

# A Century of Involvement: AJC and Russian Jewry

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ONE IMPERATIVE runs consistently through the hundred-year history of the American Jewish Committee: action on behalf of the Jews of Russia. The issue was present at the creation and remains central today. AJC was formed in 1906 in direct response to deadly attacks against Russian Jews; a century later, in 2006, the situation of Jews in the former Soviet Union and the welfare of the Russian Jewish community in the U.S. were AJC priorities.

## *The Plight of Russian Jews and the Founding of AJC*

Conditions for the Jews of Russia became especially bad after the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, as Jews were alleged to have been among the assassins. Anti-Jewish legislation followed, pogroms broke out in many communities, and Konstantin Pobedonostsev, a top adviser to the next czar, Alexander III, reportedly suggested a plan for one-third of Russia's Jews to emigrate, one-third to convert to Russian Orthodoxy, and the other third to starve to death.

The particularly bloody pogrom in Kishinev in 1903 aroused indignation around the world, and a new wave of anti-Jewish violence in the wake of the unsuccessful Russian revolution of 1905 made it abundantly clear that Jewish communities in Russia were in no position to defend themselves, and could expect no help from the authorities. The Jews' only hope for protection would have to come from outside the region.

A group of American Jews formed AJC for that express purpose. On January 8, 1906, Louis Marshall, Samuel Greenbaum, Nathan Bijur, Cyrus L. Sulzberger, and Joseph Jacobs cosigned a letter to 57 prominent Jews inviting them to attend a meeting in New York the following month. It read, in part:

The horrors attending the recent Russian massacres, and the necessity of extending to our brethren a helping hand in a manner most

conducive to the accomplishment of a permanent improvement of their unfortunate condition have, with remarkable spontaneity, induced thoughtful Jews in all parts of the United States, to suggest the advisability of the formation of a General Committee to deal with the serious problems thus presented, which are likely to recur, even in their acute phases, so long as the objects of our solicitude are subjected to disabilities and persecution, owing to their religious belief.

Ten months later, on November 11, 1906, the American Jewish Committee was created. Strikingly, one of its very first steps was the creation of a press bureau. The rationale—which could as easily have been written in the mid-1960s, when the worldwide Soviet Jewry campaign began in earnest—was set forth in a resolution adopted by AJC's executive committee on January 27, 1907:

For the prevention of massacres of Jews in Russia, no means can be considered so effective as the enlightenment of the people of the western world concerning real conditions in Russia, which have hitherto been systematically concealed or distorted by the power of the Russian Government; that to this end a Press Bureau should be established to gather and disseminate correct news of affairs in Russia . . . .

It was not at all clear to the embryonic organization if the American government could be persuaded to act decisively to assist persecuted Jews overseas. AJC's leaders, therefore, came up with an ingenious approach to send an unmistakable message of disapproval to Russia.

The provisions of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, signed in 1832 by Russia and the United States, served as the principal bilateral agreement between the two countries. It stated that "the inhabitants of their respective States shall mutually have liberty to enter the ports, places and rivers of the territories of each party, wherever foreign commerce is permitted," and yet American Jews, beginning in the 1890s, were routinely denied entry visas by Russian consular officials. The U.S. State Department, in 1907, appeared to sanction this objectionable policy, announcing that it would refuse to issue passports "to Jews who intend going to Russian territory, unless it has the assurance that the Russian Government will consent to their admission."

Although the State Department subsequently reversed itself, AJC became convinced that the appropriate response to Russia's

discriminatory policy against some (i.e., Jewish) Americans was to press for outright abrogation of the 1832 treaty. It took five years for the AJC leadership, collaborating with key congressional leaders while facing resistance from the White House and the State Department, to achieve that goal.

Particularly noteworthy in reviewing this campaign is its similarity, in several striking ways, to the effort that led to the adoption of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment 65 years later. That measure, named for its principal sponsors, Senator Henry Jackson (D., Wash.) and Congressman Charles Vanik (D., Ohio), linked the granting of most-favored-nation trade status to the right of emigration from non-market countries—i.e., the communist bloc, and in particular, the Soviet Union.

One similarity was the same division between American Jewish communal leadership and a majority of the U.S. Congress, on the one hand, and the executive branch on the other. On both occasions, each side invoked diametrically opposed arguments about whether punitive measures would, at the end of the day, achieve the desired objectives.

Second, in the early twentieth century no European country joined with the U.S. in applying a “stick” to protest Russia’s discriminatory policy, thus weakening the American effort. The same European resistance occurred in the wake of the adoption of Jackson-Vanik: not a single West European country went beyond rhetorical opposition to Soviet policy on emigration, or such admittedly important symbolic acts as sending diplomats to the Moscow synagogue or to trials of activist Jews.<sup>1</sup> Neither diplomatic sanctions nor economic measures were ever seriously considered by any Western nation other than the United States.

And third, once the 1832 treaty was, in fact, abrogated, each side sought vindication for its position. The White House argued not only that American businesses were negatively affected, but also that the position of Jews in Russia deteriorated further because of

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<sup>1</sup> At the same time it should be noted, with appreciation, that the Netherlands undertook the task of representing Israel in Moscow after the Kremlin severed diplomatic ties with the Jewish state in 1967; that Austria, despite unrelenting Arab pressure, served as the country of first arrival for hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews able to secure exit visas; and that Italy provided a temporary home for those many Soviet Jews obliged to wait months for the processing of their applications to resettle permanently in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

the belligerent American approach. Proponents of abrogation, meanwhile, hailed the move as a victory for high-minded principle in American foreign policy. Again, this split was a forerunner of the conflicting and self-justifying views expressed by the two contending sides in the months and years following Jackson-Vanik's enactment in 1975—and which continue to this day, without concession by either party.

AJC's Jacob Schiff dramatically stated the case of the winning side in the battle over the 1832 treaty:

We have just passed through an episode which, in my opinion, is of greater importance than anything that has happened since civil rights were granted Jews under the first Napoleon, or since English Jews were admitted to Parliament . . . For the first time, Russia, that great Colossus, has received a slap in the face from a great nation, which act, I cannot help thinking, must be of the greatest consequence in the history of civilization.<sup>2</sup>

The difficulties for Jews in Czarist Russia, however, continued. In 1911, Mendel Beilis, a manual laborer, was arrested in Kiev and, without any evidence, charged with the ritual murder of a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy—a classic case of blood libel. The trial began in September 1913. (Bernard Malamud produced a fictionalized account of the case in his acclaimed book *The Fixer*.) In what came to be the signature style of AJC, the organization sought, beyond its own advocacy efforts, the support of prominent non-Jews to demonstrate to the Russian government the breadth of concern about the trumped-up charges. As a result, distinguished Protestant and Catholic clergymen signed a letter, dated October 31, 1913, addressed to “His Imperial Majesty, Nicholas II, The Czar of All the Russias,” in which they declared:

We are convinced that the blood accusation against the Jews, which has been made sporadically, is as unfounded as was the same accusation which, as history shows, was frequently directed against the early Christians. It has been subjected to the most careful investigation for centuries, and no evidence warranting the slightest credence has ever been discovered, and it has been rejected as unworthy of serious consideration both by Church and by State.

