event will be attended by some 2,500 Jewish leaders, senior government officials and congressmen.

Olmert will be the guest of honor and the main speaker at the event.

J Street is considered a left-wing Jewish lobby which aims to promote a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is boycotting the group and its events, which has prompted criticism by some of his ministers.

Minister Dan Meridor as well as various Knesset members and Israeli politicians have previously met with J Street officials. In the past, the group hosted Opposition Chairwoman Tzipi Livni.

# **Right-wing Blogs**

## **American Thinker: J Street gets comeuppance from Israeli diplomat at its annual conference**

Updated: NYT censors the remarks

*Leo Rennert (3/28/12)*

[http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2012/03/j\\_street\\_gets\\_comeuppance\\_from\\_israeli\\_diplomat\\_at\\_its\\_annual\\_conference.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2012/03/j_street_gets_comeuppance_from_israeli_diplomat_at_its_annual_conference.html)

J Street, the leftist group that describes itself as "pro-Israel" and "pro-peace" but is more deserving of an "anti-Israel" and "anti-peace" label, got a long overdue comeuppance at its annual conference in Washington, D.C. this week.

Administering a forceful spanking of J Street was none other than the No. 2 diplomat at the Israeli Embassy, Deputy Ambassador Barukh Bina. While his address to thousands of J Street supporters was couched in diplomatic language, it turned into a ringing indictment of J Street's agenda.

Financed by the likes of George Soros, J Street has positioned itself as an all-out opponent of AIPAC, a genuine pro-Israel advocacy group that represents a far bigger slice of American Jewry than upstart J Street and, for its efforts, was repeatedly vilified during the conference.

While J Street has made only relatively few inroads among American Jewry and Israel supporters, its unrestrained criticism of Israeli policies has been a treasure trove for mainstream media eager to quote a "pro-Israel" group to flog Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

For this year's conference, J Street corralled several prominent leftist American and Israeli personalities, but its main "get" was the No.2 diplomat in the Israeli Embassy. Last year, the Embassy stayed away from AIPAC's conference and the year before, it sent only a low-level observer. This time, it was going to be different.

In the run-up to the conference, Jeremy Ben-Ami, the head of J Street, gloated over his organization's ability to snare Bina as its stellar attraction. Bina's listing on the program as an honored guest meant that J Street had broken through its isolation as a fringe element and become a bona fide player and a legitimate Jewish voice in matters involving Israel. Or so Ben-Ami expected things to unfold.

However, it didn't turn out that way. Bina received a tumultuous welcome from the audience when he began his address. But as he proceeded to deliver his point-by-point critique of J Street, the crowd was stunned and fell silent.

Bina began by stressing that Israel and the U.S. share the same democratic values -- but pointedly noted that there was also an important difference. "Unlike your secure existence between those happy shores, an ocean apart from the bad guys," he remarked, "our borders are made of missiles and mayhem."

Then, warming to his theme, Bina said that, while Israel welcomed the views of Jewish groups in the Diaspora, "at the end of the day, it is we, the Israelis who must bear the ultimate burden and may have to pay the ultimate price. And we, dear friends and family, have no margin of error, none whatsoever."

From these basic premises, Bina went on to urge J Streeters to change their spots -- to end their obsession with Israel as the prime culprit, to take a more balanced view of the Mideast conflict and to acknowledge and proclaim Israel's sterling achievements.

"Stand with us," he told the audience. "It is as simple as that, and someone ought to say it." This was the hardest blow for J Street and Ben-Ami -- a double-entendre that sealed Bina's indictment of J Street. For one thing, it meant that J Street, while proclaiming itself as "pro-Israel," follows a radically different agenda - that it had in effect not been standing up for Israel. For another thing, it was an unmistakable dig at J Street's real identity -- Stand With US just happens to be a group genuinely supportive of Israel and unrelenting in its defense of the Jewish state -- poles apart from J Street.

Alluding to J Street's lobbying of the Obama administration to take a tougher line against Israel, Bina acknowledged that "internal activism is a central part of democratic society," but he warned that "pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a great problem. Friends, I urge you to stand by our side as Americans, as members of your community, as Jews. For the sake of our forefathers and our future, we must keep our brotherhood strong."

Not exactly the words Ben-Ami hoped to hear. But words that badly needed to be said.  
Update from Leo Rennert:

The NYT has censored Israeli deputy ambassador's remarks at J Street conference  
Reading the March 28 edition of the New York Times, one would conclude that there wasn't a single discordant note at the annual conference of J Street, the self-described "pro-Israel, pro-peace" group ("J Street, Pro-Israel but Opposed to Attacking Iran, Takes Its Message to Washington" by Helene Cooper, page A9).

Spread over six columns, Cooper's article conveys J Street's hostility to AIPAC, the far more powerful and influential pro-Israel lobby, for being too "hawkish." She interviews J Street delegates who make the rounds on Capitol Hill to plead against a pre-emptive attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. She faithfully reports J Street's attempts to forge a dovish coalition that can demonstrate that American Jewry is not monolithically supportive of Israel's leadership.

And she points to speakers who give some heft to J Street, including high-level Obama administration officials and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. In doing so, however, Cooper conspicuously omits any reference to a speaker who did not follow J Street's playbook, but challenged it head-on - Israel's deputy ambassador to the United States, Barukh Bina.

None of Bina's remarks, let alone his presence, made its way into the pages of the New York Times. Yet, his appearance and speech were newsworthy on two counts - a sharp departure from all the other speakers, which left the J Street audience speechless, and a not-so-subtle signal that Israel's democratically elected government views J Street's agenda as potentially harmful to the Jewish state.

With copious coverage of all the pro-J Street doings and utterances at the conference, why was this discordant note overlooked?

## **Joint Media News Service: J Street Conference: Amos Oz Calls AIPAC ‘Hawkish, Militaristic’**

*Paul Foer and Jacob Kamara (3/27/12)*

<http://www.algemeiner.com/2012/03/27/j-street-conference-amos-oz-calls-aipac-%E2%80%98hawkish-militaristic%E2%80%99/>

As a crowd of 2,500 people gathered for J Street’s third annual conference, keynote speaker Amos Oz used the self-labeled “pro-Israel, pro-peace” group’s opening plenary Saturday night as a platform to slam the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Oz, the famed Israeli author and left-wing activist, received a standing ovation when he questioned the “hawkish, militaristic banner of AIPAC” and encouraged the crowd to “unite now under the banner of J Street.”

J Street conference attendees echoed Oz, promoting what they claimed to be political positions favored by the majority of Jews. George Washington University student and J Street activist Adam Lucente said, “I feel that J Street better represents the overall Jewish community than AIPAC, for example.”

Yet, AIPAC’s conference earlier this month drew 13,000 participants, more than five times the crowd attracted by J Street. While J Street has marketed itself as an alternative to AIPAC by frequently and vociferously backing President Barack Obama’s policies on settlements, borders and Jerusalem, Obama did not mention J Street’s core issues when he spoke at AIPAC’s conference March 4. The president instead stressed points such as “Israel’s sovereign right to make its own decisions about what is required to meet its security needs.”

In addition to Obama, addressing the AIPAC conference were dignitaries including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. The same could not be said of the J Street conference, whose special guests included Tony Blinken—Vice President Joe Biden’s national security staffer—and embattled former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who has been indicted on bribery charges.

However, regarding the crowd J Street drew, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi—founder and soon-departing director of The Israel Project advocacy group—told JointMedia News Service: “There are a lot of people here. It took AIPAC a lot of years to get to that point.”

Oz on AIPAC

AIPAC did not return a request for comment regarding Oz's statement that the pro-Israel lobby is "hawkish, militaristic." Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) President Mort Klein said in a telephone interview with JointMedia News Service that Oz's words show that he "knows nothing about what AIPAC does, or says, or supports."

"AIPAC embraced Oslo from day one, they embraced the Gaza withdrawal as soon as [Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon mentioned it, before any discussion of the issue... They (AIPAC) repeatedly, regularly lobby for aid to the Palestinian Authority, openly support a Palestinian state," Klein said.

Oz also said that, "There is more than one way to be a good Zionist... No one can claim Zionism to themselves. It's a surname."

Israeli journalist Stav Shaffir, a leader of last summer's massive Israeli social protest movement, said Israel is "a more fragmented and segmented society than ever."

"It's many different societies in conflict with each other," Shaffir said. "If one can't solve that, we can't deal with our borders. If we can't manage to redefine Israel according to our own values, then we lose. We are so close to that."

Beinart's call for boycotts

Peter Beinart, whose recent New York Times op-ed called for boycotts and other civil protests against Israeli settlements and settlers, debuted his new book—*The Crisis of Zionism*—at J Street's conference. Leading up to the conference, J Street Executive Director Jeremy Ben-Ami said Beinart's op-ed "immediately raises pressure on J Street and other organizations over giving a platform to Peter."

Maintaining that J Street was "thrilled" to host Beinart, Ben-Ami admitted that the group disagrees "with some of the actions that Peter is calling for." Disagreeing with Beinart's tactic of putting pressure on settlers and "the ideologues driving the settlement enterprise," Ben-Ami called for a "focus on borders, not boycotts, as it is a recognized border that will save Israel's democratic and Jewish character."

ZOA's Klein said many of the Jews who move to Judea and Samaria do so "because it's beautiful, and it's less expensive," not out of ideological reasons.

"What Ben-Ami and others refuse to acknowledge is that this is no one's sovereign land," Klein said. "Jordan captured this illegally in 1948, the UN refused to recognize their sovereignty over Judea and Samaria, King Hussein relinquished his claims in 1988... This is simply unallocated international land, and until there's some sort of final resolution, why can't 300,000 Jews live in Judea and Samaria among 2 million Arabs when 1.2 million Arabs live among 6 million Jews in Israel?"

Lobbying and student activism

As conference attendees gathered to listen, talk, argue and question, supporters of groups such as Rabbis for Human Rights, B'Tselem, the New Israel Fund, Partners for Progressive Israel, and others displayed their literature and promoted their agendas.

About 800 activists descended upon Washington's Capitol Hill on Tuesday to lobby Congress on behalf of J Street's agenda, which favors a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. At the conference's Sunday afternoon plenary session, Carinne Luck—J Street's vice president of field and campaigns—kicked off the organization's "We are the Future of Pro-Israel" campaign, whose stated goal is to "fight for an Israel whose people live in security with recognized borders, an Israel living in peace and prosperity alongside a Palestinian homeland where citizens can thrive and build their own country."

J Street's new campaign also calls for the U.S. government "to invest all possible resources to help Israelis and Palestinians create a peaceful and secure future."

Conference attendees were young, old and in-between, and from hundreds of locations. About one in four attendees was a college student, with 650 students representing 125 schools across 24 U.S. states and five different countries. Aimee Riese, a student at the London School of Economics who represented J Street's UK counterpart, called Yachad, said, "I identify as a Zionist and Israel is important as the historical homeland of the Jewish people." When asked why she supported J Street and why she attended the conference, Riese—who has been to Israel 10 times—said, "Settlements is the issue."

Regarding settlements, J Street has "supported criminalizing the Jews who live in Judea and Samaria," but has "never supported any actions against the Arabs" building there, Klein said.

"If you really want to say 'I don't want these areas changed in any way,' say 'Everyone should stop building.' Everyone. Why only Jews?" Klein said.

## The Washington Post

### **Right Turn, Blog of the Washington Post: The demise of the left's favorite not-pro-Israel group**

*Jennifer Rubin (3/27/2012)*

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/the-demise-of-the-lefts-favorite-not-pro-israel-group/2012/03/27/gIQALhnFeS\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/the-demise-of-the-lefts-favorite-not-pro-israel-group/2012/03/27/gIQALhnFeS_blog.html)

I've meant to write about the not-very-pro-peace, pro-Israel J Street confab that has been going on in D.C., but even the most trivial campaign news or remote foreign policy issue seems to have more significance than a couple of thousand lefty stragglers trying to pass themselves off as friends of the Jewish state, a phrase they'd likely never use. That said, J Street remains a curiosity, and evidence of just how little market there is for Israel-bashing in the U.S.

Ruthie Blum of Israel Hayom nicely sums up the proceedings: "Not only did a mere 2,500 activists attend the conference, as compared with more than 13,000 at AIPAC's gathering three weeks ago at the same venue. But its raison d'être had long ago wilted. Grad missiles from Gaza, Fatah reconciliation with Hamas, and Iranian nukes tend to put a damper on concepts like 'peace process.' Still, [executive director Jeremy] Ben-Ami and his flock were not deterred from insisting that Congress not focus too much attention on Tehran, when there are Israeli settlements obstructing a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." You get the idea.

This mind-set doesn't reflect any significant segment of the American electorate or even the views of the Obama administration (which has disappointed J Street by vetoing a U.N. resolution condemning the settlements and refusing to impose a peace plan on Israel). It is even less reflective of Israeli public opinion; the left's "peace" agenda was demolished by the historical factors Blum cites.

The absence of a congressional host committee or any high-ranking administration speaker tells you what you need to know about the group's effectiveness and influence in the U.S.

J Street is even further estranged from Israeli public opinion. The group could not rope in any influential Israeli politician, so it was reduced to featuring the indicted former prime minister, Ehud Olmert, who probably didn't live up to expectations when he reminded the audience of how the Palestinians turned down his generous peace offer. ( Narrative fail! It's not all about settlements.)

