

Introduction

In October 1981, two American Jewish professionals talked past one another as they reenacted a routine argument about attitudes in the Jewish world toward the United Nations (UN) and one of its chief projects, international human rights. Playing the role of cynic was thirty-nine-year-old Harris Schoenberg, recently appointed director of UN affairs for B'nai B'rith. His antithesis was seventy-four-year-old Philip Klutznick, a former president of B'nai B'rith and the World Jewish Congress (WJC) and UN envoy for three separate US presidents. The issue Schoenberg put to Klutznick: UN member states were perverting human rights by exaggerating Israeli transgressions in territories it was occupying and passing resolutions decrying Jewish nationalism as racist. Ever the Pollyanna, Klutznick declared his younger colleague's cynicism went too far. He exhorted Schoenberg to stop "expecting miracles" from an imperfect institution. Instead, Klutznick maintained, what ought to concern them was the parochialism of their ranks: "our principal trouble is that unless it is Soviet Jewry, or Israel connected, or antisemitism, we frequently think the issue is not of importance ... human rights, whether they involve Jews or not, is important to all of us." To Schoenberg, however, clinging to old mantras seemed hopelessly naïve when dealing with an institution that had become the "moral equivalent of a Nuremberg rally." He waxed poetic about how Jewish history was defined by a creative tension between the universal and the particular, manifest in their own time between balancing support for human rights and for the restoration of Jewish sovereignty. Now, Schoenberg insisted, these "parallel Jewish impulses" were "almost at war."¹

Schoenberg and Klutznick were two inheritors of a long tradition of Jewish internationalism that dated back nearly 150 years. For almost as long as there was an international system of states, those who conceived of themselves as custodians of Jewish collective self-defense sought to sensitize the international legal and political order to the place of vulnerable Jewish minorities within it. The different lived experiences of these two American purveyors of Jewish internationalism explains the gap in

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sentiment that had emerged between them. Klutznick, born in 1907 to a Yiddish-speaking family in Kansas City, Missouri, lived through the major convulsions of twentieth-century Jewish history: the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. Trained as a lawyer, he was also one of the leading American Jewish advocates for Israel of his day and as a real-estate developer helped plan the construction of the Israeli port city of Ashdod.² In contrast, Schoenberg was only six years old during the historical moment that birthed both Israel and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). He was the product of an inwardly turned American Jewish community and viewed international institutions as sites of war for Israel, devoting his 1972 doctoral dissertation to a critical evaluation of postcolonial concepts of self-determination in international law.³ Schoenberg would dedicate his life to combating what he considered the weaponization of human rights against Israel.

Foregrounding sensitive points of tension such as that between Klutznick and Schoenberg upends dominant narratives about Jews and human rights that often emphasize creative symbiosis above all. Philippe Sands's best-selling chronicle of Hersh Lauterpacht and Raphael Lemkin typifies the kind of celebratory narrative that venerates the formative role played by Jewish lawyers, diplomats, and activists in laying the foundation for a new architecture of international human rights and criminal law in the twentieth century.⁴ Other moments and figures have also been cited in order to help popularize a tale of harmonious fusion between some Jews and human rights. At the 1945 San Francisco Conference convened to discuss the creation of the UN, the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) Jacob Blaustein and Joseph Proskauer helped nudge the United States to push for the incorporation of human rights into the UN Charter. René Cassin, a Jewish jurist and president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) for three decades, served as one of the primary drafters of the UDHR, for which he later received the Nobel Peace Prize.⁵ Four Jewish lawyers – brothers Jacob and Nehemiah Robinson, Louis Henkin, and Paul Weis – collaborated in formulating the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which introduced to international law the binding principle of *non-refoulement*.⁶ In received wisdom, figures like these embodied the perfect balance between Jewish universalism and particularism, bringing Jewish historical experience and legal expertise to bear for the benefit of all humanity. They illustrated a mantra that became popular among Jewish lawyers and activists: Jewish rights were best protected if the human rights of all were assured.

This common reading that focuses overwhelmingly on a small number of individuals and remains largely tethered to the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust obscures exactly how fraught the relationship between

some Jews and international rights protection became in the second half of the twentieth century. This is not the first book to claim that a once-steady relationship between Jewish internationalists and human rights became subject to frictions and pressures that over time undermined the partnership. It differs from previous works in its points of emphasis, in its chronology, and in the causal factors it advances to explain the separation.

