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## **The Role of Ethnic Politics in U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy: the Case of Soviet Jewry**

**Fred A. Lazin**

Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel

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Fred A. Lazin, Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel.  
[lazin@bgu.ac.il](mailto:lazin@bgu.ac.il)

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## **Introduction**

This paper examines the exercise of power by American Jews in American politics. It does so through an examination of the influence of the Soviet Jewry advocacy movement on United States refugee policies during the 1970s and 1980s. The movement consisted mostly of American Jewish organizations and individuals and operatives of an Israeli government agency, the Liaison Bureau.<sup>1</sup>

The paper presents four case studies; efforts to gain entry into the United States for Soviet Jewish émigrés in the 1970s, proposals by the Reagan Administration to direct resettlement of Soviet Jewish émigrés to Israel, the issue of free emigration of Soviet Jews and the Gorbachev-Reagan summit meetings; and the decision by the American government to impose a quota on Soviet Jewish refugees allowed to enter the United States after 1989. The focus of the case studies is on the role of establishment Jewish organizations in the Soviet Jewry movement including the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (CJF).<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on the establishment organizations reflects their central role in influencing American Jewry, American public opinion and Congress and the American government. It also reflects archival sources used by the author.<sup>3</sup>

The paper deals with the broader issue of ethnicity and American politics. The analysis of the response of American Jewish leaders to the plight of Soviet Jewry in the 1970s and 1980s provides important information about the political behavior, influence and style of a well-established minority group in the United States. Since the 1960s American Jews “have come to wield considerable influence in American economic, cultural, intellectual and political life” (Friedman 1999:1, 2). By the 1980s and 1990s they played “a major role in electoral politics and public policy... [and] wield[ed] considerable influence in the nation’s public life” (Ginsberg 1993:139, 1, 2).<sup>4</sup> According to Biale (1986:177-178), Since the mid- 1980s “... this community has access to the highest corridors of power and possesses considerable ability to influence, if not always decisively, the government of the United States in favor of Jewish interests.”

Importantly, the group's acceptance, wealth and political power are recent. In the 1930s American Jews were seen by many and often by themselves as outsiders and strangers (Silberman 1985:62-85). They lacked political influence and felt insecure as American-Jews. They believed that as a minority American Jews should not lobby publicly for a specific Jewish issue (Lazin 1979). In responding to Hitler’s anti-Jewish policies in Germany and later to the Holocaust most major American Jewish leaders urged caution in approaching their government (Lazin 1979 & Ne’eman Arad 2000). They feared that public agitation for rescue could lead to anti-Semitism (Novick 1999:40). According to Ginsberg (1993:3), “...the Jewish community lacked sufficient influence to induce the United States government to take any action that might have impeded the slaughter of European Jewry”.

The findings here on the rise of Jewish influence in American politics should contribute to a better understanding of the process of Americanization of groups considered at one time outsiders, strangers and politically ineffective. Understanding the way American Jews participate as organized interest groups in American politics since the 1970s should provide an interesting marker for other groups who have more recently entered American society. The findings might provide a paradigm for understanding what may happen to second and third generation children of newer immigrants who today are considered outsiders and newcomers.

In light of the recent papers by Mearsheimer and Walt 2006) on the Israeli influence on American foreign policy and the significant role played by the American Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) the findings here should be of great interest to students of American politics. Israel played a major role in the Soviet Jewry movement in the United States (Lazin 2005). It helped establish the NCSJ and exerted major influence in the organizations studied here which in turn influenced American refugee policy.

### **1. Gaining entry for Soviet Jews in the 1970s**

The Soviet Union allowed some of its Jewish citizens to emigrate beginning in 1968. Leaving via Austria, almost all the émigrés continued on immediately to Israel. Only 58 persons “dropped out” in 1971, 251 out of 32,000 in 1972 and 1500 out of 35, 000 in 1973. Thereafter the dropout rate reached 50 percent by 1976 and over two thirds by the end of the decade.

The Jewish Agency for Israel referred all Jewish émigrés not wanting to go to Israel to the JDC and HIAS.<sup>5</sup> Both organizations moved them to Rome where they applied for visas to the United States and other countries. JDC provided care and maintenance and HIAS assisted in obtaining visas and coordinated resettlement.<sup>6</sup>

With the initial increase in Jews leaving the Soviet Union in the 1970s, the American Soviet Jewry advocacy movement sought United States governmental aid for refugee resettlement in Israel. In 1973, for example, the United States gave Israel \$44 million to help resettle Soviet Jews because that “movement of Soviet Jews from Soviet Union is a matter of United States foreign policy and as such it deserves close support” (Shapiro 1984:74). At the time, Soviet Jews were the only refugees that move with full financial support of the American government. Between 1973 and 1993 Israel received \$405.6m from the US government to resettle Soviet Jews.<sup>7</sup>

When the number of Soviet Jews trying to come to the USA increased, HIAS, CJF and others lobbied to have Soviet Jews admitted as refugees (conditional immigrants) or parolees (Goldberg 1996:183, 184). Until the Refugee Act of 1980 the United States definition of a refugee mostly involved persons fleeing Communist regimes.<sup>8</sup> The definition since 1980 stipulated that a refugee was any person who was outside his/her country “and who is unable or unwilling to return to... because of persecution, or a well-founded fear of persecution, on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (Reimers 1985:191). Therefore, Soviet émigrés had to prove to an immigration officer in Rome that they had a well founded fear of persecution (Zolberg 1995:138 & Goldberg 1996:265). United States policy was to accept all Soviet Jews as refugees (Bayer

1991:140-141). Few were rejected. David Reimers (1985:240) writes that "whereas the main problem for German Jews in the 1930s was finding a home to escape Hitler, forty years later Russian Jews had little difficulty being admitted to the United States..."

Another option involved Parole which allowed the Attorney General to permit the entry of political refugees without specific quotas provided a sponsoring agency took responsibility for the parolee.<sup>9</sup> It was less advantageous than refugee status because recipients and their sponsors received less resettlement aid and it was more difficult to obtain permanent residency and citizenship. Between 1972 and 1975 about 2, 739 Soviet Jewish émigrés entered the United States under parole. In 1976 when the visa process backup in Rome stranded many Soviet émigrés, CJF chair, Mr. Max Fisher, intervened with the Republican administration and Attorney General John Mitchell paroled thousands of Soviet Jews into the United States (Memo, Gaynor Jacobson to Cooperating Agencies "Backlog of Soviet Jews in Rome" November 30, 1976 (CJF files, Box 710).

The Soviets severely limited direct visas to Soviet Jews wanting to join relatives in the United States; they preferred Third Country Processing (TCP) for family reunification cases to the West. Between 1971 and first quarter of 1977 they issued 3, 337 TCP visas. During this same time 134, 945 leave on visas for Israel. Soviet exit policy, therefore, influenced most Soviet Jews to apply for visas for Israel rather than to the United States. The odds of success were much greater.