Adam Kredo quotes former deputy national security adviser Elliott Abrams: "J Street's real problem is that Israel is thriving under [conservative] Likud leadership and it drives them crazy. The fact is that Israelis reject the J Street approach. That Netanyahu seems almost certain to win another term as prime minister leads them to question where Israel is heading instead of wondering why their own views are so out of step with Israeli reality." Ironically, the group that wails about loss of Israeli democracy insists that it, not the democratically elected government in Israel and the overwhelming weight of public opinion, is the legitimate expression of modern Zionism.

But something useful did come of this. We got another reminder of how fraudulent are the faux “human rights” groups that provide cover for de-legitimizers of the Jewish state. The New Israel Fund, for example, ran a panel at the conference on “Jewish extremism.” Considering its Wikileaks public relations disaster (“A senior New Israel Fund officer [NIF] told a U.S. official in 2010 that the disappearance of the Jewish state would not be a tragedy, according to a document that was leaked by Wikileaks.”) and NIF’s activities in support of boycotts and de-legitimization campaigns, this all would be comical if it were not so grotesque.

But best of all, Barukh Binah, the deputy chief of mission at Israel’s Washington embassy told off J Street attendees. (“He is the first Israeli diplomat to attend a conference of the liberal pro-Israel group since its establishment in 2008. A good deal of Binah’s speech, however, was reproachful, and earned silence. “We need you to stand with us,” he said. “It is as simple as that and someone ought to say it. Internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem, davka [especially] when we need you the most.”) But, in fact, Israel doesn’t need J Street. The latter is as irrelevant as it is tiny.

A final note: I wonder if President Obama’s post-election “flexibility” would include resumed chumminess with J Street and adoption of elements of its agenda. Ya think?

## **Weekly Standard: Allen West Blasts 'Pro-Palestinian Jewish Organization'**

*Daniel Hallper (3/27/12)*

[http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/allen-west-blasts-pro-palestinian-jewish-organization\\_634747.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/allen-west-blasts-pro-palestinian-jewish-organization_634747.html)

In a Facebook note published today, Congressman Allen West blasts J Street, or as he calls them, the "Pro-Palestinian Jewish Organization."

"Today on Capitol Hill there are lots of J-Street (Pro-Palestinian Jewish Organization) representatives, of course several have recognized me and wanted to chat," West writes. "I just have to shake my head when these citizens ask me to believe in Iran and support a two-state solution. When I ask them if there is a willing peace partner on the other side, they respond by saying yes. When I ask them how does one negotiate with leaders who do not even recognize your existence, they respond with, you have to believe in them. Well, looks like I will have to save these people from themselves. I take a man at his word when he says he wants to kill me, I ain't suicidal."

J Street is wrapping up their conference today in Washington, D.C. by visiting members of Congress on Capitol Hill.

The Obama administration was represented at this year's J Street conference by White House senior adviser Valerie Jarrett, a close confidant of President Obama.

As Adam Kredo reports, the conference was a solemn affair. "Paranoia and gloom enshrouded J Street's 2012 conference, as speaker after speaker warned supporters of the dovish 'pro-Israel, pro-peace' movement that the Jewish state is on the brink of collapse, a prognosis that experts rejected as misleading," writes Kredo.

## **Washington Free Beacon: Fear and Loathing on J Street**

Ben-Ami: Give up the Land

*Adam Kredo (3/27/12)*

<http://freebeacon.com/fear-and-loathing-on-j-street/>

Paranoia and gloom enshrouded J Street's 2012 conference, as speaker after speaker warned supporters of the dovish "pro-Israel, pro-peace" movement that the Jewish state is on the brink of collapse, a prognosis that experts rejected as misleading.

"Yes, there is much cause for despair," J Street founder Jeremy Ben-Ami told attendees on the confab's opening night. "There is no viable peace process to speak of, the present Israeli leader pays lip service to a two-state solution, yet its actions undermine the chance for lasting peace."

"I know how many of you here and those who chose to stay home are distraught about the present situation" in Israel, Ben-Ami continued, chastising the Jewish state for a range of offenses.

"Within Israel, democratic rights are being challenged: The status of women is under attack, the control of the religious right seems to grow by the week," and the construction of Jewish homes in Jerusalem continues undeterred, Ben-Ami complained to a crowd of nearly 2,500. "All of this is enough to make someone give up and go home."

Ben-Ami—like many speakers at the conference—offered a simple remedy.

"Give up the land," Ben-Ami said, "necessary for a Palestinian state and secure Israel's future as a Jewish democracy, or keep all the land and sacrifice either the Jewish or democratic nature of the Jewish state."

Even liberal observers of Ben-Ami's address did not seem convinced.

"Applause for Jeremy Ben-Ami less than overwhelming," Mitchell Plitnick, a former official of B'tselem, a far-left Israeli human rights group, observed after Ben-Ami's speech. "His speech urged retreat from apathy. Didn't seem to work."

Other foreign policy experts explained that Ben-Ami's portrait of Israel is misleading.

"The gloom and doom is absurd," said Elliott Abrams, a senior National Security Council adviser to former President George W. Bush. "As to internal matters in Israel, we've heard all that before: a couple of decades ago people said the Sephardi-Ashkenazi splits would deepen and threaten national unity."

“If democracy is eroding, how is it that their Supreme Court is as powerful as ever and they have higher participation rates in national elections than we do, by a significant margin?” Abrams asked. “J Street’s real problem is that Israel is thriving under [conservative] Likud leadership and it drives them crazy. The fact is that Israelis reject the J Street approach. That Netanyahu seems almost certain to win another term as prime minister leads them to question where Israel is heading instead of wondering why their own views are so out of step with Israeli reality.”

Though multiple J Street speakers blamed Israel for failing to achieve peace, Palestinian incitement and violence received little mention.

Speakers at the J Street conference, however, often hit a panicked note.

“Israel today is the most unequal society in the western world with the exception of you,” said Avishay Braverman, a liberal member of the Israeli Knesset. “It’s clear today that we have to partition the Holy Land as soon as possible.”

Israeli lawmaker Zehava Galon, chair of the country’s far-left Meretz Party, claimed that an “anti-democratic campaign is presently taking place in Israel.”

“It is the occupation that undermines Israeli democracy,” said Galon, claiming that Israel’s supposed “occupation” has promoted “racism” and hurt the Jewish state’s economy.

Despite a worldwide economic recession, Israel’s economy continues to grow.

An Arab-Israeli lawmaker chided Israeli settlements, referring to them the major “obstacle to peace.”

“The current coalition of Prime Minister Netananayahu cannot have real negotiations,” said Knesset-member Raleb Majadele. “Only a differing government, based on a differing coalition that is committed to peace, can restart the process and move forward.”

Netanyahu has repeatedly emphasized his willingness to unconditionally negotiate with the Palestinians.

Obama was the first to stipulate a settlement freeze as a precondition to peace talks. Abbas has said that he would not have made it an issue without Obama first doing so.

Amos Oz, an Israeli novelist and one of J Street’s headline attractions, took a shot at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which held its annual pro-Israel conference earlier this month, attracting more than 13,000 attendees, including President Obama.

J Street’s conference, held at the Washington D.C. Convention Center, shared space with the Photoshop World Conference and Expo.

“Let us all be united,” Oz said. “But why unite under the hawkish military, extremist banner of AIPAC?”

The notion that the state of Israel is in jeopardy and that only J Street supporters can save it continued into Sunday, when a panel of Democratic political operatives tried to explain why Obama is perceived as being unfairly hostile to Israel.

“Obama has been damaged on Israel, but people can’t tell you why,” noted Ilyse Hogue, a writer for the Nation magazine and former top official at MoveOn.org. “They can tell you they don’t trust him on Israel.”

Ilyse noted that “those are the kinds of activities that can swing elections,” adding that “yes, it’s a concern, and I don’t have the answer for what to do” about it.

J Street activists also seemed worried about the president’s perceived record on Israel.

“A lot of [conservatives] talk about Obama’s stance on Israel and criticize his stance on the Middle East,” noted one J Street attendee during a panel discussion on Israel’s prominence in the presidential election cycle. “It definitely seems like it’s on a lot of people’s minds and how they view his presidency.”

Another J Street delegate who identified himself as an Obama campaign organizer said he expects Jews to “vote with their noses closed” for Obama.

Center for American Progress senior fellow Eric Alterman said that J Street is far from rivaling the power of AIPAC.

“J Street does great work in the same way that the Nation [magazine] occasionally does great work,” Alterman said. “It’s silly to say JPAC [J Street’s political arm] is in any way comparable to the power AIPAC has.”

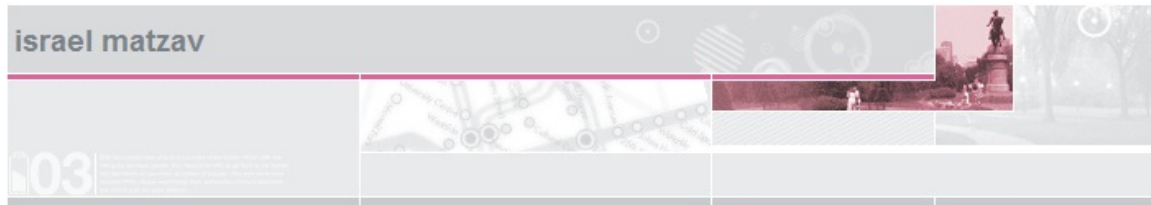
## **Washington Free Beacon: Rep. West Slams J Street**

*Washington Free Beacon Staff (3/27/12)*

<http://freebeacon.com/rep-west-criticizes-j-street/>

Rep. Allen West (R., Fla.) posted a message on his Facebook page Tuesday criticizing the advocacy group J Street, and its push for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict:

Today on Capitol Hill there are lots of J-Street (Pro-Palestinian Jewish Organization) representatives, of course several have recognized me and wanted to chat. I just have to shake my head when these citizens ask me to believe in Iran and support a two-state solution. When I ask them if there is a willing peace partner on the other side, they respond by saying yes. When I ask them how does one negotiate with leaders who do not even recognize your existence, they respond with, you have to believe in them. Well, looks like I will have to save these people from themselves. I take a man at his word when he says he wants to kill me, I ain't suicidal.



## **Israel Matzav: Israel's deputy ambassador scolds J Street to stunned silence**

*Carl in Jerusalem (3/27/12)*

<http://israelmatzav.blogspot.com/2012/03/israels-deputy-ambassador-scolds-j.html>

This is one video of J Street's conference that you will not find on the J Street website. To stunned silence, Israel's deputy ambassador Barukh Bina scolded the J Streeters and urged them to support Israel.

Audiences at the annual J Street conference in Washington on Monday were shocked when one of the event's honorees, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, DC, Barukh Bina, stood at the podium and issued a respectful yet scathing criticism of the advocacy group's policies. As he took the podium at the event's gala dinner, Binah received rapturous applause, according to the tweets of several conference-goers. However, as the tone and content of Binah's speech became more apparent, the crowd was stunned into silence.

The presence of a high-level diplomat at this year's conference, entitled "Making History," marks a significant shift in attitudes toward the organization. J Street, an advocacy organization that describes itself as "pro-Israel and pro-peace," is known for its adversarial position toward Israel's traditional lobby in the U.S., AIPAC, which was largely vilified at this week's J Street conference. Last year's conference was not attended by any Israeli diplomats, and two years ago only a junior embassy representative attended. This year, however, following speculations and consultations, the embassy decided to send Binah to the event, and he took advantage of his captive audience to deliver a harsh yet measured rebuke to the organization which official Israel sees as a less than constructive force.

"I come to you today not only as the second highest ranking Israeli diplomat in the U.S., but as a brother (and I have an extensive American family). We share your democratic values. But unlike your secure existence between these happy shores, an ocean apart from the bad guys, our borders are curved and dusty, and made of missiles and mayhem," Binah said.

Addressing the prevalent view among American Jews who call themselves "Progressive Zionists" – a group that J Street purports to champion – that Israel's current government is steering Israel away from its democratic character, Binah told the gathering, "Nobody is perfect, and, as a seventh generation Israeli born I know full well what needs to be fixed in my own society. I salute those individuals and organizations working for grass-roots improvements within Israel, and I personally attempt these corrections every four years when I cast my vote. Sometimes I have it my way, and sometimes I do not. It is called democracy.

"We share your democratic values ... as we continue to face intolerable threats, we sometimes have to make decisions of life and death. We welcome the opinions of our brethren in the Diaspora, especially on issues of Jewish identity and pluralism, but at the end of the day, it is we, the Israelis, who must bear the ultimate burden and may have to pay the ultimate price. And we, dear friends and family, have no margins of error, none whatsoever.

"I understand that you, my friends, are all about future and hope. So are we, the young and most energetic country that we are. But while our view is towards the future, we dare not forget our past. History must not shackle us, but its lessons must guide us," Binah said.

Taking aim at various voices within the American Jewish community, as well as a growing theme among some American pundits, who think that the current Israeli government is abusing the memory of the Holocaust to point to the threat from Iran, Binah said, "And please, do not tell me that it is no longer relevant, because it is. (It is alive and scorching just like the trail left by an Israeli Air Force F-16, flown over Poland's valleys of death by the granddaughter of the commanders of a ghetto revolt. It is alive in ink on paper as long as a 12-year-old, an eighth generation Israeli born, dedicates her bat mitzvah book to 'members of my family whom I never met,' though nobody coached her in this direction."