Prior work on the subject has accepted uncritically the testimonies of Jewish internationalists that they were simply forced out of human rights movements due to disproportionate and unfair criticism of Israel by others. Some of these accounts use the year 1967 as a sharp dividing line and examine Jewish disillusionment with how human rights became a cudgel with which to attack Israel in international forums as a result of savvy Soviet and Arab diplomatic strategy in the context of decolonization. They note how many Jewish and Israeli elites began to feel human rights had become a new cover for antisemitism, an obsession with the allegedly diabolical deeds of the Jewish state that ignored even worse misdeeds by neighboring tyrannical and authoritarian regimes. In this telling, the causes of disassociation between some Jews and human rights were swift and monocausal.⁷

In truth, such accounts are less about human rights in particular than about Israel's changing position in the international arena. When Israel became the UN's fifty-ninth member state in March 1949, the international body had an overwhelmingly Western composition, led by states from Europe and the Americas. Rapid decolonization in Asia and Africa doubled the number of UN members between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, bringing in new postcolonial countries concerned with national self-determination, racial discrimination, and economic development. This turned out to be an unwelcome development for Israel, whose international standing was already imperiled by the twin forces of the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel's chief enemies in the international arena, fourteen Arab and three Soviet states, seized on the themes of anticolonialism and South African apartheid to curry favor among the new nations of the global South, ultimately coaxing them into forming a routine anti-Israel bloc. After Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War humiliated the Soviet and Arab states and left it an occupying power, this unholy alliance went into overdrive, attacking Israel's very legitimacy as a nation-state. A concerted campaign against Israel in a variety of international organizations culminated in the passage of the infamous 1975 UN General Assembly Resolution that labeled Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, as a "a form of racism and racial discrimination." The project of Jewish internationalism

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had nowhere to go once international institutions became sites of war against Israel.⁸

While this book builds on these existing observations, it breaks new ground by arguing that the seeds of the separation were planted in 1948. Israel's very birth was a structural constraint that reoriented the terms of Jewish internationalism and made impossible any kind of long-term harmony with human rights movements, other than those linked to the right of Jews to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Rather than being suddenly forced out by the anticolonial capture of human rights at the UN, Jewish internationalists gradually pulled back from defending human rights as a result of the birth of a Jewish nation-state. As we will see, the relationship between some Jews and human rights was in trouble even before Israel came into being, but the circumstances of its birth, its long-beleaguered standing in the world, and its claim to speak for all Jews combined to sabotage the union between Jewish internationalism and human rights.

Israel was supposed to help normalize the position of the Jewish people in international affairs, but it quickly became a burden and, for some, even a liability. Like other nation-states, Israel was created by the dispossession of a native population, whose plight and problematic absorption forced Jewish activists to strive to ensure international human rights laws and norms would not apply to it. Jewish internationalists became deeply constrained by Israel's conduct with respect to Palestinian Arab refugees, a large Arab minority, and its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. These tensions were present in 1948, became more visible in the 1950s, and exploded after Israel became an occupying power in 1967. It was simply impossible to continue to fashion human rights norms, laws, and institutions without nagging concern they could soon apply to the Jewish state. Israel also faced a hostile environment in the Middle East and in a Cold War, decolonizing world, sucking Jewish activists into all its geopolitical conflicts. The more embattled Israel became, the more Jewish activists had to deploy resources to defend it – and not human rights. Finally, as the self-proclaimed nation-state of the Jewish people, Israel claimed to speak in the name of all Jews, blurring the line between Israelis and others, all the while seeking to cajole Jewish activists into acting in its interests. Rather than seeing reactions to the demonization of Israel in international forums as the primary precipitant of the split between Jewish and human rights, we are better served to recognize them as final breaking points. A swift annulment was impossible without a groundwork of grievances laid beforehand. Some divorces occur simply because of the infidelity of a partner, but the separation between Jewish and human rights took place by mutual consent of the parties.

