

**PRAGUE 1744 - LAKE SUCCESS 1947:
STATECRAFT WITHOUT A STATE**

On 18 December 1744 the Habsburg ruler Maria Theresia signed an edict expelling all Jews from Prague: until the end of January 1745 they had to leave the city, and by the end of June all Jews would have to leave all of Bohemia and Moravia, and would not be allowed to settle in any of the Habsburg hereditary lands.¹

For centuries, the Jewish community in Prague had been one of the largest and richest in Europe, and the sudden expulsion - the last attempt to expel Jews from a major European city prior to the French Revolution - was a blow not only to the Prague Jews, but also threatened Jewish livelihood and security across Europe. In the ensuing months, one of the most intensive political and diplomatic campaigns was waged, on behalf of the Prague community, by Jews practically all over Europe. Under pre-1789 conditions, and before the onset of Jewish emancipation, this campaign should be seen as a testimony to the Jewish capacity and dexterity in using a variety of means - from humanitarian and commercial arguments, to financial enticements and straightforward political lobbying - to reverse, under time pressure and extremely difficult war conditions, a political decision of one of Europe's most powerful rulers. What follows will be an attempt to delineate the contours of that political campaign; only a detailed analysis of the methods used can provide a full picture of the meaning of a statecraft used by a state-less people: it was, on the one hand, a continuation of traditional Jewish *shtadlanut* (intercession), yet it was also beginning to use modern means of communication and persuasion to achieve its aims. In this it prefigures the means used by modern Jewish diplomacy leading to the legitimation of Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel.

The exact reasons for Maria Theresia's order to expel the Jews from Prague have not been firmly established, but the historical context is clear: the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). In this war, Prague was occupied twice by anti-Habsburg forces: first in 1741-1742 by a Bavarian-Saxon-French force, and then, in the summer of 1744, by the Prussians.

Many of the Prague aristocracy and burghers welcomed the Prussians for reasons that go back at least partially to the old anti-Catholic and anti-Habsburg sentiments still prevalent in Bohemia despite the apparent

¹ For details, see G. Wolf, 'Die Vertreibung der Juden aus Böhmen,' *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Juden und des Judenthums*, IV (Leipzig, 1869), pp. 145-261; J. Bengl, *Die Ausweisung der Juden aus Prag* (Prag, 1927).

successes of the Counter-Reformation. After the Austrians finally recaptured Prague in November 1744, many of those who welcomed the Prussians were arrested, tried for treason and executed. It was then that rumors surfaced – as they did during the first occupation of Prague in 1741 – that the Jews had supported the Prussians: when the Habsburgs returned, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Prague, and twenty Jews were reported killed, more than a 100 injured, and many shops burned and looted. It was then that the first rumors about a possible expulsion of the Jews from Prague began to circulate: the Jewish community sent emissaries to Vienna to “the Queen of Hagar” (i.e. Hungary – Maria Theresia had not yet acquired the Imperial title), but they were unable to get an audience with the ruler.

Yet it is not clear whether the accusation of collaboration with the Prussians was by itself the major reason for the expulsion order: for years prior to the War of Succession, Prague burghers filed complaints against Jewish merchants; this led to the setting up of a Royal Commission to look into the issue, and a day before the expulsion order Count Kinsky, the Head of the Bohemian Court Chancellery, submitted a memorandum to Maria Theresia in which he criticized the very existence of the institutional structure of Jewish communities, which – according to him – created communal solidarity and made it difficult for the authorities to bring individual Jews to justice. Yet Kinsky expressed clear opposition to the idea of expelling the Jews from Prague: the political and commercial damage to the Habsburg interest would outweigh the possible benefits which might accrue to the Christian merchants of Prague. So the immediate reasons for the expulsion remain somewhat murky.

Be this as it may, the day after the expulsion order was promulgated, on 19 December 1744, the Jewish community leaders decided on two parallel steps: in the traditional lachrymose language of *The Book of Lamentations* they ordered members of the community to pray and fast and beg for divine mercy; parallel to this, they composed a circular letter sent to a number of leaders of Jewish communities, asking for their intercession.²

This letter, while couched in conventional language, is a seminal document, and it started something which can be likened only to a snowball. Written in a mixture of biblical Hebrew and colloquial Judeo-German, it implores “the nobles of Judah ...who have power and standing in the courts of the powerful” to intercede on behalf of their Prague brethren. The writers excuse themselves that because of time pressure, the urgency of the issue, and the “surfeit of agonies,” they could not write personalized letters but could prepare only eight copies of the circular; they urge the recipients to prepare further copies and send them on to other communities and correspondents. The original eight copies went to the Jewish communities in

Vienna, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, London, and Venice, as well as to Wolf Wertheimer in Augsburg, the most prominent court Jew of his time, and to Bendit Gumperz in Nijmegen.³

The circular describes in great detail the terrible agonies to be expected if thousands of people, including women and children, are expelled and sent on the roads in the middle of winter. As an immediate tactic – and aware of the time constraints – the writers of the circular suggest not to try to ask for rescinding the expulsion order outright, but instead to ask for postponement of its execution and the appointment of an “Inquisition Commission” to look into whatever complaints may be lodged against the Prague Jews. With just five weeks before the order was to take effect, the Prague Jewish leaders realized that a pragmatic approach – postponement – would have better chances than an attempt to confront whatever political pressures were responsible for the expulsion order itself.