When domestic resettlement expenses increased after 1975, CJF lobbyist Mark Talisman proposed getting the federal government to match the Jewish community's expenditures (Goldberg 1996:182). He along with Stuart Eizenstat of the White House, initiated and drafted legislation for a block grant which allocates a per person

reimbursement fee for refugee resettlement to federations. Refugees and their sponsors became eligible for financial support for transportation, baggage, maintenance, visa processing fees, and initial resettlement in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the bulk of the cost of maintaining and transporting Jewish refugees to the USA was met by the United States government (Phil Bernstein 1983:75).<sup>11</sup>

With the increase in Soviet Jewish émigrés arriving in the United States each year after 1975, the Jewish federations had a very difficult time funding the absorption of these destitute newcomers. By the summer of 1976, six of the 12 communities with Jewish populations above 75000 and several medium size Jewish communities, “restricted their acceptance of new refugees to those people who have first-degree relatives in that community” (Memo, Gaynor Jacobson to Cooperating Agencies, August 31, 1976 (JDC files).

The Soviet Union “closed” its gates to most Jews wanting to emigrate in 1982. With the change in Soviet policy on Jewish emigration in the early 1980s, the refugee activities in Vienna and Rome soon ground to a halt.

The first case study indicates that American Jewish organizations obtained US government aid to resettle Soviet Jewish émigrés in Israel. Once Soviet Jews began to drop out and preferred to resettle in the United States then American Jewish organizations lobbied to obtain for them refugee status and resettlement aid. This angered Israel. American Jewish leaders resisted Israeli pressure year after year to desist from aiding dropouts to enter and resettle in the United States. At the same time some Jewish federations in early 1978 and 1979 began to limit aid to Soviet Jewish émigrés who had first degree relatives in the community.

## **2. Proposals to change United States refugee policy**

In March 1982, Howard Eugene Douglas, US Ambassador at Large and Coordinator for Refugee Affairs in the State Department proposed changes in government regulations *which would curtail refugee immigration* into the United States. He made specific references to Soviet Jews as well as to other groups of refugees.

Realization that Soviet Jews had the alternative of immigrating to Israel in the context of an overburdened American refugee load may have led Ambassador Douglas to reconsider the American policy of granting all Soviet Jewish émigrés refugee status (Interview with Lapidot, June 2002). The Israelis may have influenced his thinking on Soviet Jewry.<sup>12</sup> Douglas believed it in the interest of both Israel and the United States for most Soviet Jewish émigrés to resettle in Israel (Interview, June 29, 2004).

Ambassador Douglas told Carmi Schwartz of CJF in May 1982 that there was a need for an across the board curb on refugees entering the United States. More specifically he wanted to limit entry to Soviet Jews with first degree relatives “... in keeping with the government of Israel’s policies vis a vis Soviet Jewish immigrants” (Memo, Carmi Schwartz to Martin Citron “Proposed US Administration New Regulations” (2 drafts) , May 20, 1982 (CJF files, box 660). In his view Israel needed and wanted their valuable human resources and their going to Israel satisfied the higher echelons of the KGB and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It would also reduce the refugee burden of the United States. (Interview, H. Eugene Douglas, June 29, 2004). By this time the United States had encouraged other nations to share the burden of refugee resettlement .



Changes proposed by Ambassador Douglas would mean that many more Soviet Jews would have to enter the United States as immigrants and not as refugees (Memo, Leimsidor, July 3, 1982 (CJF files). As immigrants, a relative or agency will have to file affidavit of support pledging to keep her/his incoming relative free of public dependency for three years. This disqualifies the immigrant from most government benefits unless stateside relative's income is low enough to warrant qualification.

If new Soviet US citizens refused to assume responsibility for first-degree relatives, then the "... local Jewish communities may be asked to provide financial support and increased services to newly arrived immigrants" (Working draft of notes of meeting of JDC Transmigrant program staff in Rome, October 7-8, 1986 (JDC files). The care and maintenance provided immigrants are not eligible for federal reimbursement under the block grant .

Representative Hamilton Fish (Republican NY), probably at the behest of CJF and other American Jewish groups wrote Ambassador Douglas (July 23, 1982 (CJF files, box 659) that he opposed a change in refugee policy. He argued that the Holocaust justified "special consideration of the plight of Jewish refugees". Representative Fish emphasized that the United States has been encouraging the Soviet Union to allow the Jewish population to leave. To now call for limiting entry would make us seem hypocritical. Moreover, our setting a high ceiling on Soviet Jewish refugees is sending a signal to the Soviet Union that American is committed to principle of freedom for Soviet Jews; to change this policy would send the wrong signal now.

He closed "My hope is that the United States will adhere to its practice of admitting Soviet Jews regardless of whether they have relatives currently living in this

country. The unsettled conditions in the Middle East provide an additional reason for allowing Soviet Jewish refugees the option of living outside of Israel.”

Ambassador Douglas replied to Congressman Fish that it “would be unthinkable that we would precipitate any action which might impede the ability of Jews to leave the Soviet Union”.<sup>13</sup> He emphasized that “It is absolutely incongruous that we are competing with Israel for Soviet Jewish refugees when basically Israel is the *country of first resettlement* (Letter, Douglas to Fish, August 23, 1982).<sup>14</sup> Competition with Israel he suggested contradicted our policy of encouraging other countries to be prime resettlement sites for ethnics that related to them. Douglas reassured Fish that he had no intention of going ahead with the proposed changes.

Later, Ambassador Douglas claimed that he had been overruled by Congress. He believed that the "Jewish lobby" (CJF, HIAS and other organizations) had “gotten to Congress”. He also suggested that the Israeli government and Liaison Bureau refused to help him in dealing with American Jewish opposition to his proposed changes which would have brought more Soviet Jews to Israel (Interviews, H. Eugene Douglas, February 3, 2004 (telephone) and June 29, 2004).

In February 1987 Prime Minister. Yitzhak Shamir publicly suggested that the United States not consider Soviet Jewish émigrés as political refugees. He called on American Jewish leadership and organizations to support the Israeli position and called upon American government to “institute more restrictive measures with regard to immigration and refugee status for Soviet Jews wishing to be resettled in the United States“ (Freedman 1989:86-90).<sup>15</sup> According to HIAS, Secretary of State George Shultz told Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that he would not act on the request “unless it

receives a clear signal from the American Jews that this is what they want” (Letter, Robert Israeloff to HIAS Board, March 24, 1987 (JDC files).

The CJF responded that there was a clear consensus among American Jewish leaders and organizations “that indicates that American Jews will not undertake such an assignment—quite to the contrary, American Jewish leaders and organizations will continue to be committed to more liberal United States immigration and refugees policies and will seek to have such policies implemented on all United States government levels (“Notes for re: Soviet Jewish immigration, refugee status and direct flight issues “ April 8, 1987 (CJF files, box 667). Shoshana Cardin, CJF President stated we are opposed to any change in the current emigration laws and regulations (.Meeting of Large City Presidents & Executive Meeting and Notes (CJF), April 27, 1987 (CJF files, box 696).

In this case study we observed that the American Jewish establishment successfully blocked efforts by the head of US refugee policy to direct more Soviet Jews to Israel. They also continued to resist efforts by Shamir to have them drop support of drop outs and to have US government block the entry of Soviet Jews.

### **3. Reagan Gorbachev Summits**

Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party on March 11, 1985 (Gitelman 1987:263). Gorbachev opposed unrestricted emigration by Soviet citizens including Soviet Jews (Friedgut 1989:13). He feared the loss of human capital.<sup>16</sup> He also considered Soviet emigration a domestic (internal) matter. His stand and policies would be altered, however, when he sought to achieve détente with the United States.