If Jewish internationalism long focused on constraining the power of nation-states, its post-1948 incarnation centered around cementing Israel's international legitimacy and its status as a haven for Jewish migrants. Despite some nominal efforts at the UN, Jewish internationalists largely drifted away from leaning on international law to defend Jewish rights across the world. Instead, they reframed their cause as a struggle for the right to leave and for freedom of emigration. Those on the receiving end of Jewish internationalism played a large role in this transformation. Years before they stopped pleading at the UN for incremental legal change, Jewish internationalists found the objects of their advocacy declare they could best exercise their rights in the State of Israel (or, in some cases, within other Western liberal democracies). Unable to ignore this clear message, Jewish rights carriers narrowed their focus to one conditional kind of human right – the right to leave – rather than those political and civil rights required for full freedom in nation-states. As a landing place for those escaping persecution, seeking economic opportunity, or expressing ideological attachment to Zionism, Israel was the best source of rights protection for Jews, even as some of its actions toward others brought it into direct conflict with international human rights norms.

Jewish internationalists gradually discovered that the German-Jewish political theorist Hannah Arendt had it right all along. To recall, in 1949 Arendt published an essay, later incorporated into her celebrated work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which she criticized the fragilities of the UDHR. In a world of nation-states, the only human rights that mattered, Arendt asserted, were those that could be guaranteed through participation in a functioning political community. No one could enjoy human rights by virtue of their humanity, she declared, but rather had to be a citizen of a nation-state to possess the “right to have rights” and enjoy those civil, political, economic, and social rights proclaimed in international documents. In an oft-ignored aside, Arendt argued that “not only did the loss of national rights in all instances entail the loss of human rights, but the restoration of the latter, as the recent example of the State of Israel proves, has been achieved so far only through the establishment of the former.”⁹ Indeed, in their time and place the most significant pieces of legislation for Jews were not international human rights laws but Israel's 1950 Law of Return and 1952 Law of Nationality, which granted the right of any Jewish immigrant to receive automatic Israeli citizenship.¹⁰

This book's protagonists are Jewish lawyers, activists, and public figures who operated through the auspices of Jewish nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Rather than an exhaustive account, this book

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focuses on the thought and action of activists associated with the most visible and influential Jewish NGOs in the international arena: the WJC, the AJC, the AIU, and, to a lesser extent, B'nai B'rith, the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA), and the Board of Deputies of British Jews (BDBJ). I treat these entities on three separate levels: as organizations that present a public face of Jewish politics in the international arena, as umbrella bodies that bestow legitimacy on and authority to the actions of individuals, and as carriers of two distinct traditions of Jewish internationalism. Like many works of modern Jewish political history, this book treats these groups as brokers of collective Jewish politics, not as actual embodiments of the views of the heterogeneous constituents for whom they claim to speak. They engaged in what postcolonial theorists call “strategic essentialism”: the presentation of group identity in an overly simplified manner in order to make claims and achieve political goals.¹¹ As is characteristic of the political organization of diaspora groups, the ability of these agents to project claims was not easily contested from below even if they remained nominally sensitive to the concerns of those on the receiving end of their advocacy.¹²

Although I highlight individual agency when warranted, this book is not a collective biography. It foregrounds a number of less well-known figures as well as leaders from the Jewish world more familiar to some readers. These characters are all male, because the elite world of organized Jewish internationalism largely restricted the opportunities of women to play significant roles. This book's subjects serve as exemplars of an older form of Western European advocacy or epitomize an American Jewish variant that became dominant after World War II. A preponderant number were acculturated American Jews of Eastern European background, but others were Central European Jewish emigres or Jews native to the United States, France, or Britain. Some were deeply committed Zionists, while others were nominally non-Zionists who developed a sense of Jewish political identity only in the wake of the Holocaust. Almost all were profoundly secular and made the performance of Jewish solidarity a central expression of their Jewish identities. To be sure, these characters hailed from different national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. At times, such differences manifested themselves, whether in relation to questions of group rights, legal traditions, approaches to empire, or Cold War sensibilities. Yet it remains striking how seemingly dissonant worldviews often overlapped in the world of Jewish internationalism. While this book tries to make sense of how these figures understood their own actions, it does not take their self-fashioning at face value and reads them against broader contexts of which they were not always aware. Such a complex and multilayered approach

has been a particular challenge in the field of Jewish studies, which often leans on self-understanding as a central heuristic.¹³

Even if this book's central characters were fixated on international human rights, they were most certainly not "human rights activists" in the contemporary sense of the term. Many wore multiple hats in the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds and juggled a wide variety of other causes central to postwar Jewish life: reconstructing Jewish communities ravaged by the Holocaust, repairing the relationship of the Jewish world to Germany, lobbying for economic and political aid to Israel, and encouraging Jewish-Christian reconciliation. Some do not easily fit the category of nonstate actor, as several characters in the book served simultaneously as Jewish NGO leaders and as representatives of nation-states at international forums. With the exception of those few who dedicated themselves to monitoring developments at the UN, almost none worked full-time on human rights.