Binah went on to issue a thinly veiled dig at the group, saying, "We need you to stand with us. It is as simple as that, and someone ought to say it. Internal activism is a central part of democratic society, but pressures on the elected government of Israel can present us with a problem, when we need you the most. Friends, I urge you to stand by our side as Americans, as members of your community, as Jews. For the sake of our forefathers and our future, we must keep our brotherhood strong."

Read the whole thing. If I find video, I will post it. Sounds like he gave those pompous a\*\*\*s a good smack in the mouth. Zeir gut gezogt (very well said).

Omri Ceren points out (via Twitter) that this is not the first time that Binah has scolded J Street. Given that, I wonder why they agreed to have him. Heh.



## **PJ Media: Israeli Government's Gift to J Street: Truth Served Straight Up**

The address of the embassy's No. 2 sparked a gala dinner tiff, but then former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert also got into hot water with the crowd.

*Bridget Johnson (3/26/12)*

<http://pjmedia.com/blog/israeli-governments-gift-to-j-street-truth-served-straight-up/?singlepage=true>

The No. 2 at the Israeli Embassy in Washington took the stage at J Street's gala dinner tonight with a polite, impeccably structured point-by-point barrage of the risks faced by the Jewish state and where the lobbying organization has slipped.

It sparked a battle of sorts at the event, with former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert taking the beginning of his address to slam the Israeli government for sending the diplomat to speak — but then launching into similar points on Iran that provoked the same chilly reaction from the crowd.

Ambassador Barukh Binah, who assumed his duties as deputy chief of mission at the embassy early this year, was introduced with an explanation to the crowd that J Street maintains open dialogue with the Israeli government even if critical of its policies.

“It's the first public appearance I make in the United States in my current position,” Binah opened to cheers — the last he would receive until the tepid applause at the end of his address.

“I salute those individuals and organizations working for grass-roots improvements within Israel, and I personally attempt these corrections every four years when I cast my vote,” he said. “Sometimes I have it my way, and sometimes I do not. It is called democracy.”

Binah said that the U.S. and Israel share these democratic values. “But unlike your secure existence between these happy shores, an ocean apart from the bad guys, our borders are curved and dusty, and made of missiles and mayhem,” he said. “As we continue to face intolerable threats, we sometimes have to make decisions of life and death. We welcome the opinions of our brethren in the diaspora, especially on issues of Jewish identity and pluralism, but at the end of the day, it is we, the Israelis, who must bear the ultimate burden and may have to pay the ultimate price.

“And we, dear friends and family, have no margins of error; none whatsoever.”

Binah said he approached J Street to remind it of its responsibilities as a lobbying organization that presents a legislative agenda to Congress.

“Thus, when you bring lawmakers to Israel, please make sure that they come out with a full picture,” he said. “You may be critical of settlements, but if you choose to show the most extreme, it behooves you to present the greater mass of moderates as well. If you show them negative aspects of checkpoints, please show as well the catastrophe and grief of terror victims. If you show them Israel’s failings, show them also our triumphs such as the aliyah of the Jewish community of Ethiopia. I urge you to strive for balance, so that these lawmakers may become friends of Israel who might be critical, and not critics of Israel who are not friends.”

The ambassador said he welcomed the “evolution” in J Street’s position on Iran and hoped it would be followed by a policy “that all the options, including a military effort, are on the table” to keep the Islamic Republic from obtaining nuclear capability.

“Likewise, I welcome your position against one-sided resolutions on settlements, and I hope that you will never go back to opposing a veto cast by the Obama administration, like you did in January of 2011,” Binah said.

He also hit at the controversial welcoming of Peter Beinart. “I hope that the leaders of the BDS movement will not be welcomed at J Street, and that all calls for boycott will continue to be refuted,” he said. “They use such appearances as a means of gaining legitimacy, and whatever actually happens in your fora, they report to their supports that they were greeted at J Street with enthusiasm and consent. Please don’t let yourselves be used. They aren’t honest players.”

And he addressed the two-state solution theme of the conference, which included a video played during the dinner of various parties calling for a continuation of the peace process.

“Israel remains committed to achieving peace with our Palestinian neighbors,” Binah said. “We wish them well. Yet, our efforts to directly negotiate all issues are constantly thwarted by Palestinian rejection. We are willing to put all the contentious issues on the table, in order to bring an end to the conflict. But time after time we find out that the metaphoric table was removed, or cut, or blown up in the flames of terror. We urge the Palestinian leadership to lead their people in the arduous path of peace, as true leaders do, and to forgo the game of the past, the game of hatred and virulent incitement.

“It is not a game of political Quidditch that we play here; it is a heavy-duty selection of choices that we must make,” he stressed. “A Hamas government is not a harbinger of peace and neither is an Iranian-backed Hezbollah regime.”

“The proof of the pudding, my friends, is in the eating, and so far we are only fed with the old, stale and hateful anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish slogans, as if nothing is happening,” the ambassador added.

“So, while we cling on to our quest for peace we must be very careful and keep our shields up. Especially when repressive regimes such as Iran’s or Syria’s continue to butcher their own citizenry, like in Tehran 2 years ago and in Homs 2 days ago, especially when they go on spewing their venom, and especially when they strive to build a nuclear arsenal that might attempt, God forbid, to put an end to the Jewish question, this time in the Middle East.”

Binah urged the J Street members to stand by Israel “as Americans, as members of your community, as Jews.”

“For the sake of our forefathers and our future, we must keep our brotherhood strong,” he concluded.

There was some unintelligible yelling after Binah’s speech, when J Street executive director Jeremy Ben-Ami took the podium.

“You give new meaning to the phrase ‘hard act to follow,’” he quipped at Binah.

Ben-Ami launched into a spirited defense of the organization, stressing the organization’s motto that it’s a “pro-Israel, pro-peace” group.

“We wanted a voice that recognized that Israel’s future depends on achieving a two-state solution,” he said. “We wanted to express our voice to say that being pro-Israel doesn’t mean being anti-Palestinian. Being pro-Israel doesn’t mean agreeing with every policy of this Israeli government.”

Ben-Ami, who thanked Binah for his “attendance,” said J Street knows that the present is not the future it wants.

“Our choice is not to sit home and wallow in despair,” he said.

Olmert, the evening’s final speaker, called his own presence at the dinner a “historic” moment for Jewish community in America.

“I’m guessing some of you might not have agreed with everything Mr. Binah said,” he said to cheers. “...The fact that the government decided to send him is the most important thing and this is very significant.”

Olmert thanked the group for inviting him, but said he was “aggravated” that some people congratulated him for accepting the invitation.

“J Street is a legitimate organization which cares for the state of Israel,” the former prime minister said.

Yet when Olmert touched on similar themes of stopping a nuclear Iran like Binah did, he lost the crowd.

“I entirely agree with those who believe that Israel cannot tolerate a nuclear Iran,” he said. “... We’re talking about a nation which openly, formally talks about wiping Israel off the map.”

To deal with the crisis, he said he would “examine, analyze” in a “balanced and determined manner.” He advocated superpowers in the West taking the lead to stop Iran, but said Israel needs to build capacity for action on its own.

“As a last resort, go to the first one,” Olmert said. “I don’t think I need to say more.”

A woman shouted “no war” in the quiet audience.

Olmert brought the crowd back to life by saying that the two-state solution is the “primary responsibility” of Israel — then clarified that it’s not exclusively Israel’s responsibility. “The Palestinians don’t always meet their responsibilities,” he said.

He quipped that “maybe I could get a standing ovation” from the conference crowd if he laid all blame on Israel.

Olmert proceeded to advocate a peace plan starting with 1967 borders and declared that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas wants peace.

The third J Street conference had nearly 2,500 registered. It was dwarfed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee event earlier this month, also at the convention center, which was packed with more than 13,000 registered attendees.

Whereas AIPAC had security checkpoints including metal detectors and hand-searches of all bags, J Street had no such screening.

More than 60 lawmakers from the House and Senate attended the J Street dinner, Ben-Ami said, calling them the “legislative future.”

J Street attendees were to hit Capitol Hill on Tuesday for more than 200 lobbying meetings. AIPAC reported a record 530 lawmaker meetings this year, five short of the total members of Congress.



## **PJ Media: Four Lawmakers Laud J Street as ‘Teachers’ for Capitol Hill**

*Bridget Johnson (3/26/12)*

<http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2012/03/26/four-lawmakers-laud-j-street-as-teachers-for-capitol-hill/>

Four members of Congress spoke at the J Street conference today, agreeing that the greatest barrier to Mideast peace is “politics” even as an audience member yelled out “Benjamin Netanyahu!”

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas), though, said it was the settlements on the West Bank — earning hearty applause in what was the trigger line for this conference akin to the undivided Jerusalem pledge at AIPAC.

“It’s like an organization I’ve been looking for for at least 25 years,” Johnson said of J Street. “I think I have gotten myself in trouble many times just making simple statements where I didn’t know the implications.”

She told the audience that she had approached AIPAC about making sure that women were at the table in Mideast peace negotiations, telling the lobbying group about the history of Mother’s Day and the role of women pleading for peace after the Civil War.

“I had Jewish members of my staff, Muslim members of my staff, Christian members of my staff,” Johnson said. “It became almost obsessions with me, trying to strike a balance, and I really didn’t find that balance until I found J Street and they found me.”

“I do feel that I have met up with a group that feels peace is the way out of this and peace is what we seek,” she added.

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), clearly a crowd favorite, said that more members of Congress are looking for “space” for dialogue about advocating a two-state solution.

“They want the space to be able to cast more balanced votes,” she said. “They want our country to lead, they want our country to bring both sides together and push push forward.”

Lee has introduced a resolution, which has nine co-sponsors, to appoint a special envoy on Iran and do away with the policy of not directly contacting Tehran. She said J Street helped write the resolution and lobby for it.

“How can you have a diplomatic option that’s real and a no contact policy?” she said, adding, “We need to get rid of our own nuclear weapons.”

Lee said that when an issue springs up she immediately asks for J Street’s policy analysis.

Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) said he was glad the conference was in town to bring attention to the Mideast peace process while Capitol Hill is occupied with Iran.

“Washington right now is obsessed with flexing its military might,” he said.

“I think an intelligent discussion is what’s missing in this country and I think you’re helping to bring it back,” McGovern said. “Think of yourself as teachers and think of all of us as very unruly students. The more people seem to be aware of things the more you see that reflected in their votes.”

“The frustrating thing about this conflict: most of us think we know what some kind of ultimate agreement would look like roughly, but we just can’t get there,” said Rep. David Price (D-N.C.).

He said that “we have a huge stake” in not letting Israel become “a wedge issue.”



## **PJ Media: Palestinian Leader to J Street: Israel Will Kill Two-State Solution, So Try One-State**

*Bridget Johnson (3/26/12)*

<http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2012/03/26/palestinian-leader-to-j-street-israel-will-kill-two-state-solution-so-try-one-state/>

The leader of a Palestinian nationalist party and cousin of an imprisoned Palestinian terror leader told the J Street conference this morning that blame for imminent failure of a two-state solution will rest squarely on the shoulders of Israel, and advocated an alliance for “one democratic free state.”

Dr. Mustafa Barghouti spoke on a panel titled “One-State, Two-State, Green State, Blue State” at the “pro-Israel, pro-peace” conference in Washington.

He warned the audience that the point of no return for the failure of a two-state solution is near. “We have either crossed that line or about to cross it,” Barghouti said.

“There is no way you can keep a democratic state and keep oppression of another people... we as Palestinians will never accept to remain slaves of occupation,” he said to audience applause.

“If the two-state option is dead this time it will not be the Palestinian responsibility,” the leader of the Palestinian National Initiative and onetime presidential candidate said. “This time it is an Israeli responsibility and no one can avoid that.”

Barghouti’s cousin in the large Ramallah family, Marwan Barghouti, led the First and Second Intifadas and is currently serving five life sentences for murder in Israel; he was acquitted of 21 counts for lack of sufficient evidence. His name is frequently brought up in prisoner exchanges but he was not released with the flood of inmates traded for IDF soldier Gilad Shalit.

“Some people might not like the word apartheid... I understand why you wouldn’t like it; there is nothing to be proud of,” Mustafa Barghouti said. “We actually live in that system.”

He complained that Israel’s GDP was higher than that of the Palestinian territories, with Israelis making “40 times more,” “and yet we are obliged to pay the same prices that Israelis do.”

“I cannot describe to you the level of violations of human rights,” Barghouti said, accusing Israeli soldiers of using dogs on Palestinians in a manner reminiscent of segregation in the U.S.

He said the goal is to “change the balance of power so a solution can be found.”

“The policy of the Israeli government is as much against the interests of the Jewish people as it is against the Palestinians,” he said to applause, adding to more clapping that Palestinians are also “struggling for the freedom of the Israeli people from the last colonial system.”

“That’s the kind of alliance we need for the future,” he told the J Street crowd.

“Your work, your mobilization, your activity gives us a lot of hope, so thank you for what you are doing.”



