

THE FAULT LINES OF FREEDOM THE DIVISION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOVIET JEWRY MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

MICHAEL A.P. DAVIS, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY (2015)
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This thesis is dedicated to former Secretary of State George P. Shultz and former Prisoner of Zion Natan Sharansky. Though coming from very different backgrounds and leading very different lives, these two men stood above all the infighting to secure a better life for the Jews of the former U.S.S.R. To this day, they continue to be emblems of heroism and dedication to public service.

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"I can remember
Standing, by the wall
And the guns shot above our heads
And we kissed as though nothing could fall
And the shame was on the other side
Oh we can beat them, forever and ever,
Then we could be Heroes, just for one day."
-David Bowie, *Heroes*, 1977.

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of December 6, 1987, 250,000 people swarmed the U.S. National Mall.¹ Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev was to arrive the following day to meet with President Ronald Reagan for a new set of talks that marked a warming in the seemingly interminable Cold War. A future recipient of the Nobel Prize and *Time's* person of the decade, Gorbachev had entranced the Western world as a great compromiser who had brought communism with a human face to the Eastern Bloc and the potential of world peace in the face of nuclear apocalypse.² However, the quarter-million people on the frozen National Mall did not care about Gorbachev's public image. They wanted him to make a commitment that the millions of Jewish people who had suffered decades of state-sponsored anti-

Semitism in the U.S.S.R. would be granted increased religious freedom and the right to emigrate. Chants of "Let my people go!" echoed throughout the National Mall over the course of the day, a phrase that had been the clarion call for many of these people for almost thirty years.³

This event, called Freedom Sunday, had substantial representation from many of the larger American Jewish organizations, whose leaders spoke alongside Soviet Jewish dissidents known as *refuseniks*.⁴ The protestors were accompanied by government support. Vice President George H.W. Bush spoke, as did U.S. Senator Bob Dole (R-KS), Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Jim Wright (D-TX), New York City Mayor Ed Koch, former Secretary of State Al Haig, Governor Thomas Kean of New Jersey, and Civil Rights hero, U.S. Representative John Lewis (D-GA).⁵ These people of divergent backgrounds gathered to stand for the rights of an ethnic group in a land thousands of miles away. They spoke of the suffering that Jews had endured there, their inability to leave, and the abuses inflicted upon them by security forces including the KGB for the expression of their religious and cultural identity. As a result, Gorbachev created reforms,

which enabled millions of Soviet Jews to leave the country.

These reforms, however, were a long time in the making. Between the early 1960s and 1989, the Soviet Jewry movement transformed from a small student group in New York City to a major feature of the American Jewish community.¹ Its support base grew across the country, in the U.S. Congress, and eventually in the White House under the Reagan Administration.^{6,ii} How did this happen? A common assumption would attribute success to the efforts of the nation's large Jewish organizations, which often seemed to be the base of the money and power needed to execute campaigns such as Freedom Sunday, or the large marches down Fifth Avenue in New York City held in the name of Soviet Jewry over the prior two decades. But Freedom Sunday was not necessarily the brainchild of solely the Jewish establishment. A large number of grassroots Jewish activists, predominantly represented by the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ), was just as involved in organizing this event and other campaigns for Soviet Jewry. Glenn Richter, a co-founder of the SSSJ, claimed it was ultimately his cohorts that organized this particular demonstration, while the establishment footed the bill and got the credit.⁷ To the public, the movement appeared to be a seamless alliance of mainstream and grassroots forces working to achieve a similar goal; however, the relationship between the mainstream Jewish organizations and the smaller, more grassroots organizers of the Soviet Jewry movement was closer to a rivalry. Beneath the veneer of perfect unity presented at Freedom Sunday lay decades-old tensions between two factions that stemmed from differences in their respective tactics and philosophies.

I intend to show that the Soviet Jewry movement in the United States was characterized by a division between grassroots organizers and Jewish establishment organizations. The former were innovators in the early stages of the movement

and preferred nonviolent demonstrations, civil disobedience, and governmental pressure towards the U.S.S.R. as a means of achieving their goal. The latter had both the money and the government connections to make a difference, but were nervous that the activities of the grassroots organizers would lead to negative repercussions from the Soviet government in the form of punishment of the U.S.S.R.'s Jewish population. The establishment instead preferred negotiations to enable the release of Soviet Jews, something that was greatly threatened by the grassroots activists' pressure.

I have arrived at this view after carefully examining a series of primary and secondary sources. Through my research in the SSSJ Archives at Yeshiva University and the Council on Soviet Jewry (CSJ) Archives at the Center for Jewish History, I came to understand the internal life of each faction and how it individually contributed to the schism between the factions. The SSSJ Archives contain documents that articulate the SSSJ's plans for demonstrations in the late 1960s and its negative opinions on establishment organizations. Additionally, the collection features a series of bulletins and letters between the SSSJ and larger organizations from the period 1966 to 1971 that highlight the tensions between the groups. The documents, especially the internal memoranda among establishment groups, depict a palpable fear of upsetting the Soviets through excessive aggressive activism. At the same time, letters and private notes from the grassroots organizations reveal frustration with the slow pace of the Jewish establishment's push for emigration rights and a breakdown of communication between the factions. The Center for Jewish History provide letters from the leaders of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in the late 1970s. The letters, bulletins, and private writings of each group's members reflect a respective skepticism of grassroots initiatives and a desire to negotiate directly with the Soviet authorities to increase the quotas of Jews allowed to leave the U.S.S.R. These letters speak to plans to meet with Soviet officials in private to negotiate increased quotas and show a growing willingness to steer the movement into a quieter direction.

I conducted an interview with SSSJ leader Glenn Richter and studied the diary of President Ronald Reagan and the memoir of his second Secretary of State George P. Shultz. These

i There is no official start date for the Soviet Jewry movement in America, as there arguably was for something like the American Gay Rights movement with the 1969 Stonewall Riots. Moshe Decter's 1961 article in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "The Status on Jews in the U.S.S.R." brought the plight of Soviet Jews to the attention of many Americans for the first time. Similarly, the founding of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) in 1964 and its first demonstration on May 1, 1964 may be seen as the movement's first public protest. For these reasons, I want to suggest that the movement began in an ambiguous period between 1961 and 1964. I would consider its end date to be 1989, when Gorbachev eliminated emigration quotas.

ii As the thesis will show, Reagan became a strong ally of the Soviet Jewry movement after its goals were seriously opposed by previous Administrations.

perspectives were necessary to understand how the Reagan Administration changed the executive branch's response to the Soviet Jewry movement and how the administration ultimately connected and corresponded its ideals. It also highlighted the variety of tactics the administration used to achieve these ends.

In addition to this primary source research, I studied secondary source materials that shed more light on the structural differences between the two factions. The secondary sources I used to study the Soviet Jewry movement from the 1960s to the 1980s included Peter Golden's *O Powerful, Western Star*, Frederick Lazin's *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, and Gal Beckerman's *When They Come for Us, We'll be Gone*. Beckerman's book is probably the most famous piece on this subject, although it is imperfect due to its consideration of the Soviet Jewry Movement as a mostly unified group with little internal division. While I accept much of his information, his perception of relative unanimity is one I try to show as too simplistic. I also used Jussi M. Hanhimaki's *The Rise and Fall of Détente*, Walter Isaacson's *Kissinger*, and Robert G. Kaufman's biography of U.S. Senator Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson (D-WA) to better understand the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Federal Trade Act, a 1974 amendment that served as a strong point of contention for the two factions in the Soviet Jewry movement, crystalizing the schism between the two groups.

One interesting trend I found in the historiography was the phenomenon of political action driven by ideology endemic to the grassroots activists and a number of other causes in post-war America. A number of books, including Cheryl Lynn Greenberg's *Troubling the Waters* and Michael E. Staub's *Torn at the Roots*, show that many alumni of the civil rights movement were present in the SSSJ and that their demonstrations had similar tactics. The Jewish establishment, which avoided demonstrations, did not share these similarities, and the historiography suggests a longstanding reluctance to radical activism that may have inspired such sentiments. In addition to the civil rights movement, this unique trend of ideology-driven politics also seemed to include U.S. Senator Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson (D-WA) and President Reagan, both strong allies of the grassroots activists. Each of them had

a certain kind of telos that they wanted to achieve by any means necessary, and each used the cause of Soviet Jews as a means of achieving those ends. Given the common strand of thought, this phenomenon can be seen as a connection between the humble origins of the movement overall and its final place as a central tenet of American foreign policy at the end of the Cold War.