In preparation for the first summit scheduled for November 19 and 20, 1985 in Geneva, a NCSJ delegation met with the President and Secretary of State on September 9, 1985 (NCSJ statement of Morris Abram on Reykjavik, October 10, 1986 (CJF files, box 667).

At the meeting NCSJ President Morris Abram (1989:10) told President Reagan: "At the outset of the talks, the Soviet Union should be informed that it is very unlikely that the American people will trust the Soviets on new agreements affecting the vital security of both countries while they persist in violation of the humane provisions of the Helsinki accords. ... Mr. President, we ask you to raise the issue of Soviet Jewry with General Secretary Gorbachev in context of the justified suspicion of sincerity of the Soviet word felt by the American government and people and indignation that the Soviets treat the human rights agreements as if they never happened" (Abram 1989:11 and (Comments by Morris Abram at NJCRAC, " Soviet Jewry after ...", February 14-17, 1988 (CJF files, box 667).

President Reagan agreed. In doing so, he placed the issue of freedom of emigration for Soviet Jews on the negotiating table. In meetings in Moscow before the summit Secretary of State Shultz met with Gorbachev who agreed to a four part agenda for Geneva including human rights (Shultz 1993:586-594).

Lawrence Grossman (1988:196) reported that the summit "had produced optimism, bordering on euphoria that Soviet leaders were prepared to liberalize emigration policy." Other observers, however, noted mixed Soviet signals on the Jewish issue (Gitelman 1987:265 & Ro'I 1997:60). More arrests and harassment were reported

(NCSJ flyer “Washington Mobilization” “Gorbachev is Coming to Washington.” c January 1986).<sup>17</sup>

Prior to and following the summit, the Soviets let some notable persons, including Anatoly (Natan) Sharansky leave (in February 1986) without significant changes in Soviet policies of limited emigration, harassment and repressing Jewish culture (Dershowitz 1991:250). The releases generated positive publicity for the Soviet Union at relatively little cost (David Harris “After Sharansky? What’s next for Soviet Jews” *Washington Post*, February 13, 1986).

The second summit was scheduled to be held in Reykjavik in early October 1986. The White House announced that President Reagan would raise the issue of Jewish emigration at the summit. At a prior meeting at the White House he stated “I will make it amply clear to Mr. Gorbachev that unless there is real Soviet movement on human rights, we will not have any kind of political atmosphere necessary to make lasting program on other issues. ...true peace requires respect of human rights and freedom as well as arms control.” (“President Links Rights in Soviet Union to Summit success”, *NYT*, October 8, 1986.

That same day Secretary of State George Shultz told 300-400 Jewish leaders in the Department of State and “our message to the Soviets is simple. Token gestures for short term lowering of barriers will not suffice. What the American people want to see is a genuine and lasting improvement in the situation of Soviet Jews as part of a broader commitment on the part of Soviet authorities to allow their citizens to exercise basic human rights, including freedom of movement (Statement of Morris Abram on Reykjavik, October 10, 1986 (CJF file, box 667)).”<sup>18</sup>

The failure of the two heads of state to agree on arms control at the summit seemed to be a setback for human rights and Soviet Jewish emigration. Yet, in Abrams view the summit in Reykjavik marked a real breakthrough " Statement of Morris Abram on Reykjavik" October 10, 1986 (CJF files, box 667).<sup>19</sup> He argued that the Soviet Union accepted the Reagan Administration's proposal "to discuss the easing of certain emigration restrictions... [specifically it] agreed to create a [joint] working group at Reykjavik to deal with humanitarian issues" including Jewish emigration (Letter, Morris Abram & Jerry Goodman to *NYT*, October 18, 1986). In Shultz's view (1993:776) here "Reagan and Gorbachev agreed that human rights would become a regular and recognized part of our agenda".

By October 1987 Richard Schifter and others in the State Department believed that the Soviets had changed their emigration policies toward the Jews.<sup>20</sup> They had waived the first degree relative requirement for nationality groups for which the doors of emigration had opened (Jews, Armenians and Germans but not for others). On the second barrier—the consent of relatives—they removed the siblings but kept parents of spouse. In practice there were few objections. As for security clearance, it proved hard to enforce. In Schifter's view the Soviet Foreign Ministry was turning from an adversary to an ally (Schifter 1999:144, 145)

Yet some remained skeptical. In fall 1987 Shultz (1993:994) noted greater progress with the emigration of Germans than with Jews in the Soviet Union. He sarcastically informed Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze that the Jews too had a homeland and reminded him that he (Shevardnadze) had been quoted in Uruguay as saying that any Jew could leave.

In October 1987, President Reagan and Secretary Gorbachev issued a call to a December summit in Washington DC to discuss missile reductions, human rights, humanitarian issues and regional issues (Comments by Morris Abram at NJCRAC, "Soviet Jewry after ... ", February 14-17, 1988 (CJF files, box 667).

The NCSJ convened a coalition for mobilization for a demonstration before the summit meeting (Minutes, CJF Board of Directors, November 18, 1987 (CJF files, box 659). The mobilization would be preceded by a campaign of rallies and other events throughout the United States and Canada in support of the American policy "that the Soviet Union must permit the emigration of Soviet Jews" (Meeting, CJF Board of Directors, September 15, 1987 (CJF files, box 659).

The NCSJ in cooperation with eight other Soviet Jewry/umbrella organizations organized the demonstration. Over 50 national Jewish organizations and 300 local federations and community relations councils participated (Bulletin III campaign to the summit, October 21, 1987 (CJF files, box 667); Grossman 1989:227ff.). Eli Wiesel served as honorary chair.

David Harris, the AJC's Washington DC representative served as the national coordinator. He and his steering committee put together a 90-minute program, which lasted for 2 hours and 15 minutes. Harris did not want criticism of President Reagan or his policies, opposed linkage between Jewish emigration and disarmament and minimized the number of Jewish speakers.. Speakers included Vice President George Bush, Speaker of the House, Richard Schifter, representatives of civil rights groups, labor, Bishop William Keller of National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Dr. Arie Brower of the National Council of Churches, presidential candidates, and members of

Congress from both parties. Morris Abram as head of the Conference of Presidents spoke as did Elie Wiesel and several Soviet Jewish activists (Harris 1989:32). (Comments by Morris Abram at NJCRAC, "Soviet Jewry after ..." February 14-17, 1988 (CJF files, box 667).<sup>21</sup> Over 250, 000 people participated.

A person at the summit told Richard Schifter that after greeting Gorbachev at the White House, the President asked him: "Have you heard about the rally on the Mall last Sunday?" Gorbachev responded yes and that he wanted to get on with the business of the meeting "But Reagan did not let him. He started to talk about the size of the turnout, how much the Soviet emigration issue meant to many Americans, and how important it was that the Soviet Union respond positively" (Schifter 1999:145-147).

After the summit Secretary of State George Shultz told Morris Abram that the President expected substantial progress on the issue of Soviet Jewish emigration. In a short period of time Schifter realized however that the breakthrough might be short lived.