## **PJ Media: Guess Who's Going to J Street?**

*Roger Simon (3/24/12)*

<http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2012/03/24/guess-whos-going-to-j-street/>

From the JPost (no relation!):

Senior White House adviser Valerie Jarrett was added on Friday to the list of speakers to address the J Street conference opening here this weekend.

She joins Tony Blinken, national security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden, in representing the administration before the 2,500 activists the progressive Jewish lobby is expecting to host at its third annual conference.

[snip]

In addition, for the first time the Israeli Embassy will send a high-level participant. Barukh Binah, the deputy chief of mission, will offer opening remarks at the gala dinner.

An Israeli official pointed to recent steps that J Street has taken that show a "positive trend" in its positions, which have often been criticized by the Israeli government. He pointed in particular to J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami's rejection of journalist Peter Beinart's call for a boycott of West Bank settlements – in contrast to Israel proper – published on Monday in The New York Times.

Beinart, however, is still being welcomed at the conference and will hold a book signing for his new work, "The Crisis of Zionism".

[Well, that's relief.-ed. Yep, gotta have 'em all in one place. Btw, have you read "The Crisis of Zionism"?' I've boycotted it.]

## **Washington Free Beacon: No Fake: J Street-backed Evangelical Group Says Modern Israeli Jews Not Real Jews**

*Adam Kredo (3/23/12)*

<http://freebeacon.com/j-street-backed-evangelical-group-says-modern-israeli-jews-not-real-jews/>

A liberal Evangelical Christian leader close to J Street is pushing a borderline anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that modern Israelis are not descended from Biblical Jews.

Purveyors of that theory typically aim to promote the view that modern Israelis have no historical link to the land they live on, a claim that has been proven false.

In a speech before a mostly Jewish crowd at last year's J Street conference, Serge Duss, Director of the New Century Evangelicals Project, decried what he claimed is the erroneous "belief that the modern state of Israel and modern Israelis are the extension of the Children of Israel of the Old Testament," according to a copy of his remarks obtained by Commentary's Omri Ceren.

Duss—who will not be speaking again at this year's J Street conference, which begins Saturday—asked attendees to help him dispel the idea that Israelis are related to ancient Jews.

"You, only you—I can't, but only you can disabuse Evangelicals of that mythology. How many rabbis I've heard say in settings, 'We are not the Hebrews, the Children of Israel of the Old Testament'?" Duss said. "And unless conservative Evangelicals particularly hear that message from Jews in America today and Israelis in Israel, minds will not be changed."

Ceren explained that Duss is pushing a classic anti-Semitic trope, raising questions about whether it's appropriate for him to be speaking to a group of Jews at a purportedly "pro-Israel, pro-peace" conference.

"Denying the connection between ancient and modern Jews is, according to conspiracy theory expert Bob Blaskiewicz, 'a precursor to the type of rationalization of Christian Identity theology, that the "Jews" are imposters claiming the Chosen People status properly owned by the white American Christian male,'" Ceren noted. "It's a scientifically disproven canard that anti-Semites have used for centuries to disinherit Jews theologically and politically."

Ceren adds: “At its most explicit, the theory holds that contemporary Jews are descendants of non-Semitic Khazars who converted to Judaism. The Anti-Defamation League has an extended backgrounder on how the claim has played out in modern anti-Semitic movements. You can find it in the wild on Holocaust-denying WWII revisionist sites, in the forums of Protocols-obsessed David Icke, and on one of the Internet’s most notorious conspiracy theory cesspools. Note how quickly the writers transition from the theory itself into how it undermines the legitimacy of the Jewish State.”

UPDATE: Asked if J Street agrees that Israelis are not linked to so-called ‘real’ Jews, J Street spokesperson Jessica Rosenblum offered a snide rejection of Duss’ remarks.

“It confounds common sense for you to even ask me this, but because you used to be a journalist, here’s my answer: J Street believes that Israelis are real Jews,” Rosenblum said. “Our advocacy for a two-state solution is driven by our commitment to ensuring Israel’s future as a democratic and Jewish homeland.”

She added: ““Are you Adam Kredo looking to prove yourself as big a dumbass as Omri?”

An earlier version of this article erroneously said that Serge Duss would be speaking at this year’s conference.

## **Commentary**

### **Commentary: J Street Evangelicals Use Conference to Push Anti-Semitic Tropes**

*Omri Ceren (3/23/2012)*

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2012/03/23/j-street-evangelicals-conference-push-anti-semitic-tropes/>

As this year's J Street conference begins, I've obtained a speech from last year's—from a conference panel called “Working with Christian Communities Towards a Room Two-State Solution.” The speaker in question is Serge Duss, Director of the New Century Evangelicals Project, and the theory at issue is that modern Jews are not descended from Biblical Jews:

The misconception that most Evangelicals have, particularly conservative Evangelicals – I consider myself a progressive Evangelical – is what we learned in Sunday school. And what we learned in Sunday school about the Old Testament and particularly King David, we have carried forward three, four, five thousands years, where there is a belief that the modern state of Israel and modern Israelis are the extension of the Children of Israel of the Old Testament. You, only you – I can't, but only you can disabuse Evangelicals of that mythology. How many rabbis I've heard say in settings, ‘We are not the Hebrews, the Children of Israel of the Old Testament’? And unless conservative Evangelicals particularly hear that message from Jews in America today and Israelis in Israel, minds will not be changed.

Under the most innocent reading Duss was merely calling for J Street's Jewish attendees to use their Jewish identity to undermine support for Israel. That would be a telling advocacy, and here it's worth noting that J Street organizers appreciated Duss so much that they brought him back this year. Instead of trying to expand the pro-Israel tent to include more people, J Street seems committed to isolating Israel and Israelis by undermining existing their support from American Jews and Christians.

But there's very little innocent here. Denying the connection between ancient and modern Jews is, according to conspiracy theory expert Bob Blaskiewicz, “a precursor to the type of rationalization of Christian Identity theology, that the ‘Jews’ are imposters claiming the Chosen People status properly owned by the white American Christian male.” It's a scientifically disproven canard that anti-Semites have used for centuries to disinherit Jews theologically and politically.

At its most explicit, the theory holds that contemporary Jews are descendents of non-Semitic Khazars who converted to Judaism. The Anti-Defamation League has an extended background on how the claim has played out in modern anti-Semitic movements. You can find it in the wild on Holocaust-denying WWII revisionist sites, in the forums of Protocols-obsessed David Icke, and on one of the Internet's most notorious conspiracy theory cesspools. Note how quickly the writers transition from the theory itself into how it undermines the legitimacy of the Jewish State.

Duss's notion that "modern Israelis are [not] the extension of the Children of Israel of the Old Testament" has entered the leftwing anti-Israel evangelical world via at least two routes. Among Christian Palestinians the Khazar theory has long been promoted by Mazin Qumsiyeh, who is heavily tied to the anti-Israel Arab Christian circuit. In the United States it was picked up by the Israel-Palestine Mission Network, a particularly nasty organ of the Presbyterian Church USA, and inserted into booklets based on a 2008 book by Israeli professor Shlomo Sand. From Sand it hopped elsewhere in the evangelical world, until by 2010 you had Palestinian Lutheran minister Mitri Raheb declaring at an evangelical conference that he's descended from King David while Netanyahu has no Jewish blood and "comes from an East European tribe who converted to Judaism in the Middle Ages."

Duss was a little ambiguous in his J Street speech, so no one knows whether he was specifically gesturing toward the Khazar theory and its political implications. It's not impossible that Duss was just being metaphorical. Instead of intentionally using an anti-Semitic dog whistle to undermine American evangelical support for Israel, he would have been vaguely invoking a classically anti-Semitic trope to undermine American evangelical support of Israel.

Either way, by the standard J Street president Jeremy Ben-Ami set when he condemned the imagery in Netanyahu's AIPAC speech, even metaphorical anti-Semitism would still leave J Street deeply complicit.

## **Commentary**

### **Commentary: J Street Failure Reflected at Conference**

*Omri Ceren (3/23/12)*

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2012/03/23/j-street-conference-failure-influence/>

J Street is holding their annual policy conference this weekend, and the group duly requested speakers from the White House and the Israeli embassy in Washington DC. The results are unspinnable. The Israelis let J Street cool its heels until this week before dispatching deputy chief of mission Barukh Binah. Binah recently concluded a stint in Jerusalem as a Foreign Ministry deputy director-general, in which capacity he publicly castigated J Street for dishonestly manufacturing an anti-Israel publicity stunt, then building an entire media campaign around the stunt, then fabricating an Israeli apology related to the stunt. Sending him to be the embassy's speaker was not the world's most subtle move. The White House's announcement of its surrogate, the vice president's national security adviser Tony Blinken, left Ben-Ami bitterly complaining that the choice was a snub. He's right. Blinken, for all that he is an experienced hand, is several rungs below U.S. National Security Adviser Jim Jones, who appeared at the first J Street conference and left J Street boosters musing about the group's potential power.

J Street has gone from fantasies of being the anti-AIPAC to complaining publicly about its diminished influence. The spiral was a function of many things, but mostly of the group aggressively pushing counterproductive, failed, and toxic policies in Israel, in Congress, and in the media.

Israelis were always skeptical of J Street, even as the group was embraced by the Obama White House as the President's anti-Israel enabler. Israeli embassy officials declared that J Street was damaging Israel, was "a unique problem," and was "fooling around" with Israeli lives. When J Street's founder and president Jeremy Ben-Ami publicly insisted upon Ambassador Oren's presence at the group's first conference he was rebuffed, leading Ben-Ami's White House allies to attack Israel over the snub in Israeli media outlets (reports from the conference justified Israeli skepticism). Last year Israel's minister for public diplomacy and Diaspora affairs flatly called J Street anti-Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu won't take meetings with the group's delegations.

In the meantime J Street's public campaigns – many implemented with tone-deafness and some with frankly shocking incompetence – eroded its Congressional support.

Its embrace of Richard Goldstone was followed by a fumbled cover-up. Its support of anti-Israel U.N. campaigns triggered a fistfight with Congressional allies. Its defense of anti-Semitic rhetoric is seeping in this weekend's conference. Its coordination with pro-Iran lobbies has been unreal. Its stance on Cast Lead angered Israeli victims' organizations..

J Street officials got caught misleading reporters on overseas Arab and Muslim funding and then launched a clumsy spin campaign. Then they got caught misleading other reporters about Soros funding and launched another clumsy spin campaign. When the group did its fundraising in public it was for yet another effort to pressure Obama into pressuring Israel.

On a smaller scale J Street launched campaigns to defend anti-Israel media campaigns and anti-Israel art and anti-Israel artists. Its PR flak defended Mary Robinson. It brought into the fold an apologist for the Muslim students who went after Ambassador Oren at UC Irvine. A J Street delegation held meetings with Palestinian diplomats in Ramallah on the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day over Israeli objections and then Ben-Ami bragged about the trip in the Jerusalem Post. One of their board members met with Hamas.

Unsurprisingly the group has become toxic in Congress. Associating with J Street costs votes and chills relationships.

As a small example: last year some House Republicans threatened to defund the Palestinian Authority. The move was opposed with various degrees of publicity by Democrats, the White House, and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. J Street ostentatiously launched a three-month public campaign to push back, which culminated in 44 Democratic signatures on a letter. 44 is 10 fewer Democrats than J Street secured for far more controversial 2010 letter calling on Obama to pressure Israel on the Gaza siege, which J Street had to lobby for by proxy.

This time J Street was too weak to directly push on an open door in Congress. The White House and its political liaisons undoubtedly noted as much.

J Street and other anti-Israel Jewish groups will never totally collapse. They will always have a constituency, and that constituency will always pretend that they're on the cusp of influencing the policy discussion. But everyone else seems to be tired of pretending that J Street is anything but a particularly elegant case study of how fringe progressive collapses under its own weight.

## **Commentary**

### **Commentary: J Street Defends OWS's Anti-Semitism**

*Omri Ceren (3/21/2012)*

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2012/03/21/j-street-clumsy-defense-occupy-wall-street-anti-semitism/>

It's always difficult to untangle when J Street officials actually believe in the anti-Israel policies and anti-Semitic rhetoric that they push and defend, and when they're just following the commands of donors. The group's president Jeremy Ben-Ami raised eyebrows by voluntarily injecting himself on the side of anti-Jewish language during the "Israel-Firster" debate, and then later it turned out that J Street had a potential financial incentive to take that stance. On the other hand the group and its partisans seem genuinely enthused about rolling out the red carpet for Peter Beinart and his exhortation to economically suffocate Israelis who don't live where he tells them. As for J Street's call on Obama to pressure Israel in the aftermath of the Flotilla even though the Israelis were in the right on self-defense, that simply had an incoherence borne of conflicted priorities.

So it's impossible to know which dynamic — donor pressure or personal passion — was at work when J Street officials defended Occupy Wall Street from criticism of its disgraceful and extensively documented anti-Semitism. In favor of the donor theory, there's the fact that J Street funder George Soros backed Occupy. On the side of the labor of love theory, there turn out to be deep sociological, institutional, and personal ties between pro-Occupy radicals and J Street officials — so much so that those radicals are now officially "partnering" with J Street on this weekend's conference.