The first section of the thesis will outline the birth of the Soviet Jewry movement and will introduce the players within each faction, as well as their driving ideologies. The second section will discuss the different factions' reactions to the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, showing how the natural rift between the two factions' strategy grew wider. The third section will deal with the Reagan Administration's change of policy towards the U.S.S.R. It will discuss how this change, as well as President Reagan's respective support from both factions, stirred by his own political ideology, eventually blurred the divisions between the two factions in the final, most fruitful years of the movement.

The major players of this period are numerous, and are sometimes better represented as organizations rather than as individuals. The first of the two factions, the grassroots activists, consisted primarily of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) founded in 1964 by Jacob Birnbaum and co-lead by Glenn Richter. Its allies included Holocaust survivor and activist Elie Wiesel, Rabbi Avraham "Avi" Weiss of Riverdale, New York, and a host of other rabbis, student-activists, and advocates. In a distinct category but tied more to the grassroots movement than to the establishment were the *refuseniks*, a group of Soviet Jewish activists who were penalized by the Soviet authorities for attempting to emigrate. They included Natan (born Anatoly) Sharansky, his wife, Avital Sharansky, Ida Nudel, and many other allied individuals.ⁱⁱⁱ

The second faction, the establishment, was slightly more amorphous. It included most of the major Jewish organizations in the United States at the time, though I will mainly focus on the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and, to a lesser extent, the Council of Presidents. Another more distinct

ⁱⁱⁱ Natan Sharansky was born Anatoly Sharansky in 1948 in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. He was known as such until his release from the gulag in 1986 and subsequent emigration to Israel, where he changed his first name. To avoid any confusion, I have decided to refer to him by his current appellation for all periods of time.

group within this faction was the Council on Soviet Jewry (CSJ), who went by a variety of similar names throughout the movement's history. This group served as the coordinating arm of the establishment that had the most contact with grassroots organizers but operated under the demands of parent organizations. Since the leadership roles tended to change frequently among these groups, it is difficult to designate individual figures as major figures, yet certain individuals such as Richard Maas of the AJC, Morris Abram, and Albert Chernin of the CSJ and philanthropists Max Fisher and Jacob Stein were important actors.

Also important to observe are government officials who reacted to the movement. There were politicians such as U.S. Senator Henry M. "Scoop" Jackson (D-WA) who supported pressuring the U.S.S.R. to ensure emigration rights for its Jewish citizens and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, whose policy of détente was threatened by the Soviet Jewry movement and Senator Jackson's legislation. Later players included President Reagan and Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who were part of an administration that was much more active than others in helping Soviet Jews. They pressured the U.S.S.R. to allow for greater emigration rights, as well as the emancipation of the *refuseniks* and consequently developed positive relations with both factions of the Soviet Jewry movement.

What becomes clear throughout this essay is that, while these differences may have divided the movement, they made it more effective in certain ways. Both factions had distinct responsibilities and capabilities in their goal of achieving basic emigration rights for Soviet Jews. Therefore, while it may seem that the two factions were working against each other, it was not the adoption of a common strategy, but rather, the multiplicity of strategies that they were able to employ as a whole, which enabled their ultimate success in achieving this crucial goal for Soviet Jews. Their success was the product of a multi-faceted dynamism of both strategies engaging different aspects of Soviet and American policymaking. While the grassroots activists stimulated the American government to take aggressive action against the Soviets, the establishment tried to initiate diplomatic negotiations with the Soviets to ensure the Jews' right to emigrate.

SECTION I: BEGINNINGS

The divergence of strategies between the grassroots activists, and the establishment was evident at the beginning of the Soviet Jewry movement. Although Jews in the U.S.S.R. had been limited in their religious rights and prohibited from emigrating since the premiership of Joseph Stalin, the efforts in Jewish community in the United States to support those emigration rights did not truly start until the 1960s. The movement's grassroots activists were the first people to campaign in the United States on behalf of Soviet Jewry. They had a very different set of tactics than the more powerful Jewish organizations that would later play a large administrative role in advocacy for the Soviet Jewry. Despite the factions' similar goals, the aforementioned differences were deeply rooted and prevalent in the early days of the movement. This is seen in each faction's preferred methods of action and respective relationships with earlier campaigns for the betterment of African Americans. While the mainstream organizations kept their black counterparts at arm's length, the progenitors of the grassroots activists were more tightly knit. This is shown in the historiography that links the grassroots activists and the civil rights movement, as well as in the primary source documents that highlight infighting between the factions.

The first leaders of the grassroots faction were student protesters from New York City in the early 1960s. The largest and most important group was the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ), whose original support base came from young students from various New York universities and Orthodox day schools, such as Ramaz, Yeshiva of Flatbush, and Manhattan Talmudic Academy. Jacob Birnbaum, a German-born scholar who had moved to London as a boy to escape Nazi tyranny, founded the SSSJ in 1964. Birnbaum worked to help Jews in the diaspora, including Holocaust survivors and those behind the Iron Curtain.⁸ He came to New York in the early 1960s where he continued his social work in the Jewish community. Upon reading a groundbreaking 1961 article by Moshe Decter in *Foreign Affairs* that highlighted the prohibitions against Jewish religious expression and practice as well as the use of the Yiddish language by Russian Jews, Birnbaum decided to make the alleviation of their plight his mission in life and therefore founded the SSSJ.⁹

The first meeting of the SSSJ convened at Columbia University on April 27, 1964, after Birnbaum posted flyers at “Yeshiva, City University, Columbia, the Jewish Theological Seminary and New York University.”¹⁰ In the pamphlet, he called for “a grassroots movement—spearheaded by the student youth...a well-planned campaign to include some very active measures...which will be a force to be reckoned with.”¹¹ Birnbaum’s choice of words evidences the urgency and dynamism that he demanded from the youth of the city. Being forceful in demanding religious and emigration rights for Soviet Jews would be a key characteristic of the grassroots faction of the movement.

Within a short period of time, Birnbaum quickly rallied supporters for his cause. No more than four days after the first meeting, he was able to convene 1,000 people in front of the U.S.S.R. Mission to the United Nations, marching in rows of two and holding placards that read “I am My Brother’s Keeper” and “Let Them Pray.”¹² A focus on morality and determination was already present in this auspicious beginning, as made evident by these placards. “I am My Brother’s Keeper” is a reference to the story of Cain and Abel, suggesting that American Jews had a responsibility to look out for their brethren in the U.S.S.R. “Let Them Pray” is a reference to the prohibitions against religious life in the U.S.S.R., including those against the teaching of Hebrew and the maintenance of Jewish schools. The placard underscores the movement’s fight for religious freedom. The significant media attention that this march at the United Nations brought was an auspicious beginning for the movement, which would be made evident in a wide array of political action, including two “Exodus” marches in 1965 in Washington, D.C., and 1969 in New York, each enlisting over 10,000 activists.¹³

As previously noted, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s heavily influenced the SSSJ. There are superficial connections to the demonstrations for desegregation, including the single-file marching in the first SSSJ meeting and the use of “I am My Brother’s Keeper,” a phrase that white Americans used to support African Americans in the civil rights movement. In his book *Silent No More*, Henry L. Feingold presents evidence that strengthens this connection to the civil rights movement, noting that the tactics that the SSSJ employed included

“sit-ins and lie-ins, chaining oneself to fences at the Soviet Mission...and dozens of specialized techniques to win public attention,” which were all methods of protest previously adopted by the civil rights movement.¹⁴

There were also many veterans of the civil rights movement in the SSSJ, including those who were involved in more radical factions like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In his book *O Powerful Western Star!*, Peter Golden expounds on this connection by examining the career of SSSJ leader Glenn Richter. He discusses how Richter volunteered “in the New York Office of SNCC” and attempted to join the Freedom Riders, a 1964 voting rights movement in the southern United States whose repression by southern whites would claim the life of his Queens College classmate, Andrew Goodman.¹⁵ The skills that Richter gained from working with SNCC enabled him to be effective in planning rallies. This efficacy is best demonstrated by a pamphlet from the SSSJ Archives for a successful Hanukkah march in Greenwich Village. Richter meticulously planned the march, which attracted 3,000 people. He directed the students where to march, how to avoid arrest, and reminded them to “use [their] intelligence.”¹⁶ In addition, there were a number of solidarity protests on the same day across the country, run by a bevy of student organizations that Richter and other SSSJ leaders helped to coordinate. The fact that mere students were in control of these large outpourings of people suggests strong coordination with little help from outside organizations, similar to the way in which SNCC and other civil rights factions operated in their campaigns.