Beilis was exonerated and immediately left the country.

Less than 60 years later, as will be noted below, AJC would es-

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Naomi W. Cohen, “The Abrogation of the Russo-American Treaty of 1832,” *Jewish Social Studies* 25, January 1963, p. 40.

establish the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, once again calling upon Christians of good will to join in the international campaign to address the hardships suffered by Jews, this time under communist rather than czarist rule.

### *AJC and Soviet Jewry in the Cold War Years*

There is scant evidence of AJC or other Jewish organizational involvement with regard to the condition of Jews during the early years of Bolshevik rule, when restrictions on religious life were introduced. Little information was available to the outside world at the time, as possibilities for emigration came to an end and the Soviet Union sought to project itself as a new society based on equality of nationalities and devoid of anti-Semitism. It was not until after the Second World War—in which Soviet Jews fought valiantly in the ultimately victorious Red Army, while the Jewish civilian population in the western part of the nation suffered untold losses at the hands of the invading Nazi forces and those who collaborated with them—that Stalin's pathological and paranoid anti-Semitism became unmistakably visible, especially after Moscow's early support for Israel's statehood dissipated.

Consistent with its traditional emphasis on research and analysis, AJC sponsored the first book-length study about the effect of Soviet rule on the life of Jewish communities. The book, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* by Solomon M. Schwarz, was published in 1951 by Syracuse University Press. Three years later, a companion volume, *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites* by Peter Meyer, was issued by the same publishing house. AJC also produced pamphlets about Soviet Jewry throughout the 1950s, and articles on the subject appeared as well in *Commentary* and the *American Jewish Year Book*, both sponsored by AJC.

In 1954, AJC president Irving Engel was called to testify before the House Select Committee on Communist Aggression against the Jews in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as part of hearings that resulted in a special congressional report entitled *Treatment of Jews by the Soviet*. Engel pulled no punches in describing the perilous situation of "the Jews caught behind the Iron Curtain, both in the Soviet Union proper, and in the countries the Soviet Union has either annexed or transformed into puppet states through ruthless imperialist aggression." He denounced the show trials, the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaigns, the targeting of Jewish

intellectuals, the denial of religious rights, the infamous 1953 Doctors' Plot, and other examples of incitement and hatred.

On January 15, 1959, an AJC delegation met with Anastas Mikoyan, the Soviet first deputy prime minister, in New York City. This was the first high-level meeting between a Soviet official and American Jewish leaders to discuss the status of Soviet Jews since the USSR was established in 1917. Among the concerns expressed by AJC were reports that the Kremlin was seriously considering the wholesale deportation of Jews to Birobidzhan, the Soviet-established so-called Jewish Autonomous District in the Far East; the paucity of rabbis, numbering no more than 60, to serve nearly three million Jews; the failure to build a single synagogue since World War II, leaving hundreds of sizable Jewish communities without any house of worship in the wake of the destruction wrought by the Nazis; and the mounting barriers to Jews' advancement in Soviet society.

The landmark meeting resulted in a front-page story in the *New York Times* the following day, January 16, under the headline "Mikoyan Denies Exiling of Jews. Talk of Soviet Plan to Send Them to Siberia Is Untrue, He Tells A.J.C. Unit Here." At the meeting, Mikoyan, pressed by the AJC delegation, had declared that "the reported plans for the recreation of a Jewish state in Birobidzhan and the transfer of the Jewish population in Russia to that area are without foundation." Following the session, AJC sent Mikoyan a lengthy letter further documenting instances of cultural, religious, and other discrimination against Soviet Jews. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported, on February 24, 1959, that the Soviets, in response to the harsh attack Mikoyan had encountered in his U.S. visit, would permit the publication of some books in Yiddish, including selected works of the noted author Sholom Aleichem.

In August of that year, AJC issued yet another report on the condition of Jews behind the Iron Curtain, *The Plight of the Jews in Eastern Europe*. In addition to focusing on the internal threats and difficulties encountered by Jews, the report noted that "the Soviet Union has steadfastly opposed any emigration from that country" and called "for the right of Jews to emigrate freely to places of their choice, with all their possessions." It received widespread media coverage across the nation, including in the *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Catholic News*, and scores of other papers.

International attention once again focused on Soviet anti-Semitism when Morris Abram, AJC's president at the time, held a press conference in New York in 1964 to denounce *Judaism Without Embellishment*, an anti-Semitic polemic containing Nazi-like caricatures, written by T.K. Kichko and published by the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Abram noted that the booklet "reflected in a most primitive and vulgar fashion the Soviet government's official anti-Semitic campaign in which some three million Russian Jews are being used as scapegoats for internal economic problems. The situation of Soviet Jews continues to worsen as the Soviet government regresses to the crudest forms of anti-Semitism."

The resulting international furor, it should be noted, extended to Western communist parties, which did not want to be associated with blatant Jew-hatred. Indeed, as reported in *Midstream* (June 1964), "There was literally not one major communist party or leader or organ in the Western world that did not protest, either timidly or vehemently." The uproar convinced the Kremlin to disavow the book and its author, though this was far from the last such publication to appear. Three years later, AJC publicized and denounced another piece by Kichko, "Zionism: A Tool of Imperialism," published in a prominent Soviet newspaper. Many more such anti-Semitic screeds were to follow, both by Kichko and a host of other Soviet pseudo-scholars and polemicists.

### *Launching the Soviet Jewry Movement*

In 1964, AJC was one of four original sponsors—together with the Synagogue Council of America, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC)—of the American Conference on Soviet Jewry. Seven years later, AJC became a founding member of the successor organization, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), which coordinated and led organized American Jewry's efforts on behalf of Jews in the USSR. In fact, the first president of the NCSJ, Richard Maass, and the first executive director, Jerry Goodman, came from the lay and professional ranks, respectively, of AJC.