Most likely it was a little of Column A and a little of Column B, with J Street officials being genuinely sympathetic but wary about the optics of supporting yet another group of anti-Semites.

The debate revolves around a statement by self-declared "Jewish leaders" who, per the statement title, set out to "Denounce Right-Wing Smears of Occupy Wall Street." The piece specifically attacked the Emergency Committee for Israel, a J Street *bête noire* and a major force behind the electoral wipe out of J Street candidates in the 2010 election. Ben-Ami's name was one of about a dozen on the bottom of the statement, and the press contact for the entire release was J Street VP Carinne Luck.

The upcoming conference will have a core, recognized, pro-Occupy new media presence. The leftwing Jewschool site recently announced that it was going to "partner with J Street" on the conference, including dispatching sponsored bloggers to cover the events. Jewschool actively pushed Occupy and continues to do so, with the most recent

sympathetic post getting published just last week. “We are the 99%,” declared another post. An admittedly inaccurate Google site search for “occupy wall street” turns up over 700 hits.

It turns out that J Street officials and Jewschool officials have demonstrably been cooperating to insulate Occupy. For instance, an early version of J Street’s toe-in-the-water press release was published on a site called Occupy Judaism (later versions had additional press contacts). Daniel Sieradski, founding publisher and former editor-in-chief of Jewschool owns the site. I’d direct you to the original statement on Sieradski’s site but the whole blog was taken down some time this morning, after I searched for it and found it last night. Luckily it’s still cached here.

J Street officials and Jewschool activists have long worked together to paper over the anti-Semitism of Occupy Wall Street, albeit sometimes with each being once removed from their home organizations. It would be hard to think of two more appropriate “partners” for the J Street conference.

## **Left-wing Blogs**



## **972 Magazine: J Street third annual conference marks shift to the right**

*Moriel Rothman (3/28/2012)*

<http://972mag.com/j-street-3rd-annual-conference-marks-shifts-to-the-right/39491/>

I have attended all three J Street conferences since the organization formed in 2008 with the dual objectives of pushing the US government to take an active role in bringing about a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and changing the discourse within the mainstream American Jewish community to one that is more open, critical, value-driven and, yes, left-wing. J Street was the only major Jewish organization I knew of willing to criticize the insanity of that “war” and of other Israeli policies. Following J Street’s first conference in October of 2009, I decided to throw my lot in with this new movement, and remained deeply involved until I graduated college in May of last year.

This year, I attended J Street’s third national conference as a Jerusalem-based activist who has shifted further left after spending more and more time in the Occupied Territories. Meanwhile, J Street has swung right in an effort to gain more acceptance and recognition by the mainstream American Jewish Community. J Street’s shift began last September when the organization issued a statement in support of a US Veto of the Palestinian bid for independence in the UN Security Council. This decision came more from a desire not to draw the fury of the mainstream than from any sort of policy position. Only eight months earlier, J Street issued a statement against the US Veto of a UN resolution condemning settlements, writing that “we cannot support a U.S. veto of a Resolution that closely tracks long-standing American policy...”

J Street drew a lot of heat for this decision, but its conference last year, Giving Voice to Our Values,” featured speakers who did not fit neatly into the American Jewish mainstream’s version of what a kosher pro-Israel conference should look like, including Izzaldin Abueleish, a Palestinian doctor from Gaza whose daughters were killed in the Gaza war, and Sara Benninga, an Israeli activist who spoke of the joint struggle in occupied Sheikh Jarrah. Along with the usual collection of two-state liberal Zionists (including me), its panels featured Palestinian and Arab journalists, and even JVP director Rebecca Vilkomerson, who advocates boycotts, divestments and sanctions against Israel.

Since September, J Street has basically been maintaining party-line, cautioning against war on Iran and reaffirming its opposition to BDS, but this recent conferencespoke unsettlingly of the shifting priorities of the organization’s leadership.

First, the opening speakers were all Israeli Jews. Amos Oz, the only one of them to address the substance of the conflict, spoke eloquently about the need for a resolution to the conflict, using the metaphor of “divorce” between Israelis and Palestinians. The crowd was, from what I could tell, was very excited. Some that I spoke to were glowing:

“That was the best speech I have ever heard.”

Afterwards, however, I spoke to a number of people who were less thrilled: “All of these attempts to inspire us are kind of... silly,” said a J Street member from Texas.

Some from the latter camp felt that feel-goodness of the three speakers was not an appropriate tone for the opening of a conference about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2012.

“Oz’s speech,” an Israeli activist attending the conference said to me, “was full of the problematic discourse of the 1990s-Oslo-era; there are two parties who need to be separated, two parties who are “equally right,” two sides that need to change, and “divorce” into two states. Maybe that formula was more accurate in 1993, but any observer of the conflict today knows very well that there are not two equal parties to this conflict.” Nonetheless, Oz is a respected, left-wing figure, whose values are certainly in line with much of J Street’s constituency, now or two years ago.

The panels and plenaries continued in a similar vein, with general enthusiasm from the crowd and the majority of the panels were filled with very intelligent-if-vanilla Liberal Zionist Two-Staters, and a smattering of uninteresting Israeli Politicians, a few Obama officials, and a few less-Liberal Zionists like Rabbi Donniel Hartmann (author of a recent piece arguing that Israel’s political assassinations are “Tikkun Olam,” repairing the world).

The main panel on Monday morning did include Mustafa Barghouti, who in no uncertain terms described the Occupation as colonialism and apartheid and challenged the notion that a two state solution is truly possible. Negotiations today, Barghouti said, are more like “two people arguing over a piece of cheese, while one them is locked behind bars and the other is eating the cheese.”

His challenging statements received substantial applause from the audience. As someone I met told me, “people here were thirsty for a Palestinian perspective, which they never get to hear- that’s why all of the questions at the end were directed at Barghouti.”

There were also a number of not-necessarily-Zionist or necessarily-not-Zionist groups and individuals scattered throughout the panels (B’Tselem, JustVision, and a small handful of other Palestinians, including +972’s Aziz Abu Sarah). But these voices were few among many, a shrub of leftist discourse in a forest of comfortable cheerleading, with one notable, horrifying redwood towering above it all.

I came to J Street was because I was so disturbed, like many of my peers, by Operation Cast Lead. So it was quite disturbing to learn that J Street had chosen to honor the Israeli

Prime Minister responsible for the war crimes perpetrated in Gaza (not to mention the financial crimes for which he has been indicted in Israel) at this conference. The final event of the conference, the Gala Dinner, was concluded with a speech by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who positioned himself squarely within J Street's camp. "J Street," he cried, "is a legitimate organization!" He received a standing ovation from a significant part of the crowd, even though a number of people had expressed to me reservations about this choice of speaker.

When I asked Ben Ami why they had decided to honor Olmert, he responded that Olmert brings "power for getting J Street's message out, a message for the critical urgency [of the Two State Solution]. This is the most important thing we can do." He added, "in a country that has been through the wars and challenges that Israel has faced, the people who will lead it to peace are those who have led it through war, Begin, Rabin, Sharon and Olmert."

I get it. J Street's goal is to be an effective political voice in DC, and to bring the mainstream American Jewish community further left on this issue. I get that politics involve compromise, and I get that the American Jewish community's thinking on Israel has become so warped that criticisms of Israeli policy sound to many of them like existential threats. I do not expect J Street to issue papers against Israel's Jewish Law of Return or challenge the ways in which Israel within the green line has become infested with racism and oppression- that is not J Street's role. But there need to be red lines. If J Street's potential can be split into two categories: political success on one hand and building a strong, value-based community on the other, I am afraid that J Street is steering more towards the former, at the expense of the latter.

Even the most confident Two Stater must realize that no change will come from the American side of things until, at earliest, the year following Obama's reelection (if, God willing). The conference should have been called something more modest, perhaps: "Building Community."

And there was a sense of community. J Street's space, both physically and intellectually, continues to be an amazing meeting point for a lot of people genuinely concerned with ending the conflict. But according to some attendees, myself included, it should have included more Palestinian figures, more One-Staters, and, as it did last year, representatives of the BDS Movement, not necessarily as an endorsement, but as a recognition that the left-wing discourse needs to be broad and challenging.

However, J Street will not catch up to AIPAC in terms of money, membership or power in time to stave off Israel's process of Apartheidization. The only thing J Street has over AIPAC is our system of values. And this system of values must be stronger than the temptation to ally with people responsible for war crimes, as "politically/strategically valuable" as such an act might seem. While I think that many left the conference feeling excited and invigorated, I and some others left deeply concerned.

If we lose sight of our leftist values, I think we will lose what is left of our value.



## **AntiWar: J Street Stresses Return to Stalled Talks**

*Mitchell Plitnick (3/28/12)*

<http://original.antiwar.com/mitchell-plitnick/2012/03/27/j-street-stresses-return-to-stalled-talks/>

At the third annual conference of J Street, the “pro-Israel, pro-peace” lobby group that is widely seen as a counterweight to the more right-wing American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Israel-Palestine conflict took the focus back from the ongoing tension with Iran.

There was much talk of Iran at the Washington conference, but J Street intended to shift attention back to the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has successfully focused international attention on Iran, pushing the Palestinian issue off the agenda.

Controversy swirled even before the conference began. Peter Beinart, whom J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami dubbed the “troubadour of our movement,” had published an op-ed calling for boycotting products from Israeli settlements on the West Bank.

J Street does not agree with this proposal, and Ben-Ami criticized Beinart’s proposal heavily. With Beinart using the J Street conference to launch his new book, this made for some awkward moments, and when the issue came up at one of the plenary sessions, the crowd was evenly split among supporters and opponents of Beinart’s idea.

J Street was also criticized in some circles, especially by Palestinian civil society groups, for having former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as its highest-profile speaker.

The leading U.S. Jewish periodical, *The Forward*, published an op-ed criticizing J Street for bringing Olmert, whom many, including Israeli human rights organizations, have accused of war crimes in Lebanon in 2006 and in Gaza in 2008-09, and who left office under the cloud of a corruption investigation.

The Israeli government faced criticism last year for refusing to participate in J Street’s conference. It decided this time to send the deputy head of mission from Israel’s U.S. embassy, Baruch Binah, to address the audience and admonish them for putting pressure on Israel. This stood in sharp contrast to calls for open dialogue from virtually all other speakers.

After having sent his national security adviser to J Street's first conference and his top Middle East negotiator to their last one, President Obama sent the vice president's top foreign-policy adviser, Anthony Blinken, and his own key spokesperson, Valerie Jarrett, who has little involvement in Middle East matters, to this conference. These choices were widely seen as a sign that the administration was being very cautious about J Street.

Jarrett's speech was largely devoted to campaigning for the president's re-election in November and hardly touched on foreign policy at all.

Blinken's was mostly a reiteration of Obama's talk at AIPAC, focusing on Obama's strong support for Israeli security, the strengthening of U.S.-Israeli military coordination and cooperation that has been called "unprecedented," and on Obama's insistence that he will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon but intends to exhaust other options before turning to a military one.

"Later this year, [the United States and Israel] will conduct the largest joint exercise ever," Blinken said. "Despite fiscal challenges, President Obama has requested \$3.1 billion [in military aid to Israel] for 2013, the most ever."

On Iran, Blinken noted, "Iranian nuclear weapons pose a security threat to the United States as well. That's why President Obama said we do not have a policy of containment but are committed to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons.

"This 'loose talk of war' ... is incredibly counterproductive. It drives up oil prices, taking money from us and putting it in Iran's pocket. ... We believe it is possible to be smart and tough at the same time."

Neither Blinken nor Jarrett gave any indication of new or renewed initiatives designed to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. But former U.S. ambassador to Israel and Egypt Daniel Kurtzer offered some ideas as to how to move forward.

"Why not suggest Obama Parameters that say this where you start because this is where you left off?" Kurtzer said.

This echoes the "Clinton Parameters," which former President Bill Clinton laid down for the two parties in December 2000 at the end of his second term in office and in the wake of the failure of the Camp David II peace summit to produce results several months earlier.

Kurtzer suggested that Obama sum up all the results of prior negotiations, modify them for current realities and present them as a starting point for new talks.

"Within the context of negotiations, we should be pushing both sides to do what they said they would do in the Roadmap in 2002," Kurtzer said, referring to the "Roadmap for Peace" developed by President George W. Bush.

“Freeze settlements, permit Palestinian mobility in order to build their economy, destroy the infrastructure of Palestinian terrorism, and build the infrastructure of a Palestinian state. These are requirements two sides accepted, and in the context of negotiations, we should demand they fulfill them.”

Kurtzer also criticized the United States’ approach to dealing with Hamas, which the U.S. designates as a terrorist group and which controls the Gaza Strip. “On one hand we demanded elections, but when Palestinians had them, we walked away because we didn’t like the results.”

Hamas won a majority of Parliamentary seats in the 2006 Palestinian elections. Since then, the United States and Israel have imposed conditions — acceptance of Israel’s right to exist, renunciation of violence, and acceptance of all prior agreements entered into by the Palestinian Authority — for dealing with Hamas as a part of the Palestinian government.

“I think it’s fair to ask Hamas to comply with those conditions,” Kurtzer said. “The question is whether they are etched in stone or is Hamas given a path to follow. Hamas is charged with maintaining a ceasefire in Gaza. They may not do a good job, but they have the charge, so how do we encourage Hamas to continue, instead of just waiting at the finish line.”