Another tactic that bears major similarities to the civil rights movement was the shaming factor. Golden notes how Jacob Birnbaum intended to present the repression of the Soviet Jewry as a human rights crisis, exposing the USSR’s “false pretensions as a model society” and galvanizing already anti-communist Americans.¹⁷ Like Martin Luther King Jr.’s determination to display the violent abuse of nonviolent protestors as a means of changing the hearts and minds of white Americans, Birnbaum sought to reveal the ugliness of the U.S.S.R. and to motivate both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans to act. This strategy would create conflict with the larger organizations later on, when the latter wanted to

avoid pressuring or defaming the U.S.S.R.

However, the Jewish students' relationship with the civil rights movement was not permanent, and eventually, many were isolated from its more progressive factions. A large turning point was the radicalization of the Students' Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which had Jewish leaders, including future Members of Congress Allard K. Lowenstein and Barney Frank, during the 1964 Freedom Summer.¹⁸ However, the frustration with the lack of success and the rise of Black Power in the middle of the decade resulted in whites being "drummed out" from SNCC in 1965. The 1968 New York teacher's strike worsened the situation by degenerating the already tense relations between Blacks and Jews in New York City.¹⁹ As Peter Golden notes in *O Powerful Western Star!*, a vacuum eventually emerged for Jewish student activists that enabled them to "seek social justice on their own... turning them towards the U.S.S.R."²⁰ Effectively, with the ideological changes in the civil rights movement closing the doors for activism opportunities, many young Jews found a place with the Soviet Jewry movement.

The other major faction of the movement was the Jewish establishment, which financed efforts to raise awareness of the plight of Soviet Jews and inspire change. The most prominent group in this faction was the American Jewish Conference for Soviet Jewry (AJCSJ), which would later become the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ). As its name changed frequently, I will hereafter refer to the group as the Conference on Soviet Jewry, or simply as "the CSJ." Founded in 1963, the CSJ was very much a top-down advocacy group with strong ties to major U.S. Jewish organizations. In fact, on nearly every piece of stationery it produced, it mentioned their support from "the Zionist Organization of America, Hadassah, B'nai Brith, the United Synagogue of America, the American Jewish Conference" and a host of other big names.²¹ The leader of the organization, Albert Chernin, was an older veteran of the umbrella group, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), whose support included many organizations mentioned on the CSJ stationery.²²

The CSJ, as well as its sister organization, the American Jewish Committee, did not always support demonstrations pioneered by the SSSJ. Instead,

they preferred quiet diplomacy and the fostering of political relations to ensure the release of Soviet Jews. If one studies the civil rights movement and its influence on the Soviet Jewry movement to the fullest extent, it becomes evident that this cautiousness was also deeply rooted in its respective relationship with the civil rights movement. The AJC was generally against segregation and the Jim Crow laws, but was reluctant to support radical efforts. Through its official magazine, *Commentary*, the AJC expressed skepticism over the "fashion" of Jewish students partaking in civil rights protests in the early 1960s and published articles stating that former Jewish desegregationist activists had only achieved "very little."²³

The AJC's reluctance to embrace the radical activism espoused by the SNCC and SSSJ was not unique, but rather part of a longstanding skepticism towards mass movements. In his book *Torn at the Roots*, Michael Staub concedes that the AJC was active in helping both Jews and the NAACP with discrimination matters, but notes that it was unwilling to aid Popular Front causes sponsored by more radical activists like Paul Robeson, for fear of red-baiting.²⁴ This lack of aid resulted in the AJC being labeled "the agency of the big bourgeoisie," a Marxian reference to staidness and aversion to anything radical.²⁵ In her book *Troubling the Waters*, Cheryl Lynn Greenberg describes the organization as being vocal about "racist incidents" or maladies affecting the Jewish community.²⁶ Nevertheless, they tried "to cloak" their Jewishness, to avoid additional anti-Semitism, by having non-Jewish speakers address such causes.²⁷ Ultimately, they were not driven to act as brashly as the SSSJ was by their ideology-driven politics inspired by the civil rights movement. Rather, they were an advocacy group primarily focused on results that could only be achieved through careful planning. The reluctance of the AJC and the CSJ to act impulsively would underlie much of the tension between them and the grassroots activists.

In spite of this attitude, the CSJ actually had an important role to play in bringing mainstream American Jews to the side of Soviet Jewry. One example of their endeavors was their Matzoh of Hope project, in which the CSJ reached out to local synagogues during Passover to proliferate pamphlets about the plight of Jews in the U.S.S.R.²⁸ The project

displays the cautious but clever activism of the CSJ, as it was able to show to American Jews the difficulty that the Soviet Jews had in celebrating the holiday. This enabled the CSJ to play at the heartstrings of American Jews while not stoking the fires of Soviet anger.

The CSJ was also extremely important in raising political support for the movement, going beyond the usual stream of Jewish New York politicians. In Frederick A. Lazin's book, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, he makes note of how the organization had "full-time lobbyists," who easily solicited members of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate to support their cause by playing at the anti-communist rhetoric of the time.²⁹ The CSJ also enabled politicians to get more intimately involved by having congressmen "adopt" a Jewish activist in the U.S.S.R., and even got the politicians' spouses to fundraise for them through the establishment of the Congressional Wives for Soviet Jewry campaign.³⁰ Their endeavors were so successful that by the 1968 Presidential Election, the matter of Soviet Jewry had become an issue on the platforms of both parties.³¹ The establishment had a place in trying to make a difference on behalf of Soviet Jews, but one that was achieved from the top down and by more traditional means of political organizing than marching in the street.

In this period of the 1960s and early 1970s, there did not seem to be a great distance between the two groups. However, the ideological and strategic fissures were unmistakably present in the correspondence between the SSSJ and the CSJ. The SSSJ Archives at Yeshiva University reveal several early conflicts between the two factions, including conflicts over credit sharing for campaigns. While the SSSJ would arrange for activists and organizers to protest, the more prominent organizations would make these events public to the national Jewish community in their newsletters. A CSJ Passover Report newsletter recovered from May 9, 1969 mentions the SSSJ only once throughout the entire article. This brief reference occurs on the second page, where it is described as having taken part in a major protest, whereas the SSSJ had in fact organized it.³² The SSSJ appears to have been outraged, as reflected by a pen-written notation of a certain SSSJ member frustrated that the organization only received "a mention in the dispatches."³³ Tremendous

anger, betrayal, and jealousy are evident in these sentiments, as well as a desire from the CSJ to disassociate from a faction that played a major role in shaping the protests. The patterns of disagreement between the two groups demonstrated by these documents show that their relationship was deeply troubled from within.

On June 15, 1970, a catastrophe heightened the fundamental differences between the two factions. Out of desperation to emigrate, sixteen Soviet *refuseniks* bought tickets for all the seats on a small domestic flight. Under the auspices of being a wedding party, they intended to expel the pilots at a refueling stop and have a former military pilot amongst them, Mark Dymshitz, fly the plane to asylum in Israel by way of Scandinavia. The Soviet authorities at the Leningrad Airport stopped them, and all of the passengers were arrested. Dymshitz and the coordinator, Edward Kuznetsov, were sentenced to death for high treason. Beckerman writes about the outrage and protests this incited across the world, from striking "longshoreman in Genoa" to "schoolchildren in Stockholm" and all the way to New York City, where the SSSJ led a major march opposite the United Nations.³⁴

The Soviet treatment of its Jewish community, as made evident by the events surrounding the Leningrad hijacking, had finally become an international human rights issue. Although this incident cannot be cited as the single turning point, it certainly gave the SSSJ enhanced support for its activities. At the same time, the threat toward Soviet Jews had never seemed more palpable. Realizing the danger, the CSJ wanted to do everything it could to advocate for the release of these men while not inciting the anger of the Soviets. Their endeavors around this time were extremely tame in comparison to the mass marches desired by their grassroots counterparts. In one memo, they asked that the letters be "personal... non-political" and avoid "attacks on the Soviet system."³⁵ It appears they wanted to use a great deal of caution in handling this matter, and avoid causing problems for the hijacking pilots, Dymshitz, Kuznetsov and other Jews in the U.S.S.R.