The assumptions and choices of Jewish activists in the second half of the twentieth century are best understood in the *longue durée* of two political heritages of Jewish internationalism. The first tradition, what I call liberal integrationism, reigned supreme in the Jewish world between the mid-nineteenth century and the First World War. In the interwar period, a second lineage, what James Loeffler has termed "Zionist internationalism," superseded the first.¹⁴ The most bitter of divorces take place only after many years of happy union together. In the Jewish political imagination, the connection between Jews and human rights stretched back as long as there were ideas about the international protection of the rights of minorities.¹⁵

Two Traditions of Jewish Internationalism

Only in recent years has Jewish internationalism become its own subset of modern Jewish politics, owing both to growing interest in nonstate actors within international history as well as to the maturation of modern Jewish studies.¹⁶ This new vein of scholarship has been less concerned with how Jews engaged with international law and order than in the "modernization" of older patterns of Jewish solidarity. Indeed, this work has analyzed from different angles the nineteenth-century origins of the "Jewish International" – a network of Jewish institutions and individuals engaged in philanthropy, social engineering, and transnational activism. Scholars have analyzed a transition from the personal intervention of Jewish communal *shtadlanim* (intercessors) in the medieval and early modern eras to organized Jewish politics conducted by professionalized institutions by the end of the nineteenth century. They have usefully

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compared the Jewish international to other religious internationals at high levels of generality and investigated how its structures and functions were activated at specific moments, such as the 1840 Damascus Affair, the 1858 Mortara Affair, and the 1903 Kishinev Pogrom. They have also shown how the assumption of a Jewish political subject that transcended borders was based on social, cultural, or even racial terms of affinity that predated the birth of the Zionist movement.¹⁷

Such work has also questioned how the practice of modern Jewish solidarity was not always as neutral and benevolent as it appeared. Generally flowing from West to East, Jewish transnational mobilization was often an acknowledgment of the indivisibility of emancipation: an attack on the security and long-term well-being of Jews somewhere could spill over into stigmatizing Jewish minorities anywhere. Efforts to combat persecution and discrimination in “uncivilized” locales reaffirmed Western Jews’ status on the right side of the civilizational hierarchy. This enterprise was part of a larger Western Jewish civilizing mission that would “regenerate” their “backward” kinfolk, mimicking the paternalism and racism of European imperialism.¹⁸ Such undertakings could also represent preventative measures intended to stem the tide of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, whose very presence Western European and American Jews feared could endanger their own political and economic security.

Rather than a synonym for Jewish ethnoreligious solidarity, Jewish internationalism in this book has a much less capacious meaning: a mentality and set of practices intended to carve out a place for the world’s most dispersed minority within the international legal and political order. Its *modus operandi* was to make the treatment of Jewish minorities across the world a barometer of health for the international system itself. The category of “Jewish internationalist” functions to signal the extent to which a set of lawyers, functionaries, journalists, and philanthropists held similar worldviews and an abiding faith in the power of international law, without losing sight of the many national, linguistic, and cultural differences among them. Insofar as Jewish internationalism was concerned with checking the sovereignty of states that enshrined Jewish legal disabilities, it was premised on creating options of last resort after all appeals at the domestic level had been exhausted. The project of Jewish internationalism was also borne of a deep and abiding faith in intercommunal and interreligious solidarity. That the first public action of the Jewish world’s first international NGO, the AIU, involved a campaign on behalf of Syrian Christians facing massacre during a bloody civil war in 1860 was representative of this ethos.¹⁹

The first lineage in Jewish internationalism, liberal integrationism, was an outgrowth of the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French