David Shipler, writing in the *NYT* in early January 1988 indicated that some high administration officials had reservations as to whether the Soviet Union would allow free emigration of Jews (David Shipler, "Law on Emigration in Effect in Soviet; US sees tightened rules—earlier preference for Jews now apparently at end." *NYT*, January 2, 1988). He wrote that the new Soviet law bans discrimination on the basis of racial, ethnic, religious and other grounds, which "has been interpreted abroad as ending the preference given to Jews in the past". Many Latvian, Lithuanian, German and Ukrainians in the Soviet Union would now be able to emigrate. The Soviets had told Schifter that they did not intend to return to the mass emigration figures of the earlier Brezhnev



period. In effect, the Soviets might be willing to liberalize emigration across the board for some while denying mass emigration for the Jews.

This placed American Jews in the Soviet Jewry advocacy movement in a dilemma. At stake now was the general liberalization versus the interest of the Jewish minority in the Soviet Union. For the American Jewish leadership the latter took precedence over the former (Hand notes, Soviet Jewry International Council, November 30, December 1, 1988 (Jewish Agency archives).

This position is evident in the response of American Jewry to the 1987 McClure Amendment denying the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to the Soviet Union until it complies with all Helsinki clauses which meant freedom of emigration for all Soviet citizens and not just for Jews. Morris Abram and others from the NCSJ spoke with Senator Phil Gramm and told him that the Jackson Vanik Amendment is a Jewish amendment “and if you tie it to general human rights, there can never be any incentive for the Soviet Union to behave toward the Jews in anticipation of the relief in trade” Gramm influenced his fellow Senator to withdraw the amendment (Abram 1989:24).

President Ronald Reagan and Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev held a final summit in Moscow in late spring 1988. Beforehand, Morris Abram, head of NCSJ and the Conference of President’s gave Secretary of State George Shultz a memo which demanded free emigration for all Jews that wanted to leave, provisions for direct flights and full cultural, religious and educational rights for those that would remain (Letter of Morris B. Abram to George Shultz, April 13, 1988(CJF files, box 667). Abram and other Jewish leaders also met with Secretary Shultz on May 3, 1988 (Minutes, CJF Board of Directors, April 19, 1988 (CJF files, box 659).<sup>22</sup>

Several American Jewish leaders followed President Reagan to Helsinki where he stopped off on his way to Moscow.<sup>23</sup> Before an audience of over a thousand people at a dinner after Jewish Sabbath services Shultz stated "We're here because we know of the plight of Soviet Jewry...". ("Shultz Makes a Pledge To support Soviet Jews" *NYT*, May 28, 1988).

In Moscow President Reagan hosted the Zieman family, refuseniks who had applied to leave in 1977 and another 98 refuseniks at Spaso House, during the first day of his talks in Moscow (Richter 1989:55).

The Summit of May-June 1988 in Moscow led to an increase in exit visas and a liberalization in the cultural and religious life of Soviet Jews. Despite bureaucratic problems in matters of emigration, the stage was set for a massive exodus as well as the foundations for a revival of Jewish cultural and religious life in the Soviet Union.

This case study clearly showed the success of Jewish organizations in putting the issue of Soviet Jewry emigration on the agenda of the Reagan Gorbachev summit meetings. The willingness of both President Reagan and his Secretary of State to put this item on the agenda facilitated the success of the Jewish lobbyists. Significantly, when the Soviets shifted emphasis to a more universal right of all to emigrate the American Jewish organizations demanded a return to the primary principle of free emigration for Soviet Jews.

#### **4. A quota to limit Jewish immigration**

With the opening of the gates of the Soviet Union to Jewish emigration in the late 1980s many American and Israeli sources expected that up to a million Jews would

emigrate during the next few years (Gur-Gurevitz 1996:18 & *Refugee Reports* IX, no. 7, July 28, 1989). With a probable drop-out rate of over 90 percent the expected number of Soviet Jews wanting to resettle in the United States far outnumbered the available refugee slots (Buwalda 1997:160, 173; Salitan 1992:65). At the same time reforms instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev's regime radically changed the possibilities of renewed Jewish cultural and religious life in the Soviet Union.

This possible emigration scenario created a series of dilemmas for American Jewish leaders. The American Jewish establishment wanted to help their brethren in the Soviet Union but was concerned about their government's policies of providing relatively few places for millions of refugees from around the world and limited funding to resettle them, the interests of other American refugee support groups who objected to preferences for Soviet Jews, the high economic costs of resettlement in the United States (versus Israel) and Israeli demand for all Soviet Jews to be resettled there.

By late 1988, the United States government and American Jewish organizations favored a dual track system which would allow Soviet Jews to apply in Moscow to emigrate either to Israel or the United States and (other Western countries) (*JTA*, June 21, 1988 & *Refugee Reports* IX (6), June 24, 1988). On July 4, 1988, however, the United States Embassy in Moscow stopped processing visa applications for all Soviet citizens until October 1, 1988 (*Refugee Reports* IX (7) July 15, 1988 & IX (8) August 12, 1988). Officially, reception and placement money had run out (Golub (1989:46, 47). CJF, JDC, HIAS, and NCSJ urged their government to reopen the visa process in Moscow in order to signal to the Soviets that the two track system would work ("Meeting of CJF and others at HIAS on US Embassy Problem in Moscow" July 8, 1988 (CJF files, box 667).

The change in American policy toward Soviet refugees ostensibly focused on the Armenians. In May, State Department lawyers ruled that many Armenians had been accepted as refugees “without any finding that they have been persecuted in the Soviet Union” (Philip Taubman, “US Embassy holding up Visas for Soviet Émigrés”, *NYT*, July 8, 1988). An op-ed piece in the *LAT* (June 8, 1988) argued that "They are leaving in search of freedom and a better life. This is not the province of refugee policy" (Also see *NYT* May 29 and June 6, 1988).

What the *LAT* said about the Armenians could be said about many Soviet Jews. The temporary closing of visa processing may well have been intended by Washington to signal to Soviet Jews and their American sponsors and advocates that the United States government was unwilling to accept all of them as refugees. Shortly after the Moscow closing of visa processing, Attorney General Edward Meese wrote Colin Powell, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs on August 4, 1988 that "current practices in processing Soviet émigrés appear not to conform with the requirements established by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1980". Therefore, "procedures followed by the Embassy in Moscow must be brought into sync with INS procedures" (Rosenberg 2003:428). (Letter, Meese to Powell..., "Soviet Refugees"). For the first time Soviet Jews applying for refugee status in both in Moscow and in Rome would have to prove in interviews with consular authorities “a well founded fear” (Golden 1992:469; Beyer 1991:145). The Attorney General stipulated, however, that all Soviet Jews not granted refugee status would be "considered for entry in the United States under my parole authority" (Beyer 1991: 146).<sup>24</sup> Due to the “disadvantages” many offers of parole were not accepted.<sup>25</sup>

This change in policy clearly reflected refugee quagmire in Washington DC. There was a huge increase in requests for refugee status from Armenians, Pentecostal Christians and Jews in the Soviet Union but a limited number of refugee slots and insufficient funding for processing and resettlement. Also, some members of Congress pressured for a uniform application of the law; they felt that a stricter standard had been applied to people from Indochina than would be Soviet refugees (Robert Pear "U.S. Bars Some Soviet Jews and Armenians as Refugees", *NYT*, December 3, 1988).