Beckerman presents little evidence of a genuine split between the two groups. Rather, the image in his book of the movement is one of cautious solidarity in a time of crisis. He notes that the supporting

organizations of the CSJ, through a body called the Union of Councils, convened a meeting in 1971 calling for “quiet diplomacy” and “inoffensive forms of action” for fear of endangering Soviet Jews. The grassroots activists did not support this method.³⁶ However, Beckerman does not focus on the SSSJ, but claims that the Jewish Defense League (JDL) and its leader, Rabbi Meir Kahane, manifested most of the dissent.³⁷ This infamous demagogue not only condemned the mainstream Jewish groups, but also wanted violent retribution against the Soviets through bombing and attacking Soviet institutions.

Beckerman’s focus on Kahane is very problematic and somewhat reductive. Kahane’s activity in this period—in which he made a series of terrorist threats against the Soviets, instigated violence, and allegedly bombed Soviet buildings—was short-lived. Beckerman spends a chapter talking about his prominence after the Leningrad affair, but he says that Kahane’s organization soon fell out of favor among American Jews around 1971, leading Kahane himself to move to Israel. The focus on this individual detracts from issues that the SSSJ and similar, longer lasting groups had with the Jewish establishment that would eventually solidify their schism during the debate over Jackson-Vanik.

Peter Golden, on the other hand, more successfully reveals the split between the two groups. Instead of focusing exclusively on Kahane as Beckerman does, he shows the JDL’s effect on the grassroots Soviet Jewry activists. In fact, he notes how “grassroots activists...agreed with Kahane” and shows the student disappointment with the establishment-heavy Union of Councils’ decision not to act more aggressively towards the Soviets.³⁸ This lack of aggression was against the goals of the SSSJ, who made it their mission to humiliate the Soviets. Golden makes note of one particular incident involving SSSJ ally Hillel Levine, who was so disgusted with the refusal to support significant action against the U.S.S.R. that he formed a sit-in of over one hundred Jewish students at a Boston meeting of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF).³⁹ His justification for going after this group was that the members were not allocating enough resources to activities related to Soviet Jewry. Here, the comparison with the civil rights movement becomes pertinent once again, in terms of tactics and motivation. The sit-in, the classic nonviolent

demonstration favored by opponents of segregation, was being utilized in maintaining the shame factor against the Soviets. This episode once again shows the linkage between the grassroots activists and the civil rights movement, where it is drawn to such an extent that the Jewish establishment has taken the place of a segregated lunch counter or business.

From this, one can see that the dichotomy of strategy that emerged between the two groups during this period was instigated by the movement’s early struggles, and each faction’s reactions to the Leningrad Affair of 1970. There was clearly a strong desire from the part of the establishment to avoid endangering the Jewish population in the U.S.S.R. by any means necessary, as seen by their admonition of incendiary language. As a result, they did not want to allow the Leningrad Affair to balloon into a radicalizing incident among the activists and indirectly threaten the lives of Soviet Jews. While the grassroots activists did not necessarily support acts of terror, the allies of Richter, Birnbaum, and the SSSJ saw Leningrad as a wake-up call for greater action and pressure against the U.S.S.R.

The two factions of the Soviet Jewry movement came of age in the 1960s, and although they had the same goals of emancipating the Soviet Jews, they had very different strategies. Although their respective orientations to activism may have been more ambiguous in the mid-sixties, by the end of the decade, they were better split into two strategic camps: one supporting strong actions against the U.S.S.R. and the other preferring backroom negotiations. The two factions would reach new chasms of separation in the 1970s, as the debate over the Jackson-Vanik Amendment hardened their ideological disparity.

SECTION II: THE JACKSON-VANIK AMENDMENT

In the 1970s, a piece of legislation emerged that marked a turning point for the Soviet Jewry movement in the United States. This legislation was the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Federal Trade Act of 1974, which drove the United States to be less conciliatory with the Soviets and placed the goals of the Soviet Jewry movement as more important factors in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy. In spite of what might seem like a great victory for the movement as a whole, the debate over the passage of the amendment produced controversy between

the grassroots and establishment factions. The grassroots activists heartily supported Jackson-Vanik from its inception in 1971 until the Gorbachev years and earned reciprocal support from Jackson, his allies, and the *refuseniks*. It is unclear how much the establishment backed the bill while it was being debated in Congress, but it is certain that they opposed it in the years immediately following its passage. In many cases, they even attempted to alter the legislation and as documents from the Conference on Soviet Jewry Archives show, were willing to negotiate directly with Soviet leaders to amend quotas for Jewish emigration.

While the Leningrad Affair may have heightened the strategic divide between the two factions, the passage of this amendment solidified it on a geopolitical scale. By supporting the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, the grassroots activists now began to fall in line with American politicians who wanted to confront the USSR. In contrast, the Jewish establishment was more lukewarm about the bill, both during and after its passage, and preferred engaging the Soviets in a manner similar to *détente*. By the late 1970s, both groups were properly defined in terms of their own courses of action, and would remain that way until the Jews were allowed to leave the U.S.S.R. at the end of the following decade.

Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington introduced the bill alongside Congressman Charles Vanik of Ohio in 1972. It proposed an amendment to the Federal Trade Act that intended to help Soviet Jewry and to challenge the recent trend of working with the Soviets toward creating a thaw in the Cold War. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment sought to punish the “actions of nonmarket economy countries making them ineligible for normal trade relations, programs of credits, credit guarantees, or investment guarantees, or commercial agreements.”⁴⁰ The first qualification for these non-market economy (communist) countries to be eligible for punishment was if the state “denie[d] its citizens the right or opportunity to emigrate.”⁴¹ Without looking at any other subtext, it appears that Jackson was referring primarily to the Iron Curtain.

When one considers Jackson’s political history and the events surrounding the passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, it is evident that the actions of the bill were not purely coincidental to the goals of the Soviet Jewry movement. Jackson

enjoyed good relations with the American Jewish community due to this amendment as well as his previous support for Israel. According to SSSJ leader Glenn Richter, Jackson was very much in good stead with the grassroots activists.⁴² Richter also claims that Jackson’s senior aide at the time, Richard Perle, was frequently in contact with the SSSJ and held a number of strong, similar convictions of his own on the matter.⁴³ Unlike Jackson, Perle was Jewish, and according to Richter, had a great deal of sympathy for Soviet Jews. SSSJ founder Jacob Birnbaum also had warm relations with both men and was reportedly in “close contact” with Jackson and Perle as early as 1965, seven years before the amendment was proposed.⁴⁴ The SSSJ strongly advocated for “the utilization of economic pressures on the Kremlin” and as such saw the Jackson-Vanik Amendment as very favorable.⁴⁵ It is not entirely clear whether the SSSJ had any direct influence on the crafting of this bill, but, given this relationship, SSSJ involvement is not unlikely.

Before the passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment in 1974, the United States was engaged in a process of *détente* with the U.S.S.R., during which increased trade, open communication, and military restrictions were observed. *Détente* was the brainchild of Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon’s National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State from 1973-1977. Before his career in Washington, Kissinger was a professor of international relations at Harvard, where he strongly defended *realpolitik*, a system that was decidedly “anti-ideological.”⁴⁶ His primary foreign policy goal was to establish a state of order and balance in the world that would most benefit the United States.