On December 3, 1966, Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin, speaking at a Paris press conference, stunned the Jewish world when he declared that those Soviet citizens wishing to be reunited with their families abroad would be allowed to do so. While he made no spe-

cific reference to Jews, this declaration gave new impetus to those seeking to leave.

The following year, Israel's lightning victory in what came to be known as the Six-Day War had an electrifying effect on many Soviet Jews. Not only had Israel achieved one of the greatest military victories in history, but also its principal adversaries, Egypt and Syria, were close allies of the Kremlin and had relied heavily on Soviet-made weapons. With Kosygin's Paris declaration ringing in their ears and Israel's success awakening a long-dormant pride, some Soviet Jews, despite the risks, began the search for a positive self-identity, denied them by the authorities, and wondered whether there might be a chance to begin new lives outside what had for decades been the hermetically sealed borders of the Soviet Union.

The issue came dramatically to the world's attention when, on June 15, 1970, a group of Soviet Jews, joined by two non-Jews, sought to hijack an airplane at the Leningrad airport and divert it to Israel. The plan was foiled by the authorities, and the perpetrators were arrested together with their alleged accomplices. At their first trial, two of the defendants were sentenced to death and the others to lengthy prison sentences. AJC sprang into action.

*In the Cause of Soviet Jewry*, an AJC pamphlet issued in 1971, summarized the organization's response to the startling turn of events:

The AJC issued an appeal to some 100 influential individuals—industrialists, clergymen, academicians and authors—and in almost every case these people made their voices heard among government officials and opinion molders, national and international. AJC Executive Council Chairman Max M. Fisher helped arrange meetings between Jewish leaders and Secretary of State Rogers, and subsequently with President Nixon. The President's expression of sympathy and concern for the Russian Jews was flashed around the world. Conferences with other White House and State Department officials enlisted further powerful support for the Jewish victims . . . . The Committee also helped organize a national emergency meeting of Jewish leaders in Washington, with major figures from the arts, sciences and public affairs in attendance.

The international outcry led Moscow to reconsider the death penalty for the hijackers, and, in a second trial, sentence the plotters to long prison terms in *harsh conditions*.

That same year, 1971, AJC utilized its extensive contacts with other American religious groups to establish the National Inter-

religious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, whose first honorary chair was R. Sargent Shriver, and quietly provided the new entity with financial support. Drawing on the leadership of the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish communities, the task force would add an important, broad-based ecumenical voice to the Soviet Jewry campaign over the next two decades.

Among the many highlights of its activities was the testimony of Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, on behalf of the task force, before the Senate Finance Committee on April 10, 1974, in support of the proposed Jackson-Vanik Amendment. When she concluded her remarks, according to an internal AJC memorandum from Gerald Strober to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Senator Bob Packwood (R., Oreg.) stated:

I have sat here day after day listening to trade association after trade association tell the Committee of our need to trade with Russia and how such trade would have little effect upon the Soviet Jews. I want to thank you for being the first to bring a moral word to this Committee. You are to be commended for your testimony, which greatly points out how the Jackson Amendment can alleviate the plight of the Soviet Jews.

### *Turning Up the Pressure*

During the height of the Soviet Jewry campaign, from 1971 to 1991, as Soviet policy on Jewish emigration zigzagged dramatically, AJC was deeply involved in all phases of the effort, both individually and in collaboration with other interested agencies. AJC activity was especially notable in the political and diplomatic arenas in Washington, through AJC's offices, at the time, in Paris, Buenos Aires, and Mexico City, and in other capitals throughout Europe and Latin America.

The kickoff for this period of activism was the landmark World Conference of Jewish Communities for Soviet Jewry, held in Brussels in February 1971. It was planned with the assistance of AJC leaders, particularly Abraham Karlikow of the Paris office and Sergio Nudelstejer of the Mexico City office. A sizable AJC contingent, including President Philip E. Hoffman, participated. The conference's impact was felt worldwide.

From thirty-eight countries on five continents came more than fifteen hundred delegates, including scores of prominent public offi-

cials, civil rights activists, scholars, poets, writers, financiers, union leaders and philosophers . . . . To the astonishment of the secretariat, the Soviet media on the eve of the conference launched a propaganda attack that captured the attention of the world media. Nearly three hundred journalists from every part of the world covered the Brussels event . . . . From the World Conference came the demand for Soviet authorities "to recognize the right of Jews who so desire to return to their historic homeland in Israel." This demand went beyond the American campaign's demand that had focused on family reunion. It mirrored the demands of the Jewish movement in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

AJC lay and staff leaders, as well as representatives of the National Interreligious Task Force on Soviet Jewry, attended the periodic review conferences of the Helsinki Final Act, the 1975 document signed by the Soviet Union and 34 other countries that, among other things, established human rights standards by which signatory countries could be judged. This attendance took two forms—as public members of official U.S. delegations and as representatives from the nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector. Moreover, AJC sent delegates to advocate in the corridors of the U.S.-Soviet summits and at times on the streets nearby, including the critically important 1986 Reykjavik encounter between President Ronald Reagan and Chairman Mikhail Gorbachev. It was AJC's contacts in Iceland that gained permission for ten representatives of American Jewish agencies to travel to the island nation—when, for security reasons, admission was severely restricted—enabling their voices to be heard by Soviet officials and the hundreds of media representatives covering the summit.

Other noteworthy AJC efforts included involvement in and financial support for the Association of Jewish Book Publishers, which, beginning in 1977, participated in the biennial Moscow International Book Fair. The fair, a commercial enterprise, provided a unique opportunity—under the constant gaze of the KGB, to be sure—not only for direct contact with the local community but also for distribution of books and other materials to information-starved Soviet Jews. There were also many visits to "refuseniks"—those thousands of Jews denied exit visas by OVIR, the responsible So-

<sup>3</sup> Albert D. Chernin, "Making Soviet Jews an Issue," in Murray Friedman and Albert D. Chernin, eds., *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews* (Hanover, N.H., 1999), pp. 60–61.

viet agency, for one reason or another — and to synagogues in major Soviet cities, demonstrating solidarity and sending a message to Soviet authorities that their Jewish citizens had a lifeline to the West.

AJC, through its Paris and New York offices, was also involved in preparing Russian-language material on Jewish themes that made its way into the hands of Jews in the Soviet Union eager for information otherwise denied them. And AJC focused on yet another way to get news to Jews in the Soviet Union — convincing the Voice of America, the overseas broadcasting arm of the U.S. government, to expand its Russian-language programming to the Soviet Union, aimed specifically at Jewish listeners.