The seriousness of the situation was evident in the announcement of FY1989 refugee ceilings in September 1988. For the estimated 15 million refugees in the world, the United States provided for a total of 94, 000 slots, 10, 000 of which were not funded ([http://www.refugee.org/world/statistics/WRS97\\_table2.htm](http://www.refugee.org/world/statistics/WRS97_table2.htm) (last visited July 22, 2004). For the Soviet Union there would be 16,000 funded and 2, 000 unfunded refugee slots (*Refugee Reports X* (1) January 27, 1989). In November 1988 Secretary of State Shultz instructed the new Attorney General to apply uniform standard of refugee determination "a well founded fear of persecution" in Rome and Moscow (*Refugee Reports IX* (12) December 16, 1988 & *X* (1) January 27, 1989). At his confirmation the new Secretary of State James Baker noted that we have more refugees at our gates than resources to accept them .

Thereafter, the consular section in the American Embassy in Rome rejected an increasing number of visa applications from Soviet Jews. It rejected 11 percent in January, 19 percent in February and 36 percent in March 1989 (*Refugee Reports X* (4) April 28, 1989). Visa rejections were higher in Moscow where most of the applicants

were Armenian. It was the first time that the United States had denied a “significant number of Soviet Jews” refugee status (Golub 1989:1, 2 & Harris 1989: 70-72,103).

The rejections in Rome increased dramatically the size of the Jewish émigré community under the care of JDC in Ladispoli near Rome. The numbers grew from 5,000 in January 1989 to at least 16, 000 in July 1989 (Windmueller 1999:169). The mood among the émigrés deteriorated as many had their applications for refugee status rejected.

Leaders of the American Jewish community protested their government’s rejection of Soviet Jews as refugees. They charged consular officials with discrimination against Soviet Jews. Some charged INS with “institutional bias against special treatment for particular group of refugees” which reminded some of the anti-Jewish policies of American consular officials in Germany the 1930s (Lazin 1979; Morse 1968 & Feingold 1970).<sup>26</sup> A brief from HIAS, CJF and AJC and others to Attorney General Dick Thornburgh argued that in light of history and experience Jews in the Soviet Union have well founded fears of persecution (Beyer 1991:147). The Attorney General denied the charges and made it clear that the government had neither sufficient slots nor the funds (Leuchter 1993:105; Zukerman (1993:142) & Liebowitz (Interview, July 1995).

In September 1988 a State Department document asked whether in the era of *glasnost*, "conditions are such for Soviet Jews that all emigrants from the USSR automatically merit refugee status".<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless it admitted that in spite of the thaw “Jews in particular suffer from both religious and ethnic discrimination and have only limited access to higher education and senior government employment” (Golub 1989:2).<sup>28</sup> On a similar note, Senator Alan Simpson (R WYO) noted that some Soviet Jews had said that they would rather stay in the Soviet Union than go to Israel. "If they

would rather remain than go to Israel, that says something about the level of persecution... no other group of refugees on earth gets a choice of country of first asylum" (*Refugee Reports IX* (9), September 22, 1989).

Privately, several prominent American Jewish leaders questioned the standing of Soviet Jews as political refugees. In March 1989, Morris Abram (1989:30) commented, "...they are not refugees, in my judgment. If you come out of a country and have access and automatic citizenship to a free country, you're not a refugee. They came here because they are "refugees" and get the benefits of being refugees, payments of cash, money and medical services and other things."<sup>29</sup>

Another slant on the matter was expressed by then CJF Executive Vice President Martin Kraar (1993:340) "The implication for the Federation field is that if they're refugees, we still continue to get federal funding. If they're immigrants, then the federal funding dries up and the Federation system have many more financial obligations".

In December 1988, the Reagan administration reallocated 7, 000 refugee admission slots from Southeast Asia and the Near East and transferred them to the Soviet Union to handle backlog of Armenian and Jewish applications. Significantly, several American Jewish organizations joined Asian American refugee advocates in protesting the transfer ("Processing" 180; Golub 1989 & Arnold Liebowitz (Interview, August 1995).

In March 1989 the Administration initiated emergency consultations on refugee ceilings for FY89 with Congress.<sup>30</sup> On June 19, 1989 President Bush signed the Presidential Determination 89-15 certifying refugee emergency which increased the refugee ceiling for FY89 from 94, 000 to 116, 500 refugee slots. This added 22, 500

additional slots for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union whose ceiling now stood at 50,000. At the time Congress also passed a funding bill for the 22,500 slots including 6,000 that had been partially funded before. This left only 4, 000 unfunded (*Refugee Reports* X (3) March 17, 1989 & X (6) June 16, 1989).

Failing to win over the Administration, American Jewish leaders supported the Lautenberg Amendment. Enacted in November 1989, it lowered the burden of proof of persecution for Soviet Jews, Evangelical Christians and members of the Ukrainian Catholic and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church to obtain refugee entry to the United States (Beyer 1991:148ff. & Goldberg 1996:264).<sup>31</sup> These groups would have "strong likelihood of qualifying for admission to the United States as refugees because their groups have a history of persecution" (*Refugee Reports* X (7) July 28, 1989). It required immigration officers "to consider whether "historical circumstances" might give refugees a "credible basis for concern," rather than the "well-founded fear" they had been required to prove (Goldberg 1997:264-265). Some believed the amendment made every Soviet Jewish émigré a potential refugee (Beyer 1991).

Passage of the Lautenberg Amendment might have led to a confrontation between Congress and American Jewry against the Administration over the status of Soviet Jews as refugees. The Administration, therefore, may have sought a compromise. By expanding the number of Soviet Jewish refugees entering the United States, the Administration hoped that it could reach an understanding with American Jewish leaders and their supporters in Congress about the need to limit the number of Soviet Jews entering the United States.



Mr. Max Fisher negotiated on behalf of the American Jewish establishment (Interview, Max Fisher, February 1996; Gur-Gurevitz 1996:22; Kotler 1993: iv). He had the support or backing of the CJF, Conference of Presidents, and the NCSJ (Kraar 1993:343). He briefed and informed various Israeli officials about the negotiations.<sup>32</sup> He established a “no-name” committee to negotiate with the Administration for an increase the "the number of Soviet Jewish refugees to be admitted into the United States", to clean up and close down the refugee havens in Vienna and Ladispoli (Rome) and to insure that Soviet Jews would be able to leave the Soviet Union if they so desired (Kotler 1993: iv & Mark Talisman, interview, July 20, 1995).

Negotiations involved the State Department, INS, Justice, the White House and members of Congress. The entire negotiation was part of the annual consultation between the President and the legislative branch to determine refugee ceilings for FY90 (Interview, Princeton Lyman, February 12, 2004). Therefore, the "Soviet Jewish aspects" were only a component of the overall refugee ceiling and related procedures. Soviet authorities became involved; they had to agree to facilitate the obtaining of American visas in Moscow and “direct” flights to Israel. Finally, the Israeli’s were consulted by the American government (as well as by Fisher). At a particular stage the Israeli government indicated to the State Department that it would accept the proposed arrangement (Interviews, Anita Botti, August 3, 1995 & Jerry Shiran, February 2003).