Kissinger’s accommodationist directive, along with the *Ostpolitik* thawing of relations between East and West Germany, became popular at this time when the threat of nuclear war was very real. To establish this order, Kissinger sought more peaceful relations with the People’s Republic of China and the U.S.S.R. Steps toward improved relations include Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, as well as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Soviets. Kissinger also sought to normalize relations with the Soviets by being in constant contact with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and improving trade relations with the U.S.S.R., especially in the form of grain exports and the shared benefits of “scientific

exchanges.”⁴⁷ In spite of these changes, the Nixon administration escalated the war in Vietnam by overseeing the 1970 bombing of Cambodia and supported various anti-communist coups in South America, including the 1973 junta that overthrew Chilean President Salvador Allende.^{iv,48} There seemed to be no coherence of human rights or even anti-communism in Kissinger’s work, but rather a balance of power that he sought to maintain between the United States, the U.S.S.R., and the Third World. If anything, Kissinger’s policies represent the furthest deviation from any of the previously mentioned ideology-driven politics.

The historiography confirms that Jackson’s primary motivation for drafting the amendment was aiding Soviet Jewry. In his biography of Henry Kissinger, Walter Isaacson describes Jackson as being motivated to write the bill in 1972 after the Soviets passed a “prohibitively high ‘education tax’ on people emigrating, which he describes as “an exit tax primarily aimed at Jews.”⁴⁹ Isaacson also wrote that prior to the bill, Jackson opposed granting the U.S.S.R. “Most Favored Nation” status in trade unless “restrictions on Jewish emigration were lifted.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Jussi Hanhimaki claims in *The Rise and Fall of Détente* that the bill was primarily in protest to this veiled “exit tax” targeted toward Jews. Beckerman supports this view by highlighting Jackson’s close relationship and empathy with the Jewish people.⁵¹ He notes that Jackson’s desire to stand up for Jewish causes came from his role in the liberation of Buchenwald concentration camp in 1945, after which he became a “strong defender of Israel and the Jews.”⁵² In fact, Beckerman notes that Jackson responded so personally and viscerally to this particular affront on Jewish welfare that he began working on the amendment immediately after learning about the exit tax.⁵³

Unlike his nemesis, Henry Kissinger, Jackson also fit in well with the overarching trend of political action based on ideology, linking him philosophically to grassroots activists more closely. His biographer, Robert G. Kaufman, describes Jackson as being an ardent supporter of “a strong civil rights bill, national health insurance,” and labor unions from his early days in Congress in the 1940s through his support

for the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁵⁴ At the same time, Jackson was a hardcore anti-Communist who defended the Vietnam War and the development of new nuclear weapons to counter the Soviets. He firmly opposed SALT and any other weapon reduction plans.⁵⁵ This delicate balance between progressive domestic policy and hawkish foreign policy may seem idiosyncratic to some; however, Jackson’s views can be interpreted as fulfilling a higher purpose for a better, more equitable life for all. The supposedly immoral forces of unrestrained capitalism and institutional racism as well as Soviet-style communism served as obstacles to this perceived moral aim, and he sought to undermine them. The oppression of Jews in the U.S.S.R. was one case of moral injustice that had to be countered by aggressive action, a sentiment quite similar to the ones mentioned in Jacob Birnbaum’s first SSSJ newsletter.

In theory, it makes sense for all the Jewish groups to get behind Jackson and that unanimity over Soviet Jewry prevailed to change the course of American foreign policy. This is the view upheld by Gal Beckerman, who points to the collaboration between Jewish groups at this time as evidence of unanimous support for Jackson-Vanik. He talks little of opposition in the community to the bill and notes that Jackson was able to seduce even the Conference on Soviet Jewry and “the Jewish Establishment” to support the amendment.⁵⁶ Beckerman notes that Jackson was able to do so not only by the appealing substance of the bill, but also by referencing the threat of a second Holocaust in Russia to large Jewish audiences, a tactic frequently used by Meir Kahane.^{v57} The only major threat to the amendment from within the Jewish community that Beckerman mentions is that of Max Fisher, a wealthy Republican philanthropist from Detroit, who opposed the bill as part of his dedication to Nixon. Beckerman makes Fisher look like an outsider whose views were never taken seriously by other community leaders.^{vi}

However, in spite of this view, concern over the passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment

iv The U.S. involvement in Allende’s ouster is a controversial subject. While the extent of the CIA or the State Department’s engagement with the junta led by Augusto Pinochet has been debated, I accept Jussi Hanhimaki’s view that it was “if not supported, at least condoned by the Nixon and Ford Administrations.”

v The fear of a second Holocaust was a major rhetorical tool for mobilizing the Jewish community at this time, especially since the actual Holocaust was still fresh in many people’s memories.

vi Beckerman is quite dismissive of Max Fisher throughout the eighth chapter of his book. Essentially, he makes him out to be like a Sheldon Adelson-type reactionary without the same kind of influence.

at this time was quite palpable, and the community was once again more split than Beckerman assumes. Max Fisher was not the outsider Beckerman claims; he was, in fact, quite influential in the Jewish community. Fisher was head of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) from 1965-1967, one of the most important Jewish organizations in America, as well as the American Jewish Congress and the Council on Jewish Federations.⁵⁸ He was also responsible for major fundraising campaigns for Israel in the United States during the Six Day War and was the leading benefactor for the very large Jewish community of Metro Detroit.⁵⁹ All of this suggests that he would have been taken seriously and likely had a certain amount of power over major Jewish organizations.

Fisher's largest ally at the time was Jacob Stein, another man whose great importance Beckerman overlooks. Stein served as Chairman of the Council of Presidents, an umbrella group of all the major Jewish American charities. These two men arranged a special meeting with Nixon in 1973, bringing fifteen Jewish leaders with them including the CSJ officer Charlotte Jacobson. The President demanded that they abandon their support for Jackson-Vanik in order to better broker a deal with the Soviets on emigration. Nixon, the ever-brilliant manipulator, noted that the community leaders could "protest all [they] want" but that the Kremlin would not listen.⁶⁰ The close connection between Fisher and Nixon further illuminates the Jewish establishment's concern of not wanting to incite Soviet Jews. Isaacson's book reveals that Kissinger actually worked behind the scenes to increase the number of visas given to Soviet Jews to 42,000 per year.⁶¹ Given Kissinger's past statements, it would be difficult to believe he did this for humanitarian reasons, but rather aimed to show the Jewish establishment that he could be more useful to them if they opposed the amendment.

The opposition to Jackson-Vanik from the Jewish establishment became more unified after President Ford signed it into law in 1974. In many circles, the newly codified amendment was popular and marked a major shift in U.S. foreign policy from accepting warmer relations with the U.S.S.R. to being more aggressive. However, as the establishment correctly predicted, Jackson-Vanik

created a backlash in the U.S.S.R. that hurt the people it was trying to protect. The number of Jews permitted to leave annually decreased from nearly 50,000 to less than 10,000 by the early 1980s, and the crackdown on *refuseniks* and their allies in the Soviet human rights movement only increased, with major players jailed.^{vii,62} This was evident in the arrest and imprisonment of famous refusenik Natan Sharansky, as well as the internal exile of noted scientist and reform activist Andrei Sakharov.

The grassroots activists continued supporting the efforts of Jackson-Vanik, drawing recently liberated *refuseniks* into their coterie. One notable figure in this camp was Avital Sharansky, the wife of Natan Sharansky, who led a series of protests in the U.S. and elsewhere on her husband's behalf during the nine years of his incarceration.⁶³ Rabbi Avi Weiss, an SSSJ ally and civil disobedience advocate, and a multitude of grassroots supporters with whom Sharansky staged rallies and hunger strikes, accompanied her.^{viii,64} Incidentally, Avital did not receive as much support from the establishment as she did from Rabbi Weiss and his followers. The CSJ initially refused to work for her husband's release due to his dissident nature, and the CSJ's fear of pressuring the Soviets.⁶⁵ Henry L. Feingold notes that they even tried to dissuade Alan Dershowitz from running a full-page plea for Sharansky's release in the *New York Times*.⁶⁶ Even though, they later launched a series of vigils in solidarity with Sharansky, the CSJ's relationship with his wife would never be as intimate as its relationship with Rabbi Weiss and the grassroots organizers.