One major distinguishing feature of AJC's approach was support for the broader Soviet human-rights movement. Most other Jewish organizations refrained from participation, fearing it could further complicate advocacy efforts on behalf of Soviet Jewry by persuading the Kremlin — which needed little convincing — that the larger Jewish aim was not simply “repatriation to the Jewish homeland,” as the Soviet Jewry movement insisted, but, in fact, the overthrow of communism.

While never breaking with the consensus of the Soviet Jewry movement, AJC, consistent with its longstanding commitment to human rights and democratic values, managed to demonstrate solidarity with Soviet dissidents through its semiautonomous Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, led by its founding director and self-effacing visionary, Sidney Liskofsky. The institute regularly published material on and by Soviet human-rights activists, sponsored seminars and symposia, and awarded grants to NGOs that addressed broad Soviet human-rights issues, including, it should be noted, cases related to the right to practice one's religion and to speak one's language, i.e., Hebrew, consistent with relevant international covenants.

In addressing the contributions of the Jacob Blaustein Institute, Elena Bonner, the legendary human rights activist and widow of Nobel laureate Andrei Sakharov, said in 1997:

In the early 1970s, the Jacob Blaustein Institute was one of the very few, if not the only one, among Jewish organizations concerned with the general state of human rights in the Soviet Union. The Institute did not limit itself to issues of Jewish emigration, understanding that an injustice anywhere on the face of this earth is a threat to justice everywhere.

The Blaustein Institute also, in 1972, joined with the International Institute of Human Rights and the Faculty of Law at Uppsala University (Sweden) to convene the landmark Uppsala Conference, as it came to be called, on the right to leave and to return.

Attended by legal scholars from a number of Western countries, the conference focused on the fundamental rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism, as they pertained to those Soviet Jews—and others—demanding the right to emigrate. The gathering thus gave an important international legal imprimatur to the still fledgling Soviet Jewry movement. Its proceedings were published as a book by the American Jewish Committee in 1976 under the title *The Right to Leave and to Return*.

### *Freedom Sunday*

In October 1987, when Chairman Gorbachev was scheduled to make his first visit to Washington for meetings with President Reagan, the organized American Jewish community, led by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Council of Jewish Federations, asked me, as the director of the American Jewish Committee's Washington office, to coordinate the organization of a mass demonstration. Morton Yarmon, AJC's director of public education and information, was charged with overseeing the public relations dimension of the rally.

There was, however, widespread concern in the organized Jewish community about the prospect of such a rally since, unlike New York, Washington had never successfully mounted a major Jewish demonstration. Therefore, in connection with Gorbachev's expected visit, some suggested simply to rent a hall and fill it with hundreds of Jewish leaders, who would claim to speak for the larger community, and be joined by political personalities from the nation's capital. But Natan Sharansky, recently released from the Soviet Gulag, refused to settle for such a truncated demonstration, and instead urged a mass mobilization. He prevailed and, with his tireless assistance in going from campus to campus, community to community, in the run-up to the December 6 date, he helped achieve the ambitious vision.

In the 37 days from confirmation of Gorbachev's arrival date in

Washington to his actual visit, American Jewry mobilized as never before, leading to the largest single gathering of American Jews in the nation's history. Two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand people, including a sizable number of non-Jews, came to the nation's Mall on December 6, 1987, to participate in Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jewry. They expressed support for the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate ("Let my people go" was the principal slogan), called particular attention to the plight of the Prisoners of Conscience (or Prisoners of Zion, as they were sometimes called) and the thousands of long-term refuseniks, and demanded an end to restrictions on the study of Hebrew and the practice of Judaism. Vice President George H.W. Bush, leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives, Catholic and Protestant clergy, governors and mayors, union officials and civil rights activists, and Natan Sharansky—along with other recently released Prisoners of Conscience Ida Nudel, Yuli Edelshtein, and Vladimir Slepak—were among the many prominent speakers at the daylong event, which took place on the eve of Gorbachev's first meeting with Reagan in the White House.

That evening, AJC, which had brought its entire board of governors and hundreds of other members to Washington for the rally, organized a dinner at which it presented its highest award, the American Liberties Medallion, to Sharansky. He used the occasion to express appreciation to AJC for its steadfast efforts on his behalf and its support for his wife's advocacy efforts while he was in the Soviet Gulag.

Among the reasons for the rally's success, as I wrote in the *Washington Jewish Week* (December 10, 1987), were:

First and foremost, the post-Holocaust legacy played a central role. People again and again indicated that they wanted to demonstrate their understanding of the lessons of history. They wanted to be counted among those who acted, not among those who stood by . . . . Many felt a special kinship with Jews from that great wellspring of Jewish life, Russia . . . . Virtually every Jewish institution and leader sent out a clear and constant call. Freedom Sunday was the Jewish obligation of the year, perhaps of the decade . . . . People also participated because they felt that there truly might be a chance to affect events in this period of improving Soviet-American relations . . . . The Washington area Jewish community, the key to a successful event, responded magnificently to the mobilization, forever putting to rest the notion that ours is an impossible community to move.

According to later reports by then government officials, President Reagan referred to the demonstration in his meeting with Chairman Gorbachev the next morning, indicating that it expressed the sentiment of the American people and needed to be taken into account by the Soviet leader if he wished to pursue improved ties with the United States. Whether the demonstration was the straw that broke the camel's back may never be known. Nonetheless, those who participated in the rally felt it to be a watershed—a gathering of American Jews as never before, with widespread support from politicians, religious and ethnic leaders, and average Americans, that also generated extensive front-page media coverage.

### *Conflicts and Quandaries*

In fact, it was not long after the rally that the Soviet floodgates opened and Jews streamed out by the hundreds of thousands, primarily to Israel. By the 1990s, there were over one million Jews from the now former Soviet Union living in Israel, comprising approximately 20 percent of the nation's Jewish population. The stream to the United States, however, slowed during this period, as Washington narrowed the criteria for entry in what some observers believed was a tacit agreement with the Israeli government. What was perhaps most striking during the 1990s was the surge in Soviet Jewish migration to Germany, making it the fastest-growing Jewish community in the world. The number of Jews formally registered with the German Jewish community has nearly quadrupled since the late 1980s to well over 100,000, while the unofficial number is at least twice as high.

The 1987 rally evoked an unprecedented display of unity in the Soviet Jewry movement, temporarily hiding longstanding fissures. Both before and after, however, the divisions were real.