The Administration announced the new policy at Congressional hearings on September 14 and 15, 1989 (Beyer 1991:148). Beginning with FY89, the United States would allow up to 50,000 persons annually from the Soviet Union, most of them Jews, to enter the United States as refugees.<sup>33</sup> Of the expected 40,000 Jewish refugees, the United

States government would only fund 32,000 (Kotler 1993: iv). The American Jewish community had to fund, without government reimbursement, the placement of up to 8,000 Soviet Jewish refugees (Carp 1989:7 & Gur-Gurevitz 1996:23). Priority would be given to applicants with close relatives in the United States. Those without relatives or other ties to the United States would be ineligible or moved so far down the list that they would not be called for interviews.<sup>34</sup> To facilitate the process of receiving American visas, INS would process the applications in Virginia and not Moscow. There would be a dual track system for Soviet Jews to leave the Soviet Union. They could either apply to go to Israel or apply for refugee status at the American Embassy in Moscow.

Finally, first priority among qualified refugees would be given to the 30,000 persons in the Vienna-Rome pipeline and 41, 600 persons in the backlog in Moscow (Refugee Reports X (9), September 22, 1989). These two groups would use up all the visas during the first year allocation and some of the second. Most émigrés in Ladispoli, including those previously rejected as refugees, would be allowed to enter the United States as refugees.

Soviet Jews exiting after November 6, 1989 would not be allowed to apply for visas as refugees at American Embassies in Europe (Letter, Ben Zion Leuchter to Simcha Dinitz, December 22, 1989 (HIAS files). In addition aid for dropouts in Europe from HIAS and JDC would be curtailed. This “ended” the dropout phenomena. According to Rabbi Israel Miller (1990: 32), the dropout problem “was resolved by the United States Government by creating a quota.”

Finally, the agreement curtailed the potential consequences of the Lautenberg Amendment. The refugee ceilings set by the President in consultation with Congress and

not the Lautenberg Amendment would determine the number of Soviet refugees allowed to enter the United States.

This arrangement of a two-track system in Moscow resulted in Israel becoming, “by default, the destination for the vast majority of Jews seeking refuge” (Naftalin 1999:237). The US quota filled quickly for the first two years. Consequently Soviet Jews who wanted to leave could either wait a few years for a possible visa to the United States or a third country or go immediately to Israel. For Soviet Jews without close relatives in the United States or other Western countries, Israel offered a free ticket out of the Soviet Union. The uncertainty about the future of the Soviet Union at the time led to an unprecedented exodus of Soviet Jews to Israel. With the opening of the gates in 1989 most Soviet Jewish émigrés chose to go to Israel. Almost 400, 000 did so between 1989 and 1992. Far fewer went to the United States.

For the time being the Soviets did not allow direct flights to Israel. To make sure that Soviet Jewish émigrés did not drop out, Israel took the precaution of flying them via Eastern European countries. American Jewish organizations supported this policy. These countries did not allow emigrants to stay and agreed not to raise issues of freedom of choice. The Israelis set up transit sites in Bucharest, Warsaw and Budapest.<sup>35</sup>

Why did the American Jewish community abandon freedom of choice in 1989 and agree to a quota on Soviet Jewish immigrants? Several factors influenced this position. Perhaps most important was the realization that their government was unwilling to accept all potential Soviet Jewish emigrants as refugees. Jewish leaders were unwilling to challenge their government on this issue. They realized that in the worst-case scenario, the émigrés could go to Israel.

Second, the expected large number of Soviet Jewish refugees meant fewer slots for refugees from other countries (Orleck 1999:71). This created problems with other American resettlement organizations with whom HIAS and JDC and many federations had cooperated with for years. To push for more Soviet Jewish slots risked confrontation and potentially embarrassing conflicts with these groups which could raise the sensitive issue of the status of Soviet Jews as political refugees.

Third, the cost factor was important. The American government indicated it would not have funding for all those it was willing to accept as refugees, which meant that the federations would have to cover more of the costs. They would also have to fund many of those coming in as non-refugees. Many federations as far back as 1979 had found it difficult to raise the funding and resources necessary to absorb Soviet émigrés in their communities. Moreover, the federations found it easier to raise money to settle Jews in Israel than in the United States (Hoenlein (1989: 15) & Frankel (1989)).<sup>36</sup>

Related to costs and financial burden was the situation in Ladispoli with more than 15, 000 Soviet Jewish émigrés and more coming daily. The situation became untenable for American Jewish leaders and federations. The émigrés were distraught and the expense overburdening for the American Jewish community. There was no solution in sight ((Robert Pear "Why U.S. Closed the Door Halfway on Soviet Jews", *NYT*, September 24, 1989; Berman 1993:43; & Kraar 1993:342).<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the above factors had made the Israeli option more attractive for most American Jewish leaders on both local and national levels. In contrast to the 1970s, the American Jewish establishment in 1989 was more willing to support the Israeli demand

that Soviet Jews be resettled in Israel. Many felt Israel needed them and that Israel provided a better opportunity for their remaining Jewish and part of the Jewish people.

## **Conclusions**

American Jewish Organizations exercised significant influence in many areas of United States refugee policy during the 1970s and 1980s. Overall they obtained preferential treatment for Soviet Jewish émigrés during this period. Official United States policy from 1968 through the summer of 1989 was to admit all Soviet Jewish émigrés as refugees. Those that were rejected entered either as Parolees and or immigrants. Moreover, American Jewish lobbyists obtained federal government assistance for these refugees including care and maintenance in Europe, transportation to and initial resettlement in the United States.

In his book, Lazin (2005) documented the significant role played by the Israeli Liaison Bureau in initiating the Soviet Jewry movement in the United States. Apropos to Mearsheimer and Walt (2006) the findings here suggest an American Jewish community with interests often very different from Israel on the issue of Soviet Jewry. Despite a degree of concern for Israel American Jewish leaders often acted independently. For example, throughout American Jewish organizations pressured their government to provide aid to Israel to absorb Soviet Jewish immigrants. Israel became the only recipient of such aid to absorb refugees from a third country. Nevertheless, when Israel challenged the actions of American Jewry in aiding “Soviet Jewish dropouts” the American Jewish establishment resisted Israeli pressure and supported the principle of freedom of choice. Later, in the early 1980s when US Refugee Authorities tried to shift the resettlement of

Soviet Jewish émigrés to Israel the American Jewish community used its friends in Congress to block the effort. Similarly, they rebuffed Prime Minister Shamir's efforts to have the United States deny Soviet Jewish émigrés refugee status. Importantly, Israel had argued that it needed the well educated and cultured Soviet Jews for its survival in a hostile environment.

In contrast to the insecurity felt by American Jews in the 1930s, most leaders and professionals in the 1970s Soviet Jewry advocacy movement felt comfortable with being both Jewish and American. They did not see a conflict between Jewish and American concerns. They believed that the well being of Soviet Jews was a legitimate demand to make on their Congressmen and President. They justified their Jewish interests in terms of national interest and democratic and American values. To some extent, American Jews were no longer a minority but part of a majority in a psychological sense (Goldberg 1996:4ff).