Another example of this connection between dissidents and activists is the 1979 Solidarity Day rally in New York City (NYC), which was organized by SSSJ, under the CSJ umbrella. The long march down Fifth Avenue featured the Leningrad pilots Kuznetzov and Dymshitz. They had both been freed from Soviet custody after their respective death sentences were commuted, and had come to New York to advocate for other dissidents such as Sharansky, Ida Nudel, and Iosip Brugen.⁶⁷ In front of several thousand people, they spoke alongside NYC Mayor Ed Koch and Senators Jackson, Jacob Javits,

vii Golden is of the opinion that it is not easy to say whether or not the amendment was a success.

viii This story gives some idea as to the closeness in relations that Weiss and Sharansky had, especially when she came to the United States. To this day, Rabbi Weiss remains very close to the Sharanskys and has written at length about his activism for Natan.

and Pat Moynihan, all of whom strongly advocated in favor of the establishment of the right to emigration and the maintenance of the amendment. This Solidarity Day shows that the *refuseniks* were not only intimately tied with the grassroots movement, but also had strong continual support from members of the American government.

In contrast to the support of further pressure against the U.S.S.R., the Jewish establishment was growing increasingly nervous about its unintended consequences, and became more solidified in its support of more *détente*-like negotiations, which is, in turn, reflected in documents from the American Jewish Committee. These newsletters, taken from the AJC's archive at the American Jewish Historical Society reveal a conscious effort to pursue a policy of supporting waivers from Jackson-Vanik for increased emigration quotas. One newsletter from 1980, written by AJC leader Richard Maass, reveals a strong discomfort with earlier support for Jackson-Vanik. Maass noted that the overall breakdown of "*détente*, trade and cooperation" allowed for "little that the U.S. could apply to Russians to get them to allow greater numbers of Jews to leave."⁶⁸ This breakdown was clearly enabled by the passage of the amendment, as Maass seemed to be suggesting that its very forceful approach obstructed the possibility for future negotiations. Another memorandum from AJC leader David Geller said that the "restraint of trade," a reference to Jackson-Vanik, was causing the breakdown in negotiations.⁶⁹ Both documents displayed a type of thinking that differed from Jackson's ideology-driven politics. Instead, they seemed similar to Kissinger's approach, couched in political realism as opposed to the activist language of passionate 'solidarity' and 'struggle.'

The AJC even went as far as meeting with the respected Soviet scientist Dr. Sergey Rogov to gain some leverage in backroom negotiations. One memorandum suggested that getting close to Rogov could enable the Soviets to "release [their] Jewish prisoners of conscience, allow the *refuseniks* to emigrate, and increase the general level of emigration of Jews."⁷⁰ Rogov, who invited AJC agent Neil Sandberg to come to Moscow to begin talks, warned that the only way to increase any progress with the negotiations would be for the Americans to show "friendship initiatives" so as to suggest the Soviets were not being pressured. Dr. Rogov's

demand substantiated some of the concerns that the American Jewish establishment had regarding demonstrations and pressure tactics under Jackson-Vanik. Moreover, in the wake of the Soviet response to the amendment, they were desperate enough to make a deal with a figure that was not as prestigious as Brezhnev or Dobrynin.

This decade was, overall, highly transformative for both American foreign policy and the Soviet Jewish movement. As the U.S. government changed the way it interacted with the Soviets, partly due to the actions of its Jewish community, it presented a point of no return for the activists. The ideological separation between the grassroots and establishment activists that grew throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s was solidified due to the consequences of this bill. Following Jackson-Vanik, the grassroots activists and their *refusenik* allies were more committed to putting political pressure on the U.S.S.R. than ever before.

With the end of *détente* and negotiations, the establishment faction would continue to negotiate to release small numbers of Soviet Jews to no avail. It would take an even greater change in government to enable them to change their strategy, a change that would finally achieve visible progress in helping the Soviet Jews. This progress would ultimately derive from the multi-faceted dynamism in American policymaking that combined attributes of both factions. The Reagan Administration, which could balance an extreme ideological anti-communism with the pragmatism of effective diplomacy, could effect such a change.

SECTION III: REAGAN, SHULTZ, AND THE REALIGNMENT

In the 1980s, there was a major U.S. foreign policy shift as the Reagan administration came to power. Unlike previous presidents, President Ronald Reagan supported the goals of the Soviet Jewry movement, primarily as part of a larger strategy to confront the U.S.S.R. and end communism. Both of these were part of an ideological approach to politics that differed from President Nixon's foreign policy pragmatism and President Carter's more universal morality-driven politics, where Reagan held the eradication of international communism above all else. He and George Shultz, Reagan's second and longer-serving Secretary of State, continuously put

a great deal of pressure on the U.S.S.R. to release *refuseniks* and eliminate immigration quotas. The functionality of the relationship between the President and the movement was evident in the close connections Reagan made with certain activists and the Jewish community's praise for Secretary Shultz's work.

Reagan's ideological approach to eliminating communism and its largest standard-bearer fit in with the trend of political action that the SSSJ had been following since its inception, which led to the ideological understanding and connection between them. He also felt a personal affinity to its activists and the *refusenik* victims of Soviet oppression, as seen by his relations with individuals such as Avital Sharansky, which will be discussed in greater depth in this section. Similarly, President Reagan and Secretary Shultz's later focus on negotiations as a means of achieving their ends also satisfied the previously cautious Jewish establishment. The establishment, in turn, became comfortable enough to demand more pressure to release Soviet Jews. This change, made possible in part by an administration sympathetic to the cause, resulted in an increase in activity for the Jewish establishment, and a decline of divisions between the two factions of the Soviet Jewry movement.

President Reagan's foreign policy was radically different from that of his predecessors; his immediate predecessor, President Carter, based his foreign policy primarily on universal human rights. He claimed to be guided by "morals and principles," as he willingly increased pressure on both the U.S.S.R. after their 1980 invasion of Afghanistan, and authoritarian right-wing governments in Latin America and elsewhere.⁷¹ At first glance, President Carter may seem like the poster child for ideology-driven politics, similar to those of President Reagan. However, President Carter was more focused on achieving ends in foreign policy to support universal human rights, while President Reagan, Senator Jackson, and the civil rights movement's visions were more focused on achieving specific political ends.

For example, Carter was not as radical as Senator Jackson in opposing the U.S.S.R. and was willing to negotiate with them through a second round of SALT agreements, which he claimed was "in the interest of American security and world peace."⁷² According to these words, President Carter

was an individual much more focused on general, loftier goals, not necessarily trying to achieve direct ends like defeating Jim Crow laws or weakening the U.S.S.R. By contrast, President Reagan used his ideology-driven politics as justifications for his actions, which in terms of foreign policy were almost exclusively focused on defeating communism. In this sense, President Reagan's goals and intentions were more directly in the service of an extreme anti-communist ideology, despite having an inspiration beyond pure pragmatism. While continuing to oppose communist regimes, President Reagan reversed the Carter administration's positions on certain foreign actors that he believed could have been potential allies against the U.S.S.R. In doing so, he opposed sanctions on the apartheid-era government in South Africa, supported Augusto Pinochet of Chile, and aided the Contras in Nicaragua.⁷³⁷⁴ Such things would have been against President Carter's principles, which unlike President Reagan's, were not wholly dedicated to the service of a specific ideology.

The justification for this split from previous U.S. policy is exhibited in a 1979 essay written by President Reagan's future U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick, in which she claimed that autocratic regimes were not as damaging as revolutionary communist regimes. She argued that the former would simply result in power changes, while the latter would "violate internal habits and values" of the countries they dominate and have caused "tens of thousands to flee."⁷⁵ This "Kirkpatrick Doctrine" differed from Kissinger's *détente*, in the sense that it was ostensibly a foreign policy based on human rights. However, unlike Carter whose definition of human rights appeared to be more all-encompassing, President Reagan and his cabinet would ultimately determine what this meant. Hence, they supported certain political bodies that committed vicious human rights abuses.