The principal one, which first emerged in the mid-1970s, had to do with the issue of country of destination for those Soviet Jews able to leave the USSR. With few exceptions, their legal basis for departure was a *vyzov*, or invitation, from relatives in Israel, on the basis of which they could begin the protracted emigration, or repatriation, process. But upon arrival in Vienna, the first processing center in the West, an increasing number of Soviet Jews, in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, insisted on exercising their right to freedom of choice. They refused to be dealt with by the

Jewish Agency for Israel (in Hebrew, the *Sochnut*) for transfer to Israel, and turned instead to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) for assistance in visa processing, principally to the U.S., Canada, and Australia, and for financial aid during the time they were in transit in Rome, Italy.

This caused a furor. Israel insisted that all Soviet Jews leaving the USSR with documents for Israel were obligated to go there. Anyone who wanted to emigrate to the United States or elsewhere, Israeli leaders argued, should seek exit visas for those countries in Moscow through the appropriate diplomatic legations. Israel had two main concerns. First, it viewed the millions of Soviet Jews as the greatest potential reservoir for new immigrants to the Jewish state. They would affirm the vitality of Zionism and bolster the Jewish state in every way imaginable, while sending a message to Israel's adversaries that, given the steady influx, time was not necessarily on their side. Second, it feared that if Soviet Jews went elsewhere, the Kremlin might pull the plug on the entire process. After all, the USSR recognized the right of emigration only in rare cases, fearing that if some could leave many more would try to follow. Instead, it justified the Jewish exodus as repatriation to the Jewish homeland.

For organizations like AJC, this controversy was inescapable, as it was impossible to be involved in the Soviet Jewry movement and circumvent it. In the face of competing pressures, AJC took the position that, though it sympathized with Israel's desire to maximize aliyah, it could not in good conscience take any action that would curtail the freedom of the individual to choose where to resettle, consistent with entry laws in the various Western countries.

AJC's position—which resembled those taken by most major American Jewish organizations—was summed up in a statement adopted by its board of governors on March 23, 1987:

We believe that the overriding goal of the Soviet Jewry movement must remain to secure the release of the maximum number of Jews seeking to leave the USSR, and to permit them to establish new lives as free human beings and as Jews. While we would hope that the greatest number of Jews would choose to live in Israel and avail themselves of the extensive resettlement opportunities offered by the Israeli Government, we oppose any step that would serve to limit the right of Soviet Jews to select the final destination of their choice . . . .

Even as we continue to seek ways of encouraging more Soviet Jews to consider resettlement in Israel, we affirm the position taken

by the [AJC] National Executive Council in 1976 that "... every Jew who manages to get out of the Soviet Union should be helped to go to the destination of his choice and receive resettlement assistance." In that statement AJC went on record as "warmly supporting all proposals whose aim is to assure that Jews coming out of the USSR be as fully informed as possible before making their choice of destination."

There were other areas of disagreement within the Soviet Jewry movement. One was between the so-called establishment and non-establishment advocacy organizations. The former were grouped around the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, of which, as previously noted, AJC was one of the four founders. The nonestablishment activists, in contrast, looked to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, formally established in 1970 and describing itself as a community-based, grassroots organization, and the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, founded in 1964. In retrospect, the differences seem inconsequential, but, at the time, there was little cooperation between the two clusters and considerable mutual suspicion. The establishment, as befits its name, was accused of timidity and bureaucratic inertia, whereas the nonestablishment was considered by its critics to be too confrontational and its actions, consequently, counterproductive.

### *The Iron Curtain Falls*

With the collapse of communism, first, in the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe and, within two years, in the USSR itself, AJC saw an unprecedented opportunity for the United States, Israel, world Jewry, and, not least, the people of the region. A four-pronged agenda emerged, which remains to this day the overall blueprint for AJC programming in the entire region.

1. *Assisting local communities.* Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union needed to achieve full protection under the law and equal status with other citizens. Only then would these communities—now mere shadows of what they had been before the double toll of Nazi occupation and communist domination—be able to reconstitute themselves.

Eager to maintain an appropriate division of labor, AJC enthusiastically applauded, but did not seek to duplicate, the estimable efforts of the Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Jewish Joint

Distribution Committee, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, the religious movements, and other groups to strengthen Jewish life through the rebuilding of synagogues, founding of Jewish day schools and summer camps, provision of essential social services, sponsorship of communal leadership-training programs, introduction of Israeli cultural and Hebrew-language programs, and publication of books and periodicals on a multitude of Jewish themes. Instead, as mentioned, AJC sought to help ensure the place of Jews and Jewish communities in the emerging postcommunist societies.

2. *Addressing Holocaust-related issues.* Such issues, applicable to Central and Eastern Europe as well as the FSU, included pensions for survivors; identification, preservation, and protection of sites of tragedy; restitution of communal property; national acceptance, where appropriate, of historical and moral accountability; and introduction of nationally tailored curricula on Holocaust education and local Jewish history.

3. *Strengthening relations with Israel.* Bilateral ties between Israel and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the 15 successor states of the USSR, had to be broadened and deepened. It was clear early on that, as the new governments sought to reorient their foreign policies, Israel could become one of the principal beneficiaries of communism's collapse. Traditional East European support for anti-Zionism, anti-Israel terrorist groups, and the most hard-line Arab states gave way, in most cases, to pro-Western policies that included favorable attitudes toward Israel. The reasons for the change ranged from desire for access to Israeli technology and investment, to the view that close ties with the Jewish state could advance a nation's standing in the U.S., to a more generalized belief, however exaggerated, in international Jewish political and economic power, to a genuine desire to repair and rebuild frayed relations with the Jewish people and Israel.

Many of the postcommunist societies came to believe that their attitudes toward Jews were regarded in the West (and often by democrats within these societies themselves) as the best possible litmus test of the sincerity and effectiveness with which they pursued their new reformist policies. Thus, the opportunities available to Jewish agencies such as AJC throughout the region seemed almost limitless. This entirely new geopolitical situation—and the enhanced role it afforded world Jewry—also permitted AJC to as-

sist Israel not only by encouraging closer bilateral ties, but also by pressing the postcommunist states to end their supply of weapons, know-how, and personnel to nations in the Middle East posing a threat to Israel, including Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

4. *Building democracy.* Consistent with AJC's longstanding philosophy, the agency recognized the importance of participating in the formation of robust democratic institutions, the rule of law, civil society, human- and civil-rights protections, and tolerance-building programs for ethnically diverse, sometimes stratified, societies. In the final analysis, the best protection for minority communities living within majority cultures, be they Jews or others, is safeguarding the rights of all by fostering respect for democracy and pluralism. Furthermore, in this case it was not simply a matter of trying to protect Jewish communities, important though this obviously was, but extending the reach of freedom and ending, once and for all, the East-West conflict.

