

TOVA MIRVIS

ARE YOU STILL GLAD you voted for Obama?" my grandfather is asking my mother over the phone, in his pre-Passover call from Jerusalem. With the time difference, he has precious little time before the start of the holiday; in America, we have hours still.

I slink away to avoid being pulled into the conversation that I know is to follow. In the days leading up to the election, my grandfather and I had our own heated discussion about Obama, my fervor for his candidacy contrasting with my grandfather's immense dislike, and it's not an argument I'm eager to repeat. My mother's response, which I can't avoid hearing, comes as no surprise: "I'm very angry at Obama," she says, having reluctantly voted for him, one of many American Jews who were lifelong Democrats yet worried about his stance on Israel. I, like many American Jews, voted for him without reservation.

Once my mother gets off the phone, there's no time to talk politics in the swirl of Passover preparations—too many bitter herbs to be sliced—but it's still on my mind at the seder, where Jewish history is compressed into past, present, and future at once. The eternal optimist who says *Next year in Jerusalem* is side by side with the doomsayer who reminds us that in every generation, an enemy will rise up to destroy us.

Whether the perceived Obama shift away from Israel will translate into a concrete policy still remains to be seen. Even so, it's the beginning for me of a painful, reluctant disenchantment. I'm feeling the classic discomfort of cognitive dissonance, supporting the Obama agenda on most other issues but adamantly disagreeing with much of the liberal political world when it comes to Israel. Whose blind spot, whose contradiction, is this? Mine or theirs?

"I get it," Obama famously said in his State of the Union about the economy, and it is those words I want to hear him say, and say sincerely, regarding Israel's history, its all-too-valid fears, its current plight. Without those words, these are lonely, uncertain times for this Obama loyalist. I feel this most keenly at the end of Passover when, at my Republican in-laws', I await the subject of Obama and Israel to be raised. Whereas before I would have argued vehemently in his support, now, closing my mouth, not sure what to think anymore, I'm reminded of a line from Shalom Aleichem, as Tevye the Dairyman grieves at having said goodbye to one of

his daughters: "Let's talk about something more cheerful. Have you heard any news of the cholera in Odessa?" As I sit at the table, tired of matzoh, I know what to say. "Have you heard any news of global warming?"

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DANIEL PIPES

THE GENIUSES in the Obama administration have now twice provoked and twice lost the same gratuitous fight with the Netanyahu government. Unfortunately, these defeats don't deter them from persisting with their misconceived goals.

The first fight began in May 2009, when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton demanded an end to Israeli building activity on the West Bank and in Jerusalem. Four months later, after figuring out that this policy obstructed the Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy they fervently sought, the geniuses backtracked and returned to Democratic Party policies-as-usual, meaning good relations with Jerusalem.

In March 2010, Vice President Joe Biden, Clinton, and Obama then picked the same fight with Israel all over again, now over Jerusalem specifically. This time, the administration needed only six weeks to retreat from its foolishness, as signaled by National Security Adviser James Jones's speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Elie Wiesel's lunch at the White House.

Notwithstanding these tactical retreats, the policy of "linkage"—belief that the well-being of the Middle East depends primarily on an Israeli-Palestinian accord—remains very much in place and will bedevil U.S.-Israel relations at least through the next two and a half years of Obama's presidency.

At this difficult time, three facts console me. First, Israelis take more "risks for peace" and offer more "painful concessions"—i.e., they make more irreversible mistakes—when U.S.-Israel ties are warm and strong. In contrast, tense U.S.-Israel ties render such bad decisions less likely. This is one silver lining in Obama's missteps.

Another silver lining is the apparently permanent damage these fights have inflicted on Obama, who in the eyes of many Zionist Americans is seen as insufficiently supportive of Israel.

Third, Obama's fights with Israel occur at a moment of particularly strong American support for Israel; one recent poll, for instance, shows a 10-to-1 preference for Israel over the Palestinians. Add to this the deep fabric of U.S.-Israeli religious, family, commercial, and cultural ties—as symbolized by the just-signed bilateral open-skies agreement—and it appears that a president, especially one who has cascaded in the polls and must be deeply concerned about the forthcoming midterm elections, can go only so far to antagonize the very large body of pro-Israel voters. Thus, I am worried but not acutely so.

The title and questions in this symposium focus on American Jews. But the Arab-Israeli debate in the United States has changed to the point that “Jews” no longer adequately defines the actively pro-Israel camp. As Jewish defamers of Israel grow more prominent and organize themselves (think J Street), so do ardently pro-Israel non-Jews (think Christians United for Israel). I therefore suggest rephrasing the discussion, substituting “Zionists” for “Jews.”

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NORMAN PODHORETZ

‘AND THE LORD SAID unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.” Yet in our own time in America, it is within a political rather than a religious context that the undying stubbornness of the Jewish people manifests itself most blatantly. Their early ancestors had the golden calf; they have the Democratic Party.

Consider: since 1928—before Franklin Roosevelt, be it noted—a staggering 75 percent of Jewish voters have on average gone for the Democratic presidential candidate. In all those years, and long past the point where the Democratic Party served either their interests or their ideals, whether as Jews or as Americans, only one of its candidates—Jimmy Carter running for a second term against Ronald Reagan—failed to get a majority of their vote, and even he scored a plurality in a three-way race.

There is no more telling example of the stubborn persistence of this pattern than the 2008 election. Thus, in spite of Barack Obama's close association with the anti-Semitic likes of Reverend Jeremiah Wright and

Professor Rashid Khalidi, the Jewish vote for him was 35 points—35 points!—higher than the pro-Obama white vote in general, and it was even 11 points higher than the Hispanic vote. Broken down by religion: the Jewish vote was 33 points higher than the Protestant vote and 24 points higher than the Catholic vote. Only with blacks (95 percent) did Obama do better than with Jews.

Nevertheless, except for the heartbroken disavowals of Ed Koch and the angry attacks of Marty Peretz over Obama's betrayal of the soothing assurances they had given to their fellow Jews of his great friendliness toward Israel, his army of Jewish supporters has greeted this betrayal with a disgracefully tepid response (which is at least less dishonorable than the sycophantic apologetics of a leading Jewish cheerleader like Martin Indyk). More disgraceful still is how Obama's Jewish supporters have treated his evident willingness to accept an Iranian bomb in spite of repeated declarations that it is “unacceptable.”

The American Jewish community of the 1930s and 40s has often been excoriated for its “silence” in the face of Roosevelt's failure to do much about Hitler's threat to rid the earth of Jews. But compared with the response of today's community to Obama's treatment of Ahmadinejad's threat to do unto the Jewish state what Hitler did unto the Jews of Europe, the voice of yesterday's “Jews of silence” sounds like a mighty roar.

And so, even though the 2012 Jewish vote for Obama is unlikely to reach its astronomic 2008 height, it is a good bet that a majority will support him once again. “F--- the Jews,” said James Baker to George H. W. Bush in 1992, “they won't vote for us anyway.” I can easily imagine Rahm Emanuel (who is famously fond of the F word) saying to Barack Obama, “F--- the Jews; they will vote for us anyway.” After all, Emanuel knows as well as Baker that when it comes to the stiff-neckedness of the Jewish people, the Democratic Party is a worthy descendent of the golden calf.

NORMAN PODHORETZ's 12th book, *Why Are Jews Liberals?*, was published by Doubleday last fall.

DENNIS PRAGER

HERE ARE FIVE POINTS that may help to explain current American-Israeli tensions and American Jewish attitudes toward Israel.

1. To understand President Obama,