Fortunately for the Soviet Jewry movement, their cause fit perfectly into the vision of President Reagan and his cabinet. The matter of Soviet Jews was one of protecting the religious and cultural freedom of an oppressed minority against what President Reagan saw as a hegemonic communist power. Fittingly, President Reagan appointed people, who were great admirers and associates of Senator Jackson to his staff, whose staunch anti-communism meshed

well with his. Among these individuals were Paul Wolfowitz and Elliott Abrams, both of whom would go on to serve a series of senior positions in the State Department, in addition to Jackson's aide, Richard Perle. President Reagan greatly appreciated these individuals, and after Senator Jackson died suddenly of an aneurysm in 1983 at the age of 71, President Reagan honored him with a posthumous Medal of Freedom and said that he was "proud to have Jackson Democrats serve in [his] administration."⁷⁶ The Soviet Jewry movement was in a unique place, given that its allies now occupying important places in the executive branch when, less than a decade ago, it had been in opposition to the President.

The change of Senator Jackson's allies to the executive branch represented a fusion in the morally driven political work that marked the grassroots faction of the Soviet Jewry movement. As mentioned in the previous section, Senator Jackson, with his fusion of liberal domestic policy and hawkish foreign policy, was a notable exemplar of ideology-driven politics in the transition period between the movement's birth and the 1980s. The appointment of his aides to the State Department not only put supporters of the Soviet Jewry movement in powerful positions, but also enlisted people with a perspective similar to that of the grassroots activists as architects of President Reagan's foreign policy. While Reagan was much more politically conservative than activists in civil rights movement, he shared with them, Senator Jackson, and the grassroots activists of the Soviet Jewry movement, a political perspective based on working to achieve a larger ideological goal. He was focused on defeating communism above all else, just as the SNCC members were focused on defeating Jim Crow, and just as the SSSJ members were committed to extending emigration rights to Soviet Jews.

President Reagan's steadfast opposition to communism and the U.S.S.R. is evident in many aspects of his behavior, including his introduction of the ambitious and highly controversial Strategic Defense Initiative, colloquially known as "Star Wars." This program intended to stop potential Soviet missiles by using a satellite system to destroy them from space, were they to be launched. Ostensibly, it was a defensive measure, but many liberal critics, such as Senator Edward M. "Ted" Kennedy (D-MA), derided Star Wars as too costly and nuclear

warmongering.⁷⁷ However, Reagan's willingness to spend the money and risk nuclear provocation to oppose the Soviets demonstrates a dedication to his ideology above mere pragmatism. Whereas a pragmatist may have preferred a less costly or imaginative program for defense, the ever-dedicated Reagan would have been willing to risk the financial and potentially human cost in the creation of this system.

Additionally, President Reagan showed a willingness to get close to certain activists tied to the grassroots movement and act on their behalf. One example was President Reagan's relationship with Avital Sharansky, whom he first met in 1981. She had come to the White House to talk to the President about her husband Natan, who had been "in the gulag" and whose weight, due to a combination of hunger strikes and forced starvation, was "down to 100 lbs."⁷⁸ President Reagan, by meeting with this woman, granted her access, in contrast to that in past administrations, such as President Nixon's, which would only be limited to powerful fundraisers like Max Fisher as mentioned earlier in the paper. However, President Reagan's empathy towards Sharansky's incarceration appeared to border on righteous, visceral anger. He wrote in the diary entry for that day, "Damn those inhuman monsters... I promised I'd do everything to obtain his release and I will."⁷⁹ This highly emotional and dedicated behavior shows how President Reagan's ideology dominated his political decisions. Looking to this diary entry, it demonstrates that Reagan indeed felt for Sharansky, but the President's writing was also in accordance with his own vision of an evil U.S.S.R. persecuting innocent minorities, which may not have been Reagan's view in the case of similar human rights abuses committed by the apartheid-era government in South Africa.

Reagan did, in fact, act on this promise to himself and Avital Sharansky by continuously asking the Soviet leadership to release Natan. Immediately after his 1981 meeting with Avital, Reagan asked Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev to grant Avital's husband an amnesty, in what seemed to be an ostensibly humble, private letter.⁸⁰ However, he unmistakably threatened Brezhnev in the last line where he wrote, "I'm sure however that you understand that such actions on your part would lessen problems in future negotiations between our

two countries.”⁸¹

It should be noted that this letter was penned during major grain negotiations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., where Reagan had his first opportunity to move toward economic reconciliation. The U.S.S.R., which was enduring shortages due to its war in Afghanistan, could have used the U.S. demand to gain wheat exports and an easing of trade.⁸² However, President Reagan threatened to hurt the U.S.S.R. with faltering negotiations, if they did not deal with Sharansky’s persecution. He, like Senator Jackson, was willing to inflict continued and serious economic damage on the U.S.S.R., if they did not agree to his request. President Reagan’s dedication in this episode shows how far the presidency had come from the days of Secretary Kissinger. Reagan’s administration partook in the politics of action, as espoused by the grassroots activists, not just that of mediation. President Reagan’s rhetoric reflects a genuine dedication to the service of his ideology, where he was willing to upset the course of international stability for the protection of an individual and the belittling of the U.S.S.R. It seems very unwise to some, but as was the case with Star Wars, the subordination of pragmatism to ideology was a natural decision for him. In the ultimate service of destroying communism and the U.S.S.R., coexistence was of secondary priority to Reagan. Threatening the U.S.S.R. was a much more natural option for Reagan, as it enhanced the possibility of engaging the communist superstate as opposed to letting it live.

Despite this pressure, Reagan’s presidency nevertheless saw peaceful negotiations and conversation with the Soviet leaders, both about Soviet Jewry and larger matters, which greatly pleased the Jewish establishment. Such a pattern of behavior became more prevalent in his second term, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the Soviet premier. Gorbachev was more committed to reform in both domestic and foreign policy than his predecessors had been. The foreign policy reform was best seen in the period of negotiations starting with the Geneva Summit of 1985, which marked President Reagan’s first meeting with Gorbachev. During these talks, the two leaders were focused on matters, such as arms reduction and increased trade. It was very productive, and from 1985 onwards, relations between the two nations began to thaw. In

addition to easing business relations between the two superpowers, President Reagan and Gorbachev signed the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, a major ban on intercontinental ballistic missiles that partially assuaged fears of nuclear war.⁸³ President Reagan, assisted by his Secretary of State George Shultz, appeared to be moving back in the direction of Secretary Kissinger and détente.

In spite of these changes, however, Secretary Shultz pressured the Soviets to act in the interests of their Jewish citizens. He notes in *Turmoil and Triumph*, his memoir of his State Department service that the repeatedly stated U.S. concern for Soviet Jewish emigration rights would be brought up in negotiations, whether things were “going well or poorly on other issues of concern.”⁸⁴ Shultz recognized that the Soviets were using Soviet Jews as “pawns” for future negotiations as they had done in Secretary Kissinger’s time, and he pushed the Soviets on the matter in almost every meeting from 1982 to 1989.⁸⁵

Throughout this period, Shultz frequently earned the warm support of the Soviet Jewry movement. He had stellar relations with the CSJ who honored him in 1984 for his efforts and was again honored in 1988 by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, after the majority of his successes had come to pass. At this second dinner, he referred to Morris Abram, the head of the CSJ, as his “rabbi.”⁸⁶ Secretary Shultz also performed acts of calculated solidarity with the other faction, such as a 1987 Passover Seder he led in Moscow for *refusenik* leaders like Ida Nudel and Iosip Brugen, who had recently been released after incarceration in the gulag throughout the previous decade.⁸⁷ Like Reagan’s relations with Wiesel and Avital Sharansky, this was his entrée into the grassroots movement.