This explains why AJC was the first Jewish group to call on the U.S. government to recognize the independence of the three Baltic states and Ukraine, at a time when the administration hesitated to offend Moscow. Later, AJC sought to help anchor these and other post-Soviet states in the European and transatlantic architecture. Partial success came with the accession to NATO of the Baltic states in 2004, but more work remains.

### *Tangible Results*

#### PENSIONS FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

In the early 1990s, shortly after the break-up of the Soviet bloc, AJC began developing close working ties with the emerging leaders of the remnant Jewish communities in the region. Understandably, the first priorities of these communities were to reconstitute themselves, begin to find fellow Jews—many of whom had hidden their identities or were even unaware of them because their parents had never revealed the truth—organize basic communal services, deepen links with world Jewry, and ensure their rightful place within the newly independent societies.

As they assessed their needs, these leaders quickly recognized the importance of providing some modicum of support for the rapidly

aging and often indigent Holocaust survivors in their midst. Unlike their counterparts in the West who had undergone identical wartime experiences, these survivors were denied pensions from the German government. Bonn's reasoning was that even in the unlikely case that agreement with the communist countries could be reached, their regimes could not be trusted to live up to such accords. Hence these Jews, ravaged by the Holocaust and unable to secure compensation because of their residence behind the iron curtain, were "double victims," in the words of Stuart Eizenstat, then serving as U.S. under secretary of state.

Once communism collapsed, Bonn offered other rationales for refusing to provide monthly payments: it feared a flood of new claimants from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and elsewhere, well beyond the limited number of Jews still alive; its economy was battered, its budget already stretched, its unemployment rolls growing; it preferred to consider, instead of pensions, modest one-time payments made through national foundations provided with German funds. In fact, a billion deutsche marks (DM) had been transferred to Moscow for precisely this purpose just before the USSR imploded. These funds were then distributed among rather poorly administered and inadequately audited foundations established in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus—400 million, 400 million, and 200 million, respectively. In Ukraine, for example, well over 90 percent of the recipients were non-Jews, and the average one-time payment for Jewish and non-Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution was a paltry 600 DM, or about \$350.

In 1996, AJC discovered that while Holocaust survivors in, for instance, Latvia were deemed ineligible for German pensions, disabled veterans of the Third Reich were eligible. Consequently, a Latvian Waffen SS veteran injured during the war received a monthly check from Bonn, while a Latvian Jewish survivor received nothing.

To summarize a long and complex story that then unfolded, AJC's talks with the German government—first in private, but later, after achieving no progress, coupled with public pressure generated by the White House, Congress, and the media—resulted in a German decision, announced January 12, 1998, to allocate 200 million DM (approximately \$120 million). The funds were intended specifically for the estimated 20,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors who had spent at least six months in a Nazi concentration

camp or 18 months in a ghetto or hiding. Two days after the announcement, a *Washington Post* editorial commented:

Germany overall has set a positive model for the world, one that few other nations have matched, in facing up to the evils of its history and paying about \$60 billion in reparations for admittedly unrightable wrongs. But in the case of the Eastern Europeans, it stalled for nearly half a decade, offering varying untenable excuses. Only when the American Jewish Committee went public with its tenacious campaign, beginning last spring, did it begin to make progress. Recent State Department pressure and a Senate resolution endorsed by 82 Senators may also have helped.

The Senate resolution, introduced by Senators Chris Dodd (D., Conn.) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R., Tex.), was drafted in close cooperation with AJC.

#### RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

AJC, known for its frequent polling of attitudes toward Jews around the world, conducted several pioneering surveys.

In the fall of 1990, the Soviet Center for Public Opinion and Market Research, at the request of AJC, carried out the first—and the last—survey to be conducted in the Soviet Union that systematically examined, on a national level, attitudes toward Jews, Israel, and a broad range of other Jewish concerns. The results, extensively reported in the *New York Times*, were published in 1992 by AJC in Lev Gudkov and Alex Levinson, *Attitudes Towards Jews in the Soviet Union: Public Opinion in Ten Republics*.

In the first post-Soviet survey, undertaken in 1992 by the Moscow-based Russian Center for Public Opinion and Market Research on AJC's behalf, 3,965 respondents were interviewed face to face in their homes in ten of the fifteen successor states (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). The 144 questions dealt with a wide range of topics, including views of Jews and of a broad array of nationalities, political and economic opinions, civic values, and feelings about ethnicity.

Among the key findings were a wide variation in attitudes toward Jews from one state to another; overall unfavorable views about Jews when compared with earlier available studies; and the importance of placing attitudes toward Jews in the context of atti-

tudes toward other groups, many of which, especially those from the Caucasus region, were viewed even more negatively than Jews. The full results and interpretive data were published in 1994 by AJC in Lev Gudkov and Alex Levinson, *Attitudes Toward Jews in the Commonwealth of Independent States*.

A second post-Soviet AJC survey, conducted in 1996 by ROMIR, a public-opinion and market-research company in Moscow, was geographically narrower in focus, limiting itself to the Russian Federation. Published by AJC under the title *Current Russian Attitudes Towards Jews and the Holocaust: A Public-Opinion Survey*, it used a number of the questions regarding attitudes toward Jews that had been asked previously, allowing a degree of longitudinal analysis. And several questions focusing on the Holocaust were identical to those asked by AJC in eight other countries at more or less the same time (United States, England, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, and Australia), permitting a comparative perspective.

The striking findings included a decidedly pessimistic view about the overall situation in Russia, especially among older and relatively less educated respondents; a plurality of support for the Communist Party; a rather low level of hostility toward Jews, although, given the large percentage of "don't know" responses to a number of questions dealing with Jews, the potential for an increase in such hostility; greater negative attitudes toward some other groups, among them Chechens, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Gypsies (Roma); and the absence of basic factual knowledge about the Holocaust coexisting with a widespread recognition of the importance of keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive.