Revolution. It served as a handmaiden to the project of Jewish emancipation, a series of domestic political processes that advanced Jews from an inferior legal status to the equal rights of citizenship.²⁰ Liberal integrationists sought for Eastern European, Middle Eastern, and Ottoman Jewish communities to gain the rights of citizenship they themselves already possessed. Its main carriers came from a cadre of Jewish elites from Britain and France and were joined starting in the 1890s by others from Germany and the United States. Representative figures ranged from the British philanthropist Moses Montefiore and the French jurist Adolphe Cremieux to the American diplomat Oscar Straus, the German journalist Paul Nathan, and the British publicist Lucien Wolf. Figures like these derived their authority from the high professional and social standing they possessed in the non-Jewish world. However, they increasingly conducted their activities through the auspices of Jewish institutions that sprang up as part of the growth of associational life typical of the first wave of globalization. The ideology of liberal integrationism found its way into the *raison d'être* of the first NGOs concerned with Jewish international affairs, including B'nai B'rith (1843), the AIU (1860), the AJA (1871), the *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden* (1901), and the AJC (1906).²¹

Liberal integrationism was highly dependent on the expansion of European empire. As many scholars have argued, the emergence of international law as a nascent structure was bound up with Europeans' dominance of non-European states and empires.²² International law rested heavily on hierarchies of nations and peoples captured in the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism.²³ Scholars have dwelled on how Jewish activists employed the rhetoric of "civilization" and "humanity" to encourage Britain and France to pursue Jewish equality as a central aim of their foreign policy.²⁴ This logic applied not only in ad hoc interventions but also within the incipient European legal system in forms of coercive diplomacy pursued by the Great Powers.²⁵ Only this legal diplomacy promised the structural change that would extend civil liberties and the rule of law in the non-Westernized, autocratic, socialist, or quasi-democratic regimes where the Jewish objects of this advocacy lived.

Just as histories of humanitarianism and human rights have demonstrated that only specific locales consistently drew the attention of activists, so too did Jewish internationalism focus on certain geopolitically important states that had vexed relations with their large Jewish populations. In a pattern that continued into the second half of the twentieth century, the carriers of Jewish rights claims paid the most systematic attention to Jews in three states: Romania, Morocco, and Russia. At moments of changing international order, Jewish activists could press

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their claims in areas where sovereignty was more fluid, such as Romania and Morocco. At the 1856 Congress of Paris and the 1878 Congress of Berlin, Jewish legal diplomacy helped make the normative treatment of racial and religious minorities a part of the entrance of new states such as Romania into the international system.²⁶ Jewish activists also capitalized on conferences convened in Madrid (1880) and Algeciras (1906) to regulate the problem of foreign protection to shield Moroccan Jews from what they perceived as second-class citizenship under local jurisdiction.²⁷ Such coercive diplomacy was never an option in Russia, always the great outlier given its Great Power status and unassailable sovereign rights in international law.

The second variant of Jewish internationalism emerged on the ruins of the old imperial order that sustained the first. The Zionist movement had been infused with an internationalist sensibility from its origins: the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, proclaimed in 1897 to “establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law.”²⁸ Yet insofar as early Zionists held political goals beyond emigration and state-building, as scholars have recently pointed out, they primarily pursued national-cultural autonomy within the Tsarist and Hapsburg empires.²⁹ Instead, it was only with the end of the First World War, after the beckoning of what Erez Manela has called the “Wilsonian Moment,” that a significant internationalist wing of the Zionist movement emerged.³⁰

The World Zionist Organization’s October 1918 Copenhagen Manifesto was a response to this atmosphere stressing national self-determination and multilateral institutionalism. Issued less than three weeks before the armistice ending World War I, the document encapsulated the triad of principles that would govern interwar Zionist policy: the recognition of Palestine as the national home of the Jewish people, equal rights for Jews everywhere, and national-cultural autonomy in areas of Jewish demographic density.³¹ This program became operational due to two major innovations of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. The minority treaties codified a modicum of group rights in international law, extending some linguistic, cultural, and religious rights to national minorities in fourteen newly created or expanded states in Europe and the Middle East.³² The mandate system, including British Palestine, was based on the same civilizational hierarchies central to nineteenth-century humanitarian intervention: European powers were to govern non-Western territories and the peoples within them until they were “advanced” enough to govern themselves.³³ These innovations were to be regulated by the League of Nations, a Eurocentric institution promising to reconcile stability and sovereignty and regulate interstate conflict through international law.³⁴