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For the Sake of Zion I Shall Not Stand Still?

The Jewish Diaspora and the Jerusalem Issue

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Book Abstract

For the Sake of Zion I Shall Not Stand Still?

The Jewish Diaspora and the Jerusalem Issue

This book marks the first comprehensive research that focuses on the Jewish Diaspora's relations with and positions concerning Jerusalem, Israel's capital and the holiest city for most of the Jewish people. It examines both the opinions and the actions of Diaspora Jews vis-à-vis this city. Unlike many books and articles that have focused on Jerusalem's long history, on the one hand, and on the characteristics of the Jewish Diaspora, on the other, this book also refers to the political developments that have occurred in Jerusalem in view of the various social and political processes that have occurred in the major Jewish diasporic communities. Moreover, this is the first work whose main focus is the Jewish Diaspora's relations to and perspectives on contemporary Jerusalem.

The bond between the Jewish people all over the world and Jerusalem has, as we know, been maintained for thousands of years and has religious, national and cultural aspects. In the course of time, however, other religions and nations became connected to the city, which eventually became a source of inter-religious and international tension that reached its apex in recent decades. While addressing the historical dimension of the bond between the Jewish Diaspora and Jerusalem, this research explores this bond's characteristics in very recent times – namely, from the time Israel and the Palestinians first met at the negotiations table two decades ago.

The political developments in the Palestinian arena that followed the signing of the first Oslo Accords in 1993 quickly drew the attention and involvement of Diaspora Jews. Some of them expressed profound concern about the potential implications for the future of Jerusalem, which is, of course, one of the main issues at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over time, Jews living outside Israel have supported various prospective political settlements. Some oppose the geopolitical division of Jerusalem, some view it with favor; others have presented no official position but at the same time promised to support any decision taken by

present and future Israeli governments. Many Jewish organizations abroad urge the Israeli government to guarantee the unity of Jerusalem under its rule. More recently, Diaspora Jews have become active in promoting a political settlement of the Jerusalem problem. They lobby the Israeli government and/or hostland governments, demonstrate in Israel and abroad, donate money to various political organizations in Israel, and engage in other such activities.

Notwithstanding the interest Diaspora Jews have demonstrated in the political future of Jerusalem, life in the city is about more than just national or regional politics. Therefore, this research examines how Diaspora Jews contribute to Jerusalem's economy, education, welfare, health, culture, religion, and local politics too. These aspects are of such great significance that the political aspect cannot be discussed without referring to them as well. Together they make up the urban mosaic called Jerusalem. Thus, actions taken by Diaspora Jews concerning Jerusalem might have political, economic and cultural consequences all at the same time.

The book details the existing bond with Jerusalem of six largest Jewish diasporic communities: American Jewry, French Jewry, Canadian Jewry, Australian Jewry, Russian Jewry and British Jewry. The role played by Diaspora Jews' organizations with regard to Jerusalem is emphasized, since they usually include the most politically active members of the Jewish communities outside Israel and hence are at the forefront of these communities' activities. In addition, the activities of world Jewish organizations in Jerusalem and their multifaceted contribution to the city life are described in these pages.

The book offers conclusions regarding the relations between the Jewish Diaspora and Jerusalem, highlighting the heterogeneity of the views and positions of Jewish communities and organizations the world over. While emphasizing the strength, history and many faces of the existing bond between the Diaspora and Jerusalem, the research also points to the historical changes it has undergone, as well as to the growing involvement of prominent individuals and organizations of the Jewish Diaspora since the Six Day War in 1967, in general, and the signing of the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, in particular.

Notwithstanding the variety of opinions regarding Jerusalem's political future, it seems that many Diaspora Jews tend to favor the option according to which the

unity of the city under Israeli rule should be maintained. At the same time, more individuals and organizations in the Jewish Diaspora than before are willing to seriously consider a political partition of the city as part of a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

When one takes into account the geostrategic importance of the United States, the large size of its Jewish community and the dynamic character of many Jewish organizations operating there, it seems that American Jewry will remain the most active Jewish community outside Israel.

The book ends with a list of practical recommendations for decision makers serving in the Israeli government and the Jerusalem municipality regarding relations with the Jewish Diaspora. One of the main points is that the complexity of the Jewish Diaspora in different countries cannot be downplayed and hence the complex relations between Diaspora Jews and Jerusalem should be taken into account. Israeli leaders should, therefore, tread with caution when promoting their policy vis-à-vis Jewish communities abroad in order to avoid unnecessary crises between the Israeli government and Diaspora Jews as well as between Diaspora Jews and their respective host governments. Moreover, the book suggests expanding the cooperation between the Israeli government and the Jerusalem municipality with various Diaspora individuals, groups and organizations, including those that have not to date been greatly involved in the city life. This partnership has the potential to successfully advance a range of aims and projects that are not under political dispute, for the benefit of all Jerusalemites.