Mention should also be made of a pioneering three-day conference, "Jews of the Former Soviet Union: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," held in St. Petersburg in June 1996, that was sponsored by AJC and the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research, and cosponsored by the Moses Mendelssohn Zentrum of Potsdam University (Germany), the European Council of Jewish Communities, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, and Petersburg Jewish University. The conference brought together 150 Jewish leaders from across the FSU, Europe, Israel, and the United States to discuss the political, cultural, religious, and educational challenges facing Jews in the FSU and appropriate strategies for responding to them. One of the speakers was Galina Starovoitova,

the courageous activist for democracy and human rights who would be fatally shot in St. Petersburg two years later.

Regrettably, I was unable to attend the conference. A Russian entry visa was denied me on the grounds of my "past political history," which, though never explicitly defined, presumably referred to my years of involvement in the Soviet Jewry struggle and two detentions by authorities in Moscow, in 1974 and 1981. State Department and congressional efforts, including a letter to Russian president Boris Yeltsin urging him to reverse the visa denial signed by more than 40 members of Congress, proved unsuccessful. (A year later, after a meeting with Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, I was issued an entry visa to participate in an AJC delegation visiting Moscow for meetings with political officials and leaders of the Jewish community.)

In addition to a summary report of the 1996 conference, a publication including the texts of the three principal addresses—by Professor Shlomo Avineri of the Hebrew University, Dr. Michael Chlenov, president of the Russian Va'ad, and Professor Zvi Gitelman of the University of Michigan—was issued by AJC in 1997.

#### POLITICAL CONTACTS

Traditionally known as the "American Jewish State Department," AJC sought to establish links with high-level political officials in the FSU in pursuit of the four-pronged agenda enumerated above, adapted to the specific conditions of each individual country.

AJC delegations have traveled frequently to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova for meetings with government officials and representatives of the Jewish communities. Moreover, AJC has met regularly with the foreign ministers of most of the FSU countries each fall during their visits to New York for the opening of the UN General Assembly sessions. In a 14-month span during 2006–7, for example, AJC held five private meetings with Sergei Lavrov, the foreign minister of the Russian Federation, three in New York and two in Moscow.

It is difficult to evaluate the results of such meetings, for there is seldom a cause-and-effect relationship between a single meeting, or even a series of them, and a policy decision. Yet it is clear from

the fact that these leaders carve out substantial blocks of time from very busy schedules to meet with AJC delegations—and do so repeatedly—that they understand the importance of the Jewish community on the American scene, especially in the international-affairs arena.

Other than, possibly, segments of the business world, a narrow band of scholars, and Americans with ethnic roots in one of these nations, Jews are most likely to take an interest in what goes in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Central Asian countries, and the Baltic states, and the decision-makers there know it. After all, there are Jewish communities, big or small, within each of these countries to be considered, ties with Israel and the U.S. to be cultivated, potential links with Israel's foes to be monitored, and a long history of a Jewish presence that invites study and commemoration. Moreover, many of these countries, lacking any significant or well-organized diaspora community in the U.S., believe they can entice American Jewry to play that representational role or, in the case of Ukraine, to supplement the efforts of Ukrainian Americans. In the process, they also have come to understand the AJC agenda.

Our FSU interlocutors know that we want our fellow Jews to live in an atmosphere of equality that is free of anti-Semitism, above all from mainstream sources; that the state of their bilateral relations with the U.S. and Israel is vitally important to us; that concern for Iran's quest to acquire weapons of mass destruction ranks at the top of our priorities; and that we care deeply about the health of democracy and respect for human rights. Moreover, with the encouragement of the relevant Jewish communities, we often raise matters of local concern, such as the restitution of communal property, return of Jewish libraries and ritual objects, or cemetery desecrations and other instances of anti-Semitism.

#### LEADERSHIP TRAINING

A number of Jewish agencies have done laudable work in training Jewish leaders in the FSU for communal service. AJC's particular aim has been to identify those Jewish leaders who interact with the general community in their countries and to help them develop their skills in working in the political arena, fostering interreligious and interethnic dialogue, strengthening understanding of pluralism and tolerance, countering hate groups, and develop-

ing research programs. A key element of this initiative has been AJC's International Jewish Leadership Conference, held each May since 1994, in Washington, D.C., immediately following the AJC annual meeting. By design, nearly half of the 150 overseas delegates who spend a week attending both events come from the countries of the FSU. The aim is to help develop their skills in the areas cited above.

To be sure, the American Jewish model is not readily exportable to these countries, but specific knowledge and materials can be utilized. In addition, these annual gatherings permit the participants to exchange information and experiences with each other, as well as to create a network linked by e-mail and other means of communication that minimizes the sense of isolation of the smaller communities and at the same time bolsters their self-confidence.

#### PROJECT UKRAINE

Largely as a result of AJC's longstanding connections with an important segment of the Ukrainian American community and with the generous financial support of AJC benefactors, AJC launched Project Ukraine in 1993. In initiating the undertaking, AJC assumed—correctly, as it turned out—that the bulk of attention in the post-Soviet world would go to Russia. Therefore, given Ukraine's considerable size and large Jewish community, we would be well served devoting resources to the second most populous FSU state.

The aims of the project were twofold: to assist Ukraine in navigating the transition to a multiethnic, democratic nation by strengthening selected institutions of civil society that could mediate between the state and the citizen, acting as a watchdog for democracy and pluralism in the country; and working directly with Ukrainian Jewish leaders in enhancing their civic, political, community-relations, and defense skills so that they themselves could help ensure the protection of their own rights.

The program began with the first annual American Seminar for Ukrainian Leaders, held in December 1993. Government officials, educators, journalists, and representatives of Ukrainian Jewry and other national minorities participated in a ten-day program in the U.S. during which they learned about the role of civil society in American democracy, relations among American ethnic and reli-

gious minorities, and how Ukraine was viewed by American leaders.

Evaluations from this first initiative were very positive, especially about the value of the skills, knowledge, and training received. Other seminars followed. In addition, AJC professionals traveled to Ukraine to provide skills-training workshops. In 1994, for instance, AJC's legal director, Sam Rabinove, visited to discuss concepts of civil liberties, and, in 1995, AJC specialists in interreligious and interethnic relations were invited to Ukraine to share their extensive experiences on "intervention models that protect vulnerable groups" with the Jewish community and with representatives of Ukrainian civil society.

Regrettably, outside funding for Project Ukraine ended a decade ago, compelling AJC to curtail these particular programs even as it stepped up contact with Ukrainian government officials, continued to pay frequent visits to Kiev, attended events commemorating the Nazi massacres at Babi Yar, developed close ties with Jewish community leaders, focused attention on the anti-Semitic activities of leaders of MAUP, Ukraine's largest private university, and worked with the U.S. Congress to "graduate" Ukraine from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, for which Ukrainian political leaders, including President Viktor Yushchenko, gave AJC special credit.