The conference itself was saturated with calls to avoid despair, a reflection of the stalled peace process and diminishing hopes for the two-state solution that J Street is dedicated to.

“In 1967, David Ben-Gurion [Israel’s first prime minister] said we have to give back the West Bank and Gaza,” said Avishai Braverman, a member of Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, from the Labor Party. “It’s clear today that we must partition the holy land as soon as possible, because otherwise we will have either one majority Arab state or Arabs will not have rights.”

Knesset member Zehava Golan, the head of the left-wing Meretz Party, was more direct. “Today [the fight within Israeli society] is between those who protect Israeli democracy and those who would sacrifice democracy for a messianic vision. They are willing to keep the land and control of millions of Palestinians at the cost of Israel’s democratic character,” he said.

“Oppressing millions of people for so long is first of all abusive to the Palestinians but also erodes the democratic principles of Israel. Those who think we can do this and maintain democracy are delusional. ... Democracy and human rights cannot coexist with the occupation of another people.”



## **972 Magazine: What's wrong with J Street – an open letter to members**

*Dr. Naftali Kaminski (3/27/12)*

<http://972mag.com/whats-wrong-with-j-street-an-open-letter-to-members/39436/>

Dear friends,

I was among the founding members of the J Street Chapter of Pittsburgh. I attended the two previous conferences and was very active in organizing and initiating events. Over the last year, I gradually grew disillusioned and a few months ago I decided not to continue my activism with J Street. I never thought of addressing this publicly but several exchanges with friends and supporters of J Street made me aware that I am not alone in my disillusionment, that others shared my concerns and doubts but were reluctant to comment publicly out of a concern that public criticism may hurt the organization.

I now feel that the lack of public challenge to J Street leadership by members and activists is hurting J Street. J Street has become so shielded in its own conversation and articulate rationalizations that it is running the risk of becoming (or maybe it already is) a more palatable version of AIPAC, or a wealthier but still highly irrelevant version of “Ameinu.” To avoid this risk, J Street will need to address three major problems:

1. Inability to influence Congress: J Street's most obvious failure was probably its most predictable. The rise of an ultra-right wing government in Israel in 2009 and the Republican victory in the mid-term elections virtually eliminated J Street as an effective lobbying organization that affects policy through campaign funding. J Street, identified with the Democrats and President Obama, does not have much access to the newly elected Republicans. In May 2011, the 29 standing ovations that Netanyahu's hardline speech received in Congress were symbolic of AIPAC's power and pronounced J Street's lobbying strategy dead. The fact that among those cheering for Netanyahu were representatives supported by progressive donors demonstrated how futile our lobbying efforts were. Considering the low likelihood of success, it would be prudent for J Street donors to cut their losses and channel their funding towards more promising channels – such as funds for alternative and progressive Jewish education in the United States, support for civil society in Israel, and pro-peace media outlets in Israel.

2. Double-speak: One of the main concerns with J Street from the onset was what may be perceived as a double deceit – to its supporters, J Street tries to hint that it is more to the left than it acknowledges outright, and to the Jewish establishment that it is more to the right than it is generally perceived. This is very evident in J Street conferences, when the speakers who earn the loudest cheers are those who express views that are to the left of the organization.

This double-speak just occurred, in fact, in response to the furor that erupted when Peter Beinart, a featured speaker in the conference, called for a boycott on the settlements. The organization's president, Jeremy Ben-Ami, who had previously called Beinart "Our Troubadour," launched a process of damage control, and in an interview made sure to state that he did not like Beinart's recent book (also featured at the conference). Israeli author Amos Oz, another featured speaker, also supports a settlement boycott. Oz and Beinart are the main draws of this year's conference. Unfortunately, this double deceit does not really work – the Jewish establishment sees through it, as do many J Street supporters who are, frankly, embarrassed by Ben-Ami's maneuvers.

Another example was J Street's controversial endorsement of the Obama Administration's decision to veto the Palestinian UN bid for statehood, a position as egregious as the vetoes the Russians are now threatening against Security Council decisions on Syria. Fearing a severe response from the Jewish community, J Street decided to endorse the veto, despite their recognition that this would virtually close the last window of opportunity on the two-state solution, leaving the obvious impression that they were far less concerned with the positions of their supporters than with avoiding the wrath of the Jewish mainstream.

3. A disconnect from Israel: Beyond the editorial pages of Ha'aretz, very few people in Israel are as passionate or preoccupied with the two-state solution as J Street. This disconnect was perfectly exemplified this summer when hundreds of thousands Israelis protested for social justice. In the United States, J Street activists were involved in the "Two-State Summer" campaign, which would have been right on point 15 years ago. On a recent visit to Israel, I discovered a rare consensus among my politically involved friends: the right-wingers were openly advocating for annexation of the West Bank – a one-state solution – as were my lefty friends. Virtually everybody agreed that a separation based on the 1967 borders was not feasible anymore. Thus, J Street's insistence on a solution, instead of the principles by which a solution should be reached, seems anachronistic and not in tune with the concerns of Israelis and Palestinians. J Street's disconnect from Israeli public opinion was also illustrated when it invited former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to be a featured speaker. Olmert is now standing trial for multiple counts of corruption. He is extremely unpopular, having led Israel to two wars - the failed Second Lebanon War and the criminal and politically motivated war on Gaza. The decision to have him as a featured speaker is interpreted as a display of disrespect towards the Israeli legal system and a failure to recognize the disgust Israelis feel over corruption.

Although the Jewish community needs an organization like J Street, it does not really need one that so closely resembles its neighbors on K Street. What the Jewish community does need is a grassroots movement that adheres to a set of ethical principles to guide a just and equitable solution to the Middle East conflict. With a grassroots foundation, the leaders of such a movement will be liberated from the need to pander to the right and able to forcefully represent an engaged and empowered community of supporters. J Street needs must be more democratic to survive and sustain relevance. This will only happen if like-minded members create a progressive caucus within J Street, forcing the leadership to pay attention to members' views and dramatically enhance the weight of grassroots activism at the expense of top-down campaigning and traditional

Washington lobbyism. If membership fails to do so, beltway politics and DC talking point memos will dominate. As we all know, those never drove change and never will. Dr. Naftali Kaminski is an Israeli physician, scientist and expert on genomics, living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was born and raised in Israel and moved to Pittsburgh in 2002. Dr. Kaminski has been a member of the Middle East Peace Forum of Pittsburgh and was among the founding members of the J Street Chapter of Pittsburgh. He is no longer active with J Street. Dr. Kaminski writes at the Middle-East Peace Blog.

## **Mondoweiss: 'J Street' review– mixed, but positive**

*Philip Weiss (3/27/12)*

<http://mondoweiss.net/2012/03/j-street-review-mixed-but-positive.html>

I spent half the time at the J Street conference with my eyes misting over and the other half wishing that Code Pink would come in and disrupt the proceedings with angry protest. And that's without even going to see Ehud Olmert, the man who launched the Gaza massacre, last night. I couldn't bring myself.

This is the third year I have been to the J St conference and every time I find myself inspired. This year I saw Mustapha Barghouti speak repeatedly of apartheid in a room jammed with 500 people. You could hear a pin drop. I heard several Palestinians explain patiently to American Jews the insult in the idea that Israel should be a Jewish state, I heard one Israeli Knesset member, Zehava Galon, call repeatedly for a democracy in Israel without saying Jewish democracy. I watched in awe as an Israeli activist named Amitai ben-Abba did what no American Jew could bring him or herself to do, but start shouting at a member of Knesset about the ethnic cleansing of Al-Arakib and finish with the scream, that he should end the racist Jewish National Fund. I heard repeated descriptions of racism and extremism in Israeli society and of the necessity of dealing with Hamas.

I almost never heard the word Iran. I saw a crowded room discuss the one state solution with respect, a mile from Capitol Hill. I heard several speakers call for targeted boycott of the settlements. I heard Jane Eisner of the Forward urging Jews to "absorb" the fact that we are no longer a victimized minority but "a group with extraordinary wealth, social status and political power." Amen.

These are all expressions of the enlightened and moral movement inside progressive Jewish life. If you are going to pull together hundreds of Jewish youth and talk about the Jewish future, well--you had better be talking about racism in Israel.

But make no mistake: J Street is not a democratic organization. As Bruce Wolman (who also attended the conference and will be writing about it here) said, The early Zionist congresses were democratic affairs; there is not a shred of democracy in J Street. J Street is an organization that exists to gain access in Washington and shift the policy. And the deciders are not the people in the one state discussion, they are the rabbis and other community elders who still govern the Jewish communal discourse in the U.S. and by

extension the larger political discourse on the Middle East. This group is enormously conservative and they don't want change, and J Street has to placate them.

So J Street's official face is conservative. On the main stage, a rabbi named Donniel Hartman, says that Israel lives in a "difficult, crappy neighborhood" (sorry rabbi, that's racist) and a Nation contributor and former Democratic operative, Ilyse Hogue, laments that the Gilad Shalit deal gave power to Hamas.

And of course the keynote speaker last night was Ehud Olmert, who launched the Gaza slaughter and is almost certainly guilty of war crimes for indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets that resulted in the killings of over 300 children. (Not so different from Assad's methods, for which we all believe he should be in the dock.) And J Street's leader, Jeremy Ben-Ami, made a point of opposing boycott just before the conference began in an interview he granted to the Israeli mouthpiece Jeffrey Goldberg, thereby opposing Peter Beinart, one of the conference's star attractions. We can be sure that Ben-Ami took Beinart aside and said, "Peter, I had to say that. You know personally I'm on your side." Such is the nature of the monolithic Jewish discourse.

I should be thankful to J Street, and I am, that it did not go in for Jeffrey Goldberg's Iran fear mongering and Netanyahu pandering. Today J Street lobbyists are hitting the hill asking Congressmen to sign a letter that calls for diplomacy with Iran. J Street is working hard to stop the next crazy war. (Though J Street has not opposed Aipac's militant letter; and its two state letter takes pains to describe the one state solution as an extremists' concoction, both right and left).

I am thankful to J Street that it filled a room with more than 500 Jews to hear about the one state solution, and that those people were utterly quiet as Mustafa Barghouti described apartheid, over and over again. That moment was liberating. It will allow Jodi Rudoren, the next Times correspondent, to write about apartheid on the front page of the New York Times (mark my word).

Still I am not entirely sure what J Street's game is. The Obama administration sent up Tony Blinken, Joe Biden's foreign policy adviser, to address the crowd and when J Street complained about the insult, sent along Valerie Jarrett, Obama's longtime political aide. Jarrett and Blinken are chopped liver next to what AIPAC gets, the president himself and Hillary Clinton, an ambassador or two, and the whole Democratic leadership grinning and kneeling. The Democratic Party and the Obama administration are crapping on J Street-- J Street which was born to give Obama his back when he took on the fight.

So J Street has been loyal to Obama through thin and thin and Obama has done nothing to breathe political life into this organization.

J Street is the opposite of Astroturf. It has the movement in the halls, but the movement doesn't get to vote. If the people in the rooms got to vote on targeted boycott they would carry it by 60-40 or 70-30, was my impression. But they don't get to vote. The leadership of J Street is using the movement to do its outreach, to grow its membership, and meanwhile it plays an inside game, in an attempt to leverage the Jewish establishment to

the left by standing a step to the left of AIPAC. It is permitting far more freedom of speech on Palestinian human rights and the role of the lobby than the Center for American Progress ever would, but what it is doing for the movement? AIPAC buys off the young by promising to help them with their careers; and AIPAC can point to rewards it has brought to student government presidents. While J Street is seeking to give these young people spiritual and emotional rewards, by allowing them to believe in moral Jewish engagement on Israel's pervasive racism.

But I think they could get that feeling other places, without being passive as they are required to be here, with some actual power. And really the question is why they put up with it. Well, the students change from one year to another, the students move on, and as for the older people, there seemed to be fewer of them this year than ever. Some have responded cynically, J Street just wants to replace AIPAC on the left. It refuses to step outside the Jewish community and engage in real leverage on Israel-- say by calling for an end to American aid, which would be hugely popular with the American people (as Wolman reminded everyone he spoke to at the conference).

But that would be grassroots, and J Street loves the Washington power game. I'm going to stop on a very positive note. J Street is doing its best to prevent an Iran war and thus to keep Netanyahu from taking the Israel/Palestine conflict off the table for another five years. And Mustafa Barghouti is deeply grateful to J Street for giving him a forum in D.C. to talk about nonviolent struggle. To say the word resistance again and again, a few steps from Capitol Hill, and to have American Jews listen. That is real progress.

Bruce Wolman and I will have more reports from J Street panels in days to come.



## **Lobelog Foreign Policy: J Street Looking Less And Less Like A Potential Game-Changer**

*Mitchell Plitnick (3/27/12)*

<http://www.lobelog.com/j-street-looking-less-and-less-like-a-potential-game-changer/>

Four years ago, there was some hope in Washington that J Street, the self-proclaimed “pro-Israel, pro-peace” Jewish lobbying group, could someday provide a counterweight to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

No one expected J Street to seriously challenge AIPAC after just four years. But the organization’s track record to date gives some cause for concern with regard to the direction its heading in.