The praise from the Soviet Jewry movement was not without substance, as Secretary Shultz proved to be relentless in his demands to the Kremlin. When he began as Secretary of State, he first pushed to release the *refuseniks*, a group he saw as emblematic of the larger Soviet Jewry struggle. Eventually, the Soviets released Natan Sharansky in 1986, who after nine years of being the poster child of Jewish persecution in the U.S.S.R. was escorted to West Berlin under the auspices of a “spy-swap.”⁸⁸ This decision came after Secretary Shultz had been working for four years for his release. The U.S.S.R. saved face by making it

seem like a prisoner trade. In Sharansky's place, the United States handed over several Chilean scientists accused of espionage.⁸⁹ The following year, refuseniks Iosif Begun and Ida Nudel were also released due to U.S. pressure. Even after all these emancipations, Shultz pushed Gorbachev to allow the emigration of "the millions of other Soviet Jews," during the tense Reykjavik Summit of 1987.^{ix,90}

Nevertheless, whenever President Reagan and Secretary Shultz appeared to be making less progress than hoped for and the status of Jews within the U.S.S.R. seemed to worsen, the Soviet Jewry movement did not cease in their demands of the administration. This time, however, it was the establishment that applied most of the pressure. In 1984, the year before Gorbachev was made premier, only 1,000 Jews were allowed to leave the U.S.S.R. per year, down from the already low quota of 10,000 that existed five years prior and deemed a "profound crisis" by the Conference on Soviet Jewry.⁹¹ Before the Geneva conference, there was a major protest of 250,000 people in NYC, organized by the SSSJ but sponsored by the Conference on Soviet Jewry. It is notable that even though the administration was on their side, a more mainstream group like the CSJ was willing to sponsor a mass demonstration demanding even more action. Moreover, CSJ leaders, including Morris Abram and Herbert Kronish, spoke to Secretary Shultz before the Geneva conference, calling on him to pressure his Soviet counterpart, Andrei Gromyko, for the release of "all Soviet prisoners of conscience" and "exit visas" to anyone wishing to emigrate.⁹² This was a much bigger step than previous bargains, and the CSJ seemed to be adopting a more radical approach in this demand, in spite of the ongoing desperate situation.

Clearly, a transformation had taken place in the movement. The establishment was no longer content to be cautious and negotiate over the lives of a select number of Soviet Jews, but was willing to demand of Secretary Shultz emigration rights for all Soviet Jews. The CSJ's willingness at such a dire time to organize protests and pressure the government show a shift of the establishment in regard to the role the grassroots organizers had previously played. This shift was indicative of a change in the place of Jewish groups in U.S. politics. In the past, the establishment was more

moderate in its tactics as its goal was not in tandem with the White House, and Jackson-Vanik had not yet been passed. Though matters of infighting would persist, it seemed as if the major disparity of strategy between the two factions was diminishing as the Reagan era progressed, and the Soviet Jewry movement achieved a new foothold in foreign policy. As seen beforehand, this was partly due to their own activities, which laid the groundwork for a President to come in with ideas and an ideology in step with theirs.

The release of the *refuseniks* and other major progress made for Soviet Jews throughout the 1980s led to a legendary final major rally. This was the Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jews held at the National Mall on December 6, 1987, on the eve of a major meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan. Although the grassroots groups worked to mobilize hundreds and thousands of marchers, and the mainstream organizations put up the money and speakers, the separation between the two groups was still present. While many *refuseniks* and leaders of Jewish organizations spoke, no member of the SSSJ did, nor was any member invited to be on the dais. Not even SSSJ founder Jacob Birnbaum or ally Avi Weiss, who had both engaged in hunger strikes and civil disobedience for years, were given air time at this climactic rally.⁹³ The grassroots activists and the Jewish establishment may have both been winning the fight, but at the end of it all, they were still fairly divided.

In 1989, Gorbachev lifted the emigration restrictions. The Jews of the U.S.S.R. were finally allowed to leave, and over the next ten years, almost two million of its two-and-a-half-million strong community settled in other countries where they could freely practice their religion without government prohibitions and express support for their homeland. The Soviet Jewry movement in the United States was not able to entirely to overcome its internal divisions. However, it undoubtedly made tremendous progress due to shared goals, and both factions working with the cooperative Reagan administration, which consequently enabled them to develop a stronger voice in addressing these policy matters.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of the Soviet Jewry

ix By 1987, Gorbachev was making significant steps in his steps toward liberalization, yet it was still very difficult for many people in the U.S.S.R. to emigrate or obtain an exit visa.

movement in the United States between the 1960s and 1980s not only represented a great victory for the two factions of the movement, but also helped bring about a major change in U.S. foreign policy. When the movement started in the early 1960s, only a select number of prominent activists and politicians came to its aid, but, as time progressed, the matter became a focal point of late-Cold War diplomacy. My thesis displays this transition, especially in sections one and two of the paper. Jackson-Vanik and the repercussions associated with its passage made the cause of Soviet Jewry a focal point of U.S. foreign policy by driving policy makers out of the stagnancy of *détente* and into a more interventionist approach. Such a change allowed the ideas of the grassroots activists to become more accepted by the executive branch, as they fit in greatly with the new aggression taken towards the Soviets. Yet the Reagan Administration's commitment to peaceful negotiations with the U.S.S.R. regarding Soviet Jewry reflects a certain degree of calm similar to the Jewish establishment, who as mentioned earlier, remained close with the President and the Secretary of State. Essentially, the success of this movement was based on a multi-faceted dynamism that combined the best of both Soviet Jewry movement factions.

The transformation from *realpolitik* pragmatism in the Kissinger years to a palpable show of executive strength against the U.S.S.R. came during the Reagan administration, as demonstrated in the third section of this paper. President Reagan maintained an ideology-driven foreign policy primarily dedicated to vanquishing communism and all of its negative consequences, including the persecution of Jews within the largest Marxist-Leninist state. It was the combination of having a common enemy and having a shared goal, which enabled genuine action to be taken on behalf of their brethren in the U.S.S.R. While President Reagan was more ideologically compatible with the ideas of the grassroots activists than the previous Cold War presidents like Nixon and Ford, under whom Kissinger served, as well as Jimmy Carter, he certainly had not abandoned mainstream Jewish organizations, who still maintained their old ties to the executive branch. It was during Reagan's presidency that the ideas of both groups had relative parity in terms of acceptance and influence on the President and his advisors, and where the disparate strengths of both factions

came together for a foreign policy victory for the emigration rights of Soviet Jews.

It can be determined that both groups had something unique to contribute to the success of their movement and to elevate the state of Jews in both the U.S.S.R. and the United States. Through their constant campaigning and their civil rights movement-influenced activism, the grassroots activists stirred in hundreds of thousands of American Jews to demand a change in U.S. engagement with the Soviets. While their numbers were comparatively small, they were able to maintain a constant indefatigable energy throughout the three decades of the movement's existence, and to concentrate their energies on achieving tangible solutions. Supporting Jackson-Vanik before and after its passage enabled the movement to daringly challenge the mainstream of American foreign policy, in spite of the potentially damaging consequences in the U.S.S.R. President Reagan and Secretary Shultz's gumption in pressuring Gorbachev to remove the emigration quotas in the 1980s would not have been possible without the fundamental policy change secured in the preceding decade. By going against the more powerful forces of the Jewish community who were afraid to challenge the status quo, advocates like Jacob Birnbaum, Glenn Richter and the *refuseniks* were able to help create the healthy transition from *détente* to engagement.

Nevertheless, the Jewish establishment's role in the movement should not be discounted. Their financial support and ability to spread information about the movement's activities across the country was necessary for Jewish Americans outside the New York nexus of SSSJ activism to become more aware of the injustices committed in the U.S.S.R. The establishment's constant lobbying and network of political supporters enabled the cause of Soviet Jewry to get the attention it would not have otherwise received. Its willingness to negotiate with the Soviets in the 1970s may seem to have been the lost plan in achieving release for Soviet Jews. However, alongside political pressure, it was this strategy that Reagan and Shultz chose to help realize the movement's goals. Likewise, the same flexibility and practicality that marked this wing of the movement, as opposed to the justice-seeking rigidity of the grassroots activists, enabled them to change their strategy in the 1980s to pressure the President and the Secretary of the

State to push for all Jews to be released. From behind the scenes, it is undeniable that the establishment remained vigilant and effective in securing the release of Jews behind the Iron Curtain.

It was in fact the fusion of their efforts that made this transformation of an ethnic cause into a Cold War foreign policy position possible. The Reagan administration's policy of aggressive negotiation in a way marks this fusion, as it combines the dedication of the activists with the flexibility of the establishment leaders. It is not clear what would have happened if there had been no factions. It is possible that the movement would have been disregarded as another Jewish bloc without the mix of strategies and alliances necessary to achieve its ends. Like so many other successful causes, the Soviet Jewry movement would not have succeeded as a monolith. What may have seemed like problematic relations at the time produced a sort of crucial synthesis of ideas needed to bring the shared goals of the campaign to fruition.

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