The Cold War helped their case on behalf of Soviet Jewry since American Jews were seeking support and benefits for a population being persecuted by a Communist regime. This created a lot of general sympathy for the Soviet Jewry causes in the United States. Many members of Congress were strongly anti-Communist and anti-Soviet. They saw the Soviet Union as evil. The issue of Soviet Jewry attracted them and their support required very little and had few political liabilities. Refugee resettlement became a key instrument in the fight against Communism (Russell 1995:47) and "Emigration from the former Soviet Union—or the lack of it—was a major concern of United States foreign policy during the cold war era" (81). Newland (1995:190) adds that in the Cold War

refugee policy was a "handmaiden of foreign policy... meant to contribute to... damaging and ultimately defeating Communist countries."

With the end of the Cold War in 1989 the justification for giving Soviet Jewish émigrés preferential treatment as refugees ended. There was no longer a national interest to encourage Soviet Jews to leave the USSR.

Clearly aware of this change American Jewish organizations abandoned the principal of freedom of choice for Soviet Jewish émigrés. While the number of those that wanted to come to the USA far surpassed newly established quotas the American Jewish community supported these quotas. Other factors also influenced the changed position of American Jewish leaders. These factors included the reluctance of their government to accept more Soviet Jews, the limited federal funding and overall economic burden of resettlement, the desire not to alienate other groups sponsoring refugees, doubt as to whether Soviet Jewish émigrés were political refugees, and Israel's willingness to accept all Soviet Jewish émigrés.

In supporting the quota in 1989, the American Jewish community was pursuing their own self interest rather than serving the interest of Israel. Clearly, American Jews were most concerned about their own well being and prosperity as a community and as individuals. This took precedence over demands of Israel in the 1970s to desist from assisting dropouts and the desire by Soviet Jews to resettle in the United States in the late 1980s. Importantly, in 1989, Soviet Jews had the option of going to Israel or remaining in the Soviet Union which by the late 1980s was offering Jews greater cultural, religious and organizational freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Established in the early 1950s in the office of the Prime Minister, the Liaison Bureau coordinated the Israeli effort to bring Soviet Jews to Israel. A branch worked to influence American Jews and others to pressure the American government to act on behalf of Soviet Jews (Lazin 2005).

<sup>2</sup> The National Conference for Soviet Jewry, established in June 1971, was an umbrella organization representing and coordinating Soviet Jewry advocacy for 38 national Jewish organizations including the American Jewish Committee and Congress, National Jewish Community Relations Councils (NJCRAC), B'nai B'rith, Anti-Defamation League, Hadassah and the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox synagogue movements. In addition, over 200 local federations, community relations councils and local Soviet Jewry Committees affiliated with it. HIAS (<http://www.hias.org/splash.html>) (June 24, 2006) founded in 1881, resettles Jewish and non-Jewish refugees in the US. JDC (<http://www.jdc.org>) (June 24, 2006) founded in 1913 aids Jews in distress around the world. CJF represented almost 200 federations. (Goldberg 1996:52, 105). In the late 1990s the CJF, United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and United Israel Appeal (UIA) merged to form the United Jewish Communities (UJC) (<http://www.ujc.org>) August 23, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The research is based on materials in the archives of the Jewish Agency (Jerusalem), JDC, HIAS, Dorot Archives (New York Public Library) and the UJC in New York City. The author supplemented the archival materials with extensive open-ended interviews with activists in American Jewish organizations, the Jewish Agency, and US and Israeli governments.

<sup>4</sup> Ginsberg (1993:23) refers to more than \$3b per annum in aid to Israel and a decline of anti-Semitism as indicators of Jewish influence. Also see Greenberg and Wald 2001:188.

<sup>5</sup> Established in 1929 the Jewish Agency represented world Jewry and the World Zionist Organization (WZO) in efforts to establish a Jewish State (Stock 1988:7ff). In formal agreements in 1952 and in 1954, the Israeli government delegated to the Jewish Agency primary responsibility for the initial care of new immigrants. Although partially controlled by the government's coalition parties the Agency can be independent in policy making. It receives its funds from the UJA in the US and the *Keren Hayesod* elsewhere. (katz et. al. 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Since the 1960s the US government worked with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including HIAS to resettle refugees in the US (Reimers 1985:156). In practice, individual applying for refugee status had to be sponsored by one of a select group of non-profit agencies which would be responsible for their initial housing, medical care and language training. Some Jewish and most non-Jewish Soviet émigrés used the services of other agencies with whom the US government also contracted and reimbursed for services provided to refugees.

<sup>7</sup> UIA, "History of UIA-U.S. Government Grant Funds (1973-1995). US government aid covered en route care and maintenance, construction, acquisition and maintenance of absorption centers, construction of medical facilities and vocational training..

<sup>8</sup> The Hart Celler Act of 1965 replaced the national origins quotas with preference system based primarily on a reunification of families and needed skills. According to the Act (Liskofsky 1966:172) *7<sup>th</sup> preference* for refugees because of persecution or fear of persecution on account of race, religious or political opinion have fled from any Communist or Communist dominated area or any country in middle east .... " *non-preference* " *immigrants* " *aliens* who cannot qualify for one of the preference classes" admitted on first come first served basis". In the 1970s only a few Soviet Jews would enter the US as immigrants (Buwalda 1997: 57,58).

<sup>9</sup> Windmuller 1999:164. Sec 212(d) (5) "The Attorney General may in his discretion parole into the U. S. temporarily under such conditions as he may prescribe for emergency reasons or for reasons deemed strictly in the public interest any alien applying for admission to the U.S..." Letter, Fasick to Jacobson, October 15, 1976. During the 1980s the Attorney General paroled over 1 million persons mostly Cubans and Vietnamese (Reimers 1985:155, 161, 172).

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<sup>10</sup> While Goldberg (1996:182) refers to this effort as being "audacious" Reimers (1985:65, 158) documents the American tradition of aiding the resettlement of Hungarian, Cuban and Vietnamese refugees in the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, at least since the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962, the US provided aid for refugees outside the US (Reimers 1985:158). According to Goldberg 1996:182) aid for Soviet Jewish refugees was "not a hard sell".

<sup>11</sup> It funds 85-93 percent of JDC refugee operation budget and 60-65 percent of HIAS budget (Bruce Leimsidor, "Minutes of NPPC", September 11, 1979 (JDC files)). The grant provided about \$943 per person. At the HIAS Board Meeting of June 4, 1980 (HIAS files) Edwin Shapiro reported that Jewish communities would receive \$1 for every \$2 spent. (Letter of Department of Health, Education and Welfare to Carl Glick, October 3, 1978 (HIAS files).

<sup>12</sup> Ambassador Douglas met with Raphael Kotolwitz of the JA's Immigration & Absorption Department and Yehuda Lapidot, head of Israel's Liaison Bureau. Richard Krieger of the staff of the Office of Refugee Affairs in the State Department (telephone interview, December 11, 2003) remembered being approached by Israelis in the early 1980s wanting to have most Soviet Jewish émigrés go to Israel

<sup>13</sup> Later, CJF informed Ambassador Douglas that although it did not like the administration's removal of priority (clause) six on refugees it understood it as a measure of expediency and as part of a global strategy ("Introductory remarks for Martin E. Citrin at Presidential Advisory Group", March 13, 1983 (CJF files, box 695).