J Street has had some controversial missteps in its time. For example, its waffling on the Israeli attack on Gaza in 2008-09, and its dissembling response when it was revealed that left-wing magnate George Soros had been one of its key initial funders.

This time their investment in Peter Beinart presented a hurdle for them. Beinart published an op-ed in the *New York Times* calling for what he regrettably termed “Zionist BDS,” which is simply a new name for a policy long advocated by left-wing groups like Jewish Voice for Peace and more center-left groups like Americans for Peace Now. It basically advocates for the boycott of settlement products, services and venues.

Just a few days before Beinart appeared as one of the key figures at their conference, J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami gave an interview to Iran/Israel hawk Jeffrey Goldberg where he strongly criticized Beinart’s stance. The result, which became apparent when the issue came up during one of the plenaries, was a conference audience that was split over the issue.

This was not the only controversial event. J Street’s decision to feature former Israeli prime Minister Ehud Olmert brought criticism from Palestinian human rights groups, mostly in Gaza, who were concerned about this honor being bestowed on someone who they consider a war criminal. This also caused some problems for J Street’s ally group, B’Tselem, which works with many Palestinian human rights groups and was a participating organization in the conference.

One can argue about the pros and cons of these moves by J Street. But of greater concern is the question of whether J Street is really able to impact matters on Capitol Hill. At AIPAC's conference this year all the leading Republican presidential candidates (except for Ron Paul) spoke and were warmly welcomed. President Obama himself spoke to the crowd, as did his Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta. Leading members of Congress, including Mitch McConnell, Carl Levin, Nancy Pelosi, Eric Cantor and others were also featured.

For its part J Street got Anthony Blinken, who is Joe Biden's senior foreign policy aide, and key Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett, whose role has virtually no connection to Middle East policy. That might not seem so bad until you consider that Obama sent his National Security Adviser, Jim Jones, to J Street's first conference, and Middle East point man, Dennis Ross to its last one.

There is a clear decline in Obama's regard and concern for J Street being reflected here. Congress is no different. Yes, there was a congressional panel at J Street's conference. But the attendees, all Democrats, are not among those who are particularly influential on issues regarding Israel. Representatives Eddie Bernice Johnson, Barbara Lee, Jim McGovern, Chellie Pingree and David Price spoke at the conference, but will take little influence on J Street's issues back with them to the House of Representatives.

Some have noted that J Street's conference this year was more about connecting with Israel and establishing more firmly, in centrist eyes, its pro-Israel bona fides. Indeed, there certainly was a more distinctly Israeli feel about this conference. The most morally clear and persuasive speaker, to my ears, was newly-elected chairwoman of the left-Zionist Meretz Party, Zehava Galon. And there were several Knesset members present, some of whom are, like Amram Mitzna, fairly prominent.

Yet in the end all the Knesset members were from either the Labor Party or Meretz. Those two parties together control only 11 of the Knesset's 120 seats.

It's true that the Israeli embassy reversed their previous stance and sent an emissary to this year's conference. Ehud Olmert said, and J Street contends, that this is very important and perhaps it is. But one could also see it as a calculation which concludes that J Street is not much of a threat to the Netanyahu government's efforts in the US, and that the attempt to ostracize J Street does more to boost their position than a condescending speech like Baruch Binah's does.

Olmert's appearance might be considered significant as well. Yet Olmert has faded from public view in Israel because of the scandal which forced him from office three years ago. While the issue is certainly not one that is uncommon in Israeli politics, Olmert is the only Israeli Prime Minister to leave office due to such a scandal, and he is facing indictment.

Shimon Peres, who made the trip to appear at AIPAC, sent J Street a pep talk by video. So what are the prospects for J Street's future?

J Street has one reason to exist, and that is to change the playing field in Washington, to establish a real force that serves as another option to AIPAC and can cover elected officials who wish to support the policies that AIPAC opposes.

I've been to all three of their conferences, and each of the last two have felt like that goal was farther away than the one before. Polls suggest J Street represents the view of a silent majority of Jews and non-Jews, certainly among Democrats, and probably among old-time, realist-style Republicans. But it sure doesn't seem that way from the ground or at their conferences.

Most importantly, it doesn't look that way from Capitol Hill or Pennsylvania Avenue.



## **Jewscool: We Have Real Obstacles; Time to Leave Fear Behind**

*Josh Hyman (3/26/12)*

<http://jewscool.com/2012/03/26/28187/we-have-real-obstacles-time-to-leave-fear-behind/>

Ninety minutes to go before the Gala Reception, “a Ticketed Event.” I’ve spent the day puzzling, processing and arguing, a workout my brain hasn’t gotten in years. An event like this carries risk. You come here passionate, and your world views can be challenged. More than that: they will be challenged, try though you might to keep that part of your brain closed.

That’s partly because of the issue. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of history’s deepest mucks, and the two-state solution (which J Street does its best to promote, envision and implement) is a pair of quality all-weather shoes, but it is by no means a magic pair of shoes. It does not make the muck go away.

Everywhere we go is muck. We come here, a generation of high-energy, high-technology know-it-alls; we who elected a black President and invented Facebook and fought selflessly in Iraq and Afghanistan; and we pile over one another to get in the door and puzzle over this quagmire. For well over one hundred fifty years, two peoples have been nudging each other across a land, then being bought, carved up and turned violently against each other by Western empires, and finally making noises about trying to annihilate each other. We high-energy Millennials halfway around the world want nothing more than to make this problem go away, and we’re tenacious bastards.

But we’ve found ourselves trying to balance identity with justice, and that’s quite the Jewish conundrum. Kids my age like solutions, which is why we try so hard – we’re not used to failing with effort. The Jew in us wants to find the right away, and the Millennial in us JUST WANTS TO GO THERE GODDAMN NOW. Neither side will rest until it’s done.

So that’s nice and all. But it still leaves us with a Rubik’s cube. Every Jew sees this cube a little differently, and we all have to turn it and solve it somehow, together, using our 27 million or so hands. You can see the film of frustration, that special frustration that consensus requires, around every drop of hope. The reality is that we are just as seriously responsible for Israel’s very nature, as were its founders and forerunners. And the questions, on everything from our very right to do all this in the first place, to the nuances of interstate relations, still hang in the air unanswered from the time of Chaim Weitzmann.

Rabbi Donniel Hartman gave an interesting speech at the 3:50 Plenary last night. He talked about his spiritual connection to Eretz Yisrael, about his and our religious imperative to make it better; he spoke of shrinking ourselves. God, he said, shrunk Godself to make room for us, made as we are in God's image. So if we can shrink a little, to allow other options on the table, to allow other people to exist... then we can stop, maybe, attacking each other so much, as we do now, for we have as yet no room for each other.

But here my organizer brain jumps right back in and rips apart all this talk of talk. We do need all options on the table, but people are dying, for God's sake. They're dying in the name of our respective tribes, so their blood is, whether we like it or not, on our hands.

Aziz Abu Sarah, who has lost one brother and four cousins to the Israeli Occupation, shared his formula with us last night, learned from years of resentment followed by hard lessons in cooperation when he discovered that the Palestinians had Jewish supporters. If your house is on fire, Abu Sarah said, you have three options: you can run away, which most people do most of the time. You can form a committee of culpability, to see who was responsible for lighting the house on fire, while the fire burns your house down and probably sets your neighbors' houses on fire as well.

Or you can take a bucket and pour on some water, then grab a few friends and THEIR buckets, and you can, maybe, save the house. And if you're going to be a righteous person, you don't wait for your neighbor to grab his bucket first. Former US-Israel Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer implored us today to "expect – and demand – leadership from Washington, when there is no leadership from the region... This is the moment to take risks for peace," said the Ambassador. "We can't worry we might fail. We do this for the intrinsic importance of trying to succeed."

I think that's the key. We must not be afraid to contract AND to expand again, to back down from pointless attacks on our allies AND to be the first to act when there is a vacuum. Because people aren't predictable, and they will be a partner for peace only if you're not measuring their peaceable impulses every day with a yardstick, but rather restructuring their environment to make peace attractive. We're dealing with humans here, and humans are unreliable. So we cannot be too human. We must be reliable.

My girlfriend is from West Bengal, India. She introduced me this year to the works of Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Prize-winning composer of both India's and Bangladesh's national anthems. His most famous poem is called Ekla Chalo Re – "Walk Alone." Here it is:

If they answer not to thy call walk alone,  
If they are afraid and cower mutely facing the wall,  
O thou unlucky one,  
open thy mind and speak out alone.

If they turn away, and desert you when crossing the wilderness,

O thou unlucky one,  
trample the thorns under thy tread,  
and along the blood-lined track travel alone.

If they do not hold up the light when the night is troubled with storm,  
O thou unlucky one,  
with the thunder flame of pain ignite thy own heart  
and let it burn alone.

I was at a conference this weekend of thousands of American Jews who paid anywhere from \$36 to \$5000 for the privilege of finding some direction to walk from here. Because this fight is old, and we are sick of it. Most of all, we are sick of supposedly holy people accepting their own human fallibility and vilifying everyone else's.

We cannot be intimidated by AIPAC, by Bibi Netanyahu, nor by the Americans who say we are wasting our time and resources. We cannot be scared that the other side will not meet us halfway; sometimes, we may have to walk three-quarters. We cannot allow anyone to say that Israel has no partner for peace; because we are that partner.

Resistance to change among the old is predictable and we are meant to fight it. This is where evolution and God come together and whose purpose it is no longer matters. We must strip away the old paradigm through re-dedication of ourselves to solving this, once and for all. We can't dishonor the dead every day by talking and calling it action.

We have an obligation to create a permanent peace. I could write for hours on the speakers I heard (and they were fantastic); but I'd rather call those people whose business cards I got, the ones who created Israel's protest movement and who are working to make it an institutional protest, a change in Israel herself.

We are Israel and Israel is us – if not by birth, then by the fact that no one will ever be more her keeper than we. Let's go heal our country, by contracting where we must, and by expanding where we can. Let's build an unconditional peace by force, whether Israel's leaders want one now or not. I care less about Bibi's re-election, and more about my childrens' ability to live in Israel with their heads held high. Let's be arrogant Americans. It's what we do best, and I don't think our Israeli friends will mind, at the end of the day.

Lilah tov.



## **Think Progress: Retired Israeli Brig. General: Iran Debate ‘Plagued With Emotions’ And ‘A Lot Of Disinformation’**

*Ben Armbuster (3/26/12)*

<http://thinkprogress.org/security/2012/03/26/451594/brom-iran-debate-plagued-misinformation/?mobile=nc>

Speaking on a panel at J Street’s “Making History” conference yesterday, retired Israeli brigadier general Shlomo Brom, former director of strategic planning for the Israeli Defense Forces General Staff, complained that the debate on Iran’s nuclear program and whether to use military force is frenzied and beset with false claims. “The discourse is plagued with emotions ... and with a lot of disinformation,” he said.

As evidence, Brom singled out the use of holocaust metaphors to describe the Iranian threat and the fact that there is little discussion about the “political ramifications” of an attack on Iran. “I’m not so concerned about the military repercussions of a military attack,” he said, adding that he was more worried that an Israeli-initiated attack on Iran would damage the Jewish state’s relationship with the U.S. “The United States will have no choice but to be dragged into this conflict,” he said.

The Associated Press reported this month that many Israelis agree with Brom, saying the Holocaust imagery when discussing the Iran threat cheapens its memory and unnecessarily escalates tensions, particularly when President Obama is urging restraint. Opposition leader Tzipi Livni called Holocaust imagery when referring to the Iranian threat “hysterical.” Dan Halutz, a former Israeli military chief, said the Holocaust comparison was “out of place.”

However, that does not mean the Iranian nuclear program does not constitute a threat. In a recent speech, Obama warned that an Iranian bomb posed a threat to the U.S. and its allies, as well as the international non-proliferation regime. But at this point the Obama administration believes that a diplomatic end to the crisis is “best and most permanent way” to end the standoff.

More to Brom’s point, pundits and politicians regularly peddle the unconfirmed claim that Iran currently has a nuclear weapons program, but neither the IAEA, nor U.S. and Israeli intelligence — while warning that evidence suggests Iran is moving toward a nuclear weapons program — believe this to be the case.

As Brom noted, the Iran debate is also shrouded in hyperbole. GOP Presidential contender Rick Santorum accused Obama of purposely allowing Iran to acquire nuclear weapons and Rep. Michele Bachmann (R-MN) once falsely claimed that Iran said it wants to launch a nuclear weapons strike against the United States.

Obama said last year that the sanctions on Iran he worked to put in place are having an “enormous bite” and he recently warned that this kind of rhetoric and misinformation damages the “broad international coalition” his administration built to confront Iran through diplomacy.



## **Jewschool: Talking Divorce In Front of the Kids**

*Josh Hyman (3/25/12)*

<http://jewschool.com/2012/03/25/28121/talking-divorce-in-front-of-the-kids/>

Amos Oz is a wise older man. He appears to be the spiritual father of our movement (hey, I'm new here). He's also a refreshing, crisp speaker. It's maddening taking notes from a professional writer and orator; it makes you wish your fingers were phonograph needles and the paper was spinning vinyl. Tonight, he outlined for us idealistic youth the reasons Israel and Palestine need to go to their separate corners and cool down, eventually meeting back in the middle to shake and be okay. Or, as Oz put it: "Make peace, not love." Oz was the keynote speaker for the first night of J Street 2012, which is how I came to hear him talk divorce for Israel and Palestine, a divorce in which, he notes, "we'll still have to share the same house."