#### RUSSIAN JEWISH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM IN THE U.S.

In 1996, two Russian Jews living in the U.S., Peyrets Goldmacher and Sam Kliger, visited AJC with an idea. They sought to build bridges between the sizable Russian-speaking Jewish community, especially in New York, and the established Jewish organizations. At their previous meetings with other Jewish agencies, the two recounted, they had been politely but firmly rebuffed. Would AJC take up the challenge? The answer was a resounding yes. The result has been a unique partnership that began the following year and recently marked its first decade of successful activity.

The centerpiece has been an annual Russian Jewish Leadership Program. Between 20 and 30 Russian-speaking Jews are selected to participate in a ten-week program at AJC headquarters, where they are exposed to the panoply of internal and external challenges faced by American and world Jewry and encouraged to join

existing institutions or establish their own. In fact, both have resulted from this program.

In 2003, AJC hired Dr. Kliger, who at the time was with the New York Association for New Americans, as full-time director of a new division, Russian Jewish Community Affairs. The division has become a central address for research and programming related to Russian-speaking Jews in the U.S. and around the world—including in Germany, home to the world's fastest-growing Jewish community because of the heavy influx of Jews from the FSU. In May 2006, a pathbreaking conference on Russian-speaking Jews in the U.S., estimated to comprise 10 percent of the total American Jewish population, was held in conjunction with AJC's centennial anniversary in Washington. Titled "From Immigration and Resettlement to Integration and Engagement," it brought together 75 leaders from across the country to discuss strategies for strengthening the Jewish identity and commitment of Russian-speaking Jews and for bridging the gap that still separates them from the rest of the Jewish community.

### *An Enduring Commitment for a New Century*

The well-being of Jews hailing from what was once Czarist Russia, later the Soviet Union, and now its 15 successor states remains of paramount importance to the agency's agenda today.

A great deal has changed since AJC was founded in response to the deadly attacks against the Jews of Kishinev. Millions of Jews emigrated until the Bolshevik regime closed the nation's borders. Other Jews welcomed the end of the Romanov dynasty, which had marked them with second-class status, restricted their residence to the Pale of Settlement, and stood by as the Black Hundreds and other anti-Semitic groups carried out periodic assaults on defenseless Jews. For some, communism, with its promise of equality and brotherhood, seemed like salvation. But it soon became abundantly clear that any hope of achieving equality and brotherhood would come, at a minimum, at the price of suppression of a distinctive Jewish religious and cultural identity.

And once Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Soviet Jews from all of the western territories, including the Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and Moldova, became prime targets of the Nazi "Final Solution," in some cases abetted

by local collaborators. Other Jewish civilians were fortunate to be evacuated to Central Asian republics and thus survived the war. Meanwhile, Jews in heavy numbers fought in the Red Army, and many received the nation's highest military decorations.

Once the war was over and Stalin was no longer impelled to rally the entire nation, including the Jews, to defeat the Nazi aggressor, and had no further need for American assistance, he began to turn on the Jews. In this instance, Jews were vilified not as individuals, but as a collectivity. From the "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign, to the plans for deportation of all Jews to the Soviet Far East, to the so-called Doctors' Plot on the eve of his death in 1953, Stalin made clear his deep distrust of Jews and his determination to target them.

A new era opened in the mid-1960s, beginning with Premier Kosygin's remark in Paris supporting family reunification, followed by the indescribable infusion of pride among Soviet Jews in response to Israel's stunning victory in the 1967 war. Largely deprived for decades of any Jewish education or religious upbringing, some Soviet Jews hungrily sought information about their identity—and about Israel, which had been pilloried in the Soviet media after the short-lived diplomatic infatuation with the new state in 1948 gave way to a markedly pro-Arab, anti-Israel stance, climaxed by Moscow breaking diplomatic relations after the Six-Day War.

From that point until the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, an increasing number of Jews attempted to assert their identity, and demanded repatriation to Israel and family reunification. At the same time, a broader dissident movement arose that focused on human-rights violations, and the Kremlin countered with a variety of responses, including harsh punitive measures.

Who could have predicted at the onset of these dramatic events that more than 1.5 million Jews would eventually succeed in leaving the Soviet Union, resettling primarily in Israel but also in the U.S., Germany, Canada, Australia, and, in tiny numbers, even New Zealand? Against all the odds, this became one of the most ambitious and successful human-rights campaigns in history. Who could have foreseen the ascension to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, with his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which led directly to the collapse of the world's most powerful tyranny? Who could have imagined that on former Soviet space Jewish life in its multi-

tudinous forms—synagogues of various kinds, community centers, study groups, cultural organizations—would reemerge decades after a deliberate Soviet effort to extinguish every last vestige of Jewish identity and pride? Who could have conceived that Israeli embassies would be established in these post-Soviet states, with bilateral relations flourishing, in many cases, today, as representatives of Israeli institutions are permitted to open offices and educate Jews about the true nature of Zionism and contemporary Israeli life? And who could have pictured Jews—who fled the USSR on one-way tickets to the West—now traveling back and forth to their former homes, for purposes of business, tourism, or even extended stays to reconnect with their places of origin?

Throughout this tumultuous history, AJC has sought, whenever possible, to play a constructive role, whether focusing the spotlight on the travails of Jews in that part of the world, defending their right to leave and resettle elsewhere, demanding that the religious and cultural rights of Jews be protected, encouraging ties with Israel, or enhancing the links between resettled Soviet Jews in the U.S. and the larger American Jewish community.

Varying with the circumstances, these AJC efforts have taken place through diplomatic back channels, demonstrations in the streets, skillful navigation of regional and international organizations, outreach to longstanding non-Jewish partners, prodigious research and publications, constant travel for advocacy purposes, and direct links with local Jewish communities and their frontline leaders. This pattern of activism reveals an agency driven by courage, commitment, conviction, and compassion.

In light of the entirely unforeseeable events of the twentieth century that affected the millions of Jews from Eastern Europe, it would be foolhardy indeed to anticipate likely scenarios for the next century. But it is clear that as long as there are Jews in that part of the world—and undoubtedly there will be—active engagement with them, their governments, key institutions in civic society, and other interested countries, especially the U.S. and Israel, will be necessary. AJC's century-long record of steadfast commitment and its current active and forward-looking agenda give every reason to believe that the organization will continue its record of unparalleled dedication.