<sup>14</sup> According to Princeton Lyman (email message to Lazin, June 24, 2004) "it is standard refugee practice that refugees be processed in the first place of asylum... This is to avoid "asylum shopping" i.e. that refugees shop around for the most attractive places to resettle. ...in the case of Soviet Jewish refugees it was recognized that the reason they all had (at that time) visas for Israel was that this was the only exit visa the Soviets allowed Jews."

<sup>15</sup> Interview, Richard Schifter, Washington DC, August 2, 1995.. Shamir told Gur-Gurevitz (1996:18) that he raised the issue twice with Bush and discussed it with Under Secretary of State Richard Schifter as well.

<sup>16</sup> In 1987 Gorbachev told Tom Brokaw that the campaign for Jewish emigration was an attempt to "organize a "brain drain"" (Gitelman 1989:357). Ro'i (1996: 62) argues that even when the gates would be open that Gorbachev wanted to create incentives to have Jews stay because he wanted their talents and skills for the success of perestroika.

<sup>17</sup> While 1, 140 Jews had emigrated in 1985 only 914 would be allowed to leave in 1986. An estimated 400,000 had applied for invitations from relatives (Gitelman 1988:344).

<sup>18</sup> Shultz quoted article 13, paragraph 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that "everyone has the right to leave a country, including his own" Then Shultz turned dramatically to the back of the document and said "I see here the signature of Mr. Brezhnev. I believe that we have a right and a duty to monitor adherence to these provisions and insist that they be complied with" (Statement of Morris Abram at Reykjavik, October 10, 1986 (CJF file, box 667).

<sup>19</sup> Buwalda (1997:151) supports Abram, arguing that Shultz's first human rights victory was at Reykjavik when the Soviets agreed to his demand that human rights issues be open and on the agenda. (Shultz 1993:1095).

<sup>20</sup> In February 1987, 146 persons left the USSR, the largest number in any month during the past four years. It soon rose to a rate of 400 and then 700 per month (Schifter 1999:139). On March 20, 1987 the *NYT* reported that 10,000 Jews were expected to emigrate in 1987. This would be 10 times the number allowed to leave in the previous year.

<sup>21</sup> Abram claims that two weeks prior to the summit, President Reagan told representatives of the Soviet Jewry movement that "I wish I could be there" and after the summit he wrote "Congratulations on your extraordinarily successful demonstration." The Voice of America broadcast much of it to the Soviet Union.

<sup>22</sup> CJF had brought a large delegation of Jewish leaders to Washington DC for a summit action day for Soviet Jewry.

<sup>23</sup> Abram led a NCSJ delegation of 50 persons (including Mayor David Dinkins of New York City) to Helsinki (Grossman 1990: 264ff).

<sup>24</sup> Meese did not want to continue to provide parole to large numbers "unless the Administration is also simultaneously supporting a longer term legislative solution" (Letter, Meese to Powell, August 4, 1998). In December 1988 Attorney General Thornburgh announced expanded parole authority up to 2000 per month to cover persons rejected in Moscow and all persons rejected as refugees from Rome (*Refugee Reports IX* (12) December 16, 1988.

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<sup>25</sup> In the period from October 1, 1988 through March 1989 American authorities offered parole to 4,889 persons (2,073 in Rome and 2,816 in Moscow) but only 482 persons (22 in Rome and 460 in Moscow) accepted (Letter, J. Moore to Congressman Bruce Morrison, April 10, 1989 ("Soviet Refugees")). Some Soviet Jews rejected the offer of parole because it implied that "Soviet Jews are not persecuted as a group, but only in individual cases" (Besser, December 16, 1988 & Liebowitz, interview, July 1995). Beyer (1991:146) argues that HIAS urge them not to accept parole in order to bring pressure on the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to reverse the decision.

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Kingsbury, GAO ("Soviet Refugees", 141ff) found inconsistent adjudication of refugee applications by INS staff, changing guidelines, and staff lacking knowledge of the Soviet Union and Jews. Over half of INS rejections of Soviet Jews would be overturned by appeal (Rosenberg 2003:431).

<sup>27</sup> Mark Talisman ("Processing", 144) commented that "I think that there are some Sovietologists in this country who have made a strong case that under *glasnost* and *perestroika*, things have so improved for the Russians they are no longer refugees".

<sup>28</sup> Pear ("U.S. Drafts Plans...") notes that "many members of Congress and American Jewish groups say Mr. Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, or openness, has allowed freer expression of virulent anti-Semitic sentiments by grass-roots organizations."

<sup>29</sup> Susan Jacoby (*Newsday*, January 27, 1989) questioned whether the Soviet Jews should be classified as refugees at all. She argued that most of those wanting to come to the USA are not politically or religiously motivated. She believed that anti-Semitism and quotas in the Soviet Union do not add up to persecution.

<sup>30</sup> In March 1989 Congressman Bruce Morrison (letter to Dick Thornburgh, March 23, 1989 (JDC files)) estimated that the disapproval ratio of Soviet Jews had reached fifty percent. (CJF Washington Action Office "Soviet..." March 1989 (Jewish Agency archives). A March 1989 CJF Washington Action Office "Soviet Jewish Emigration: The Current situation" claimed that 7000 Soviet Jews were waiting in Rome and Vienna to enter USA and that new applicants in Moscow were told to expect a two year wait for an interview. "Justice Department urged to speed émigré processing", *Washington Post*, March 24, 1989.

<sup>31</sup> The amendment was enacted for one year and subsequently extended throughout the 1990s. INS regulations weakened the amendment but later accommodated demands of HIAS and other major American Jewish organizations (Zukerman 1993:142,143). Princeton Lyman (interview, February 12, 2004) suggests that Congressional pressure influenced INS to accept the Lautenberg Amendment.

<sup>32</sup> He claimed that Prime Minister Shamir asked him to help with Soviet Jews (Interview, February 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Liebowitz (interview July 1995) claimed they agreed to 80 percent for Jews and 20 percent for Pentecostals. No Armenians would be included. Persons could also enter as immigrants if children or spouse of citizens but this could involve a 6-8 year wait.

<sup>34</sup> Pamela Cohen of the Union of Councils called the scheme a "*selection plan*" because it bars "Soviet Jews without close relatives in the US ..." (Pear "U.S. Drafts..." & Gur-Gurevitz 1996:22).

<sup>35</sup> The station in Finland became a problem for the Israelis when the Finnish government insisted that Soviet Jews in transit be allowed to stay for up to five days and that each person sign a free-consent form before flying to Israel. The Israelis, therefore, limited the number of Soviet Jews they brought through Finland (Dominitz 1996; Gur-Gurevitz 1996).

<sup>36</sup> At the February 1990 General Assembly in Miami the CJF initiated Passage to Freedom, a \$75m fundraising campaign to "offset the cost of resettling Soviet Jews in the US and Israel". The campaign proved unsuccessful (Lender 1993:236). More successful was the Exodus Campaign set by UJA as a supplementary campaign to raise funds to resettle Jews in Israel. It was to raise \$420m over three years but succeeded to raise over \$500m in two. (Golden 1992:473; Windmueller 1999:169).

<sup>37</sup> Support for émigrés in Ladispoli cost JDC about \$3.5m per month. "Proceedings" 103 Max Fisher (interview, February 1996) recalled that the situation in Ladispoli had prompted his action. A US Refugee Program policy of limiting reimbursement increased the financial burdens of the American Jewish community (Schneider 1992:190)