Oz started his two-state career by preaching peace and a Palestinian state to skeptical Jewish audiences here and in Eretz Yisrael. Back then, he says, he was marginalized from the right. Now, he comes to J Street – "Thank you, J Street; I have been waiting for you my entire adult life" – and he tells an audience of college students, activists and uber-activists that we are working for a slow, painful separation for Israel and Palestine. Rivals throughout history, he notes, don't embrace each other and then achieve peace. They make peace through "clenched teeth," and then, over the course of generations, hostilities subside.

It's a compelling message. But it's a hard message to swallow for a roomful of kids who have gone to school with Muslims and Arabs and who know them as friends, engineers, doctors, confidantes, sometimes romantic partners, and can't understand how their parents can see these human beings as the Other. It's a tricky thing to refocus on when, speaking for myself, I can't help but see the failure of peace as a failure to understand each other's humanity. I have to think about this one really carefully.

It's hard to imagine that our course is to create a practical, painful solution; in Oz's words, "a Chekhovian, not a Shakespearean, tragedy. Everybody is upset and disappointed and frustrated, and yet alive." That we would set those gears in motion, and then in three generations, the embassies Oz envisions in East and West Jerusalem for each other's respective sovereign countries will be filled with young Israelis and Palestinians whose grandparents laid down arms, and who are just now, in 2065 or so, starting to find common human ground. That, as Rabbi Tarfon taught, we "are not required to complete the task;" yet it feels like I've been told (by a very smart man) that I am not ALLOWED to complete the task. Grandpa can be a real buzzkill.

I organize people for a living, and I like to think that campaigns motivate people. Not the steady, smart legislative pressure of J Street on the governments of the US and Israel (though I know VERY well that those smart pressures are what make the real, incremental change that counts in this world). I ask myself: Without some unifying, overarching goal; without mass buy-in; without a vision of a peaceful partnership SOON, if not NOW; without these carrots, what motivates large masses of people to lean on politicians for long-term peace? Where is the buy-in, if the product isn't sexy?

Yet maybe that is a struggle worthy of our efforts. If the slogans need a little work, maybe a managed divorce can save the household. In any case, as Jeremy Ben-Ami, J Street's Founder and Chief Executive, put it, "as a Jew, you are simply not allowed to throw up your hands and walk away." Converging on the DC Convention Center, we are putting our hands back in our pockets and resolutely rejoining the conversation. I feel in great company.

I promised myself I would not (and my boss warned us to not) simply write who said what. But the speakers from the Opening Plenary outlined some great, plural strains of thought within the Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace movement. Stav Shaffir brought the house down with her simple, powerful argument to reclaim the "crazy dream" of Israel from the old guard. She would know – she literally set up tents in rich neighborhoods in Israel, inspiring the Occupy movement and bringing out a full one-tenth of Israel's population to demand social justice. She has reclaimed the dream and literally helped steer a country with it. My fellow-blogger Shiri leaned over after Stav's speech – Shiri worked with Palestinians in Israel for a year and a half, very recently – and remarked how hard it was to do what Stav did in Israel.

The kids do want reconciliation, and they're fighting hard for it. World-class hard; organizing-noticed-the-world-round hard. At the same time, their basic goal remains two states, separate but mutually acknowledging.

This will be a long journey, so long that we can't see what's around the next turn. But how can we not love having taken the first steps? And the crazy part is, now that we've taken the first baby steps, we have to run; or we'll never catch up to those bastards who claim to speak for Jews while insisting that blind patriotism is the only way to go. Patriotism, yes. Unity, yes. But, as Amos Oz noted (and I may be paraphrasing – I didn't catch the full string of epithets as it came out), "why unity behind those racist, imperialist nutjobs over at AIPAC?"

Heh. Awesome.

Fighting words, talk of divorce, tales of revolution and the #MakingHistory Twitter feed is already being attacked from the right and the left. And if I read the conference program right, we're just getting started. This is the Judaism I know and love – let the debates begin!



## **Jewschool: Some perspective on J Street, four years in**

*(3/24/2012)*

<http://jewschool.com/2012/03/24/28108/some-perspective-on-j-street-four-years-in/>

Some perspective: In 2006, the Second Intifada was barely tapering off. Peace fatigue was high – disbelief was even higher. Yet a plucky little organization composed of grassroots Jewish activists in dozens of cities across America was hard at work. No, this wasn't J Street. J Street would be founded a few years later by Washington veterans seeking to compliment this grassroots network. This was Brit Tzedek v'Shalom.

I was the New York City co-chair for Brit Tzedek and a board member in charge of online outreach. We had a budget of less than a half a million dollars. Our single paid organizer managed a membership of 36,000 across America and some two dozen sizable chapters. In NYC, my small activist team worked alone and overwhelmed in American's biggest Jewish community to be a pro-Israel, pro-peace voice. A national tour took Combatants for Peace, featuring former IDF soldiers and former Palestinian militants, to packed synagogues and JCCs across the country at a time actively hostile to peace. We held five annual conferences in Washington, DC. We were incredibly proud to have a whopping 300 attendees. Knesset leaders from Meretz and Labor sometimes came. Often our legislative meetings with Representatives and Senators were held in hallways and Congressional cafeterias.

The powers that be, namely AIPAC and allies, mostly ignored us for the minor fly that we were. Nobody campaigned against our membership in Jewish community boards or against our handful of campus chapters. But there was almost no discussion of peace and no place for pro-peace activism. At best, Jewish peace groups were quoted occasionally in the Jewish press. Americans for Peace Now was the press' obligatory throw away quote when they wanted a pro-peace perspective. Jewish Voice for Peace was even pithier. None of the organizations ventured far from matters directly of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When asked about Iran and Lebanon, we were all mum.

The Bush administration reigned, Arik Sharon was Prime Minister, and President Abbas was sidelined. Hope for a negotiated settlement was nil. When President Bush pushed for the Anapolis agreement, the peace groups were put in the odd situation of supporting it fully. In that period, the peace movement campaigned on small things, like demanding Bush appoint an envoy to the peace process, a position that had been budgeted but not appointed. (A position Obama filled his first month in office.) We fought hard for a pyrric victory of not halting US aid to Palestinian civil society entirely after Hamas was elected.

Compare that to today.

J Street has 160,000 supporters, a budget of \$7 million, 50 staff, an affiliated PAC and 501(c)4, and became in 2010 the largest single source of pro-Israel campaign contributions. J Street U and J Street Local are the mergers of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom's grassroots chapters (a unanimous decision that I was proud to vote in) and the campus network of the Union of Progressive Zionists. J Street is a media darling, quoted regularly opposite conservatives in the NY Times and every major paper and news network, with a Stephen Colbert interview to boot.

President Obama has sent an official delegate to the J Street conference all three times – national security advisor General James Jones in 2009, Dennis Ross last year, and this year Obama personal advisor Valarie Jarrett and Vice Presidential national security advisor Tony Blinken. With 2,500 attendees, it is the fourth or fifth largest gathering of Jews in America. Near every major legislator meets with us on the Hill, even if just to disagree. The conference is co-sponsored by dozens and dozens of Israeli, American and international organizations, most of which did not exist a decade ago and who rely on this conference as their convening space.

We, the leaders and supporters of J Street, are a hotly contended issue in every Jewish community across America — and the ire of Israel's right-wing. Mainline Jewish organizations fight tooth and nail in a losing battle to obstruct us from Hillels, JCRCs, and, according to Jeremy Ben-Ami, now the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish American Organizations. We are the definitive home of peace activism inside the community. Our relative small size compared to AJC, AIPAC and the federation system is belied by the obsessive scrutiny given to our actions and statements. Whereas mainline organizations are shrinking and losing young Jews, ours is burgeoning. No single organization can speak to the diverse views of the Jewish peace movement, we are the only institution within the halls of Congress, the White House, and Israeli-Palestinian policy makers.

The magnitude of these changes should not be forgotten by those expecting a quick and easy win. And similarly, gratitude for the peace movement's tremendous growth to date should neither broker laziness nor be taken for granted. We are all aware of the huge distances to go – the entrenched resistance of AIPAC and the evangelical community, the skepticism of a peace-tired and Palestinian-phobic American (Jewish) public, and the screaming fury of an increasingly marginalized right-wing American Jewry. And most of all, let us not forget we also much account for the most right-wing government in Israel's history. (Although this year, Israel is sending for the first time an official representative, Deputy Ambassador Baruch Binah.)

Our growth is not done, nor will it come without more tireless work. The conference over the next few days will focus on returning negotiations to the Middle East agenda and preventing a war with Iran. It will be planning how to support Obama's foreign policy decisions — far better than Bush's, which themselves are nearly dovish compared to his vying would-be Republican successors. And we will discuss how to push Obama in an

election year to not backtrack or sideline peace initiatives. The critics are already lining up to portray us as anti-Semites, Israel haters, and dangerous. (A far different message when they sidelined previous peace movements as hippies. With fear comes hyperbole.) I am incredibly proud to have helped build this movement — and expect to continue to do so until Israel and Palestine see peace.



## **Jewschool: Commentary blogger impugns Jewschool for support of OWS and J Street**

*Kung Fu Jew (3/23/12)*

<http://jewschool.com/2012/03/23/28100/commentary-blogger-impunes-jewschool-for-support-of-ows-and-j-street/>

Over at Commentary Magazine, Jewschool has been impugned in the silliest of conspiracy theories. (Sorry, and you thought this post would be newsworthy!) Apparently, we've colluded with the pro-Israel, pro-peace lobby J Street to "insulate" Occupy Wall Street from spurious accusations of rampant antisemitism. Both of those bodies — J Street and OWS — of course represent the vilest of trends in American life to Commentary.

Commentator Omri Ceren spins this giddy tale: J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami worked through Jewschool "boss" Daniel Sieradski to sic on OWS's critics figures like former NY Governor Eliot Spitzer and former Vermont Governor Madeline Kunin. All to protect OWS from the vile Jew-hating going on under its auspices. The evidence: the phrase "Occupy Wall Street" occurs 700+ times in our archives, we're co-sponsoring the J Street conference, and the Sieradski-operated Occupy Judaism site suspiciously vanished last night!

If Ceren had any journalistic chops, this entertaining proposal would have unraveled before embarrassing himself and his sponsor. As Sieradski rebutted last night, a simple tweet or email would have revealed:

Just for your information: I resigned from Jewschool in 2007 when I went to work at JTA News as part of a noncompete agreement and have had no relationship to the site in the successive five years. Also, Occupy Judaism has never worked with J Street in any capacity and the letter, to my understanding, originated with Mark Green and Elliot Spitzer, not J Street. Furthermore, I did not take the Occupy Judaism site down — I was experiencing an issue with my DNS server which I was unaware of until I saw Omri's tweets accusing me of colluding with J Street to hide said letter.

As of yesterday morning, Ceren acknowledged his lack of professionalism when he changed a few lines in his article, but posted neither correction notice nor apology.

As for Jewschool's involvement in both the Occupy movement and J Street, we're quite comfortable with our association to both. For the third time, we're co-sponsoring J Street's conference and a half-dozen of our writers will be there. A number of our contributors were (and remain) active members of Occupy Wall Street and leaders in Occupy Judaism. Now, we're not prone to statements of what Jewschool as a whole

believes — our editorial board and contributors, all volunteers, run the full spectrum of progressive views. But I think it's quite safe to say that we enjoy being portrayed by Commentary's comical conspiracy as a hub of activism on progressive movements within America and American Jewry today.

And, look, Jewschool is no stranger to amateur blogging — we're all volunteers here, writing about Jews and progressive issues because of our passion for both. If Ceren made a few mistakes, we'll forgive him that. Here, we don't have paid staff or editors to fact check everything. We're not lush with Commentary's generous editorial budget. But we expect every writer to blog from personal experience (not Googling), to fact check, and when proven wrong to own their mistakes like big kids. But our masthead is clearly posted, our Twitter and email accounts are active, and yet never once have we or Sieradski been contacted. It's clear from Commentary's recent history that their mistakes are ideologically motivated. And the editorial staff seem to hardly care, for this continues to be a problem. As of today neither Ceren nor Tobin gave Jewschool, Sieradski, or Occupy Wall Street any courtesy of an apology or noted correction.

Commentary Magazine: all the news that's fit to Google with half the accuracy.

**Mondoweiss: First ‘J Street,’ now Princeton — man who ordered Gaza onslaught tours U.S.**

*Philip Weiss (3/12/12)*

<http://mondoweiss.net/2012/03/first-j-street-now-princeton-man-who-ordered-gaza-onslaught-tours-u-s.html>

Ehud Olmert was the Israeli prime minister who ordered the Gaza slaughter of three years ago. The Goldstone Report on the Gaza conflict recommended universal jurisdiction for the investigation of war crimes that took place during those 21 days of hell.

Olmert will be giving the keynote speech at J Street's conference, titled "Making History," next week. And yesterday Princeton announced a gig with the former P.M. He'll be speaking at the Woodrow Wilson School there a week from today. Attendance is free, but it requires advance registration.