It is remarkable to follow the dispatch and the speed with which the original copies of the circular reached their destinations – by special couriers – in the middle of the winter: before the end of December, all the original eight addressees received their copies.

Immediately on receiving the circular, the leaders of the small Jewish community in Vienna met in the house of their unofficial leader, Baron d'Aguilar: given their own precarious situation (formally no Jewish community existed in Vienna), they realized that their own protestations to the ruler would be futile if not accompanied by outside intervention and pressure, and they conveyed this assessment to their correspondents.

Most recipients of the circular letter from Prague followed the request to make further copies and send them on to additional addressees: Benjamin Wolf of Vienna made a further copy and sent it to the Mantua community; Wolf Wertheimer was most prodigious in sending copies to further addressees – among them to one of his sons in Munich; to his step-nephew Hirsch Oppenheim in Hildesheim; to his son-in-law Meir Katz, the rabbi of Duchy of Hanover; to his brother-in-law Eliahu Oppenheim in Hamburg; to Baruch Gumperz, the rabbi of Silesia; and to Feibush Breslauer, the rabbi of the Ashkenazic community in London. A copy reached the Copenhagen community in early January 1745; on 22–23 December Samuel Wertheimer of Vienna sent to his father Wolf in Augsburg a more detailed version, again in mixed Hebrew and Judeo-German, of “Relation of the terrible events in the Holy Community of Prague and the whole Kingdom of Boehm.” This document, known as *Relation*, was rewritten and rephrased exclusively in Hebrew (so that Sephardic communities would not come up against to them unintelligible Judeo-German), and was printed in Venice in the second half of January; this printed version was sent in many copies to further Jewish notables and communities.

² Most of the following, including the detailed chronology, is based on the seminal and unfortunately much neglected article by B. Mevorah, ‘Ma’assei hishtadlut be-Europa ll-meni’at gerusham shel Yehudei Bohemia u-Moravia,’ (Hebrew) *Zion*, vol. XVIII (1963), pp. 125–64.

³ On Wolf Wertheimer and his family, see S. Stern, *The Court Jew* (Philadelphia, 1950).

By the beginning of January – merely two weeks after the order had been signed by Maria Theresia – dozens of Jewish communities all over Europe were aware of the expulsion order, and they began to correspond among themselves, exchanging information, suggesting new avenues of approach, reporting results, both positive and negative. Thus the Hamburg community reported to its sister Spanish-Portuguese community in Amsterdam that joint action is vital, since when “one member is being hit, all the members of the body suffer,” especially when it is Prague, the Jewish metropolis (*ir va-em be-Israel*) which is being targeted.

From the voluminous correspondence that ensued, it appears that Wolf Wertheimer from Augsburg emerged as something like a coordinator: his links to the Habsburg court and other courts as well, and his financial standing, placed him in a strategic position to do so, as did his domicile in Augsburg, which was situated along the front lines in the war which is still going on.

It is fascinating to follow the quick succession of moves that followed:

- In the Netherlands, Bendit Gumperz in Nijmegen received the original circular on 5 January 1745; on the same day he wrote to one of his relatives in Amsterdam who was an official (*parnass*) of the local community and urged him to approach the States-General (*Staten-Generaal*); he himself wrote to a contact person in The Hague; further, he wrote to a correspondent in London, asking for intercession with the King of England (who was also the Elector of Hanover).

- In Amsterdam, both the Portuguese and the Ashkenazic communities set up a joint committee of deputies (*Gedeputierte*) on the matter; through the intercession of the local banker Tobias Boas they met on 31 December (less than two weeks after the signing of the order by Maria Theresia!) with a committee of the States-General. They submitted to them a lengthy memorandum, in which they maintained that the complaints (never specified against the Prague Jews) are false and malicious; they point out that expelling the Jewish merchants from Prague would gravely hurt international commerce and urge the authorities of the United Provinces to intercede in Vienna through their ambassador on behalf of “Justice, Mercy and Utility,” and ask the Habsburg government to postpone the expulsion order and to appoint an commission of enquiry. The States-General acceded to the request, sent a copy of the memorandum to Baron van Burmania, their ambassador in Vienna, and directed him to approach the Court and ask what were the reasons for such “an extremely hurtful” measure; they further directed their ambassador to convey to the Vienna authorities their “deep concern” for the consequences, due to the interests the people of the Netherlands have in the continuation of their commerce with Prague, and hence urge to deal with the Prague Jews “with moderation.” The letter of the States-General was sent through the Amsterdam Jewish community by their own special courier to two Jewish leaders in Vienna, so it could be quickly forwarded to the ambassador.

In this as in further cases, it appears clear that despite the winter and the difficult 18th century transportation conditions, the Jewish

communities were able to use their own commercial network of couriers to make sure that official messages would get to their destination as soon as possible and not become victims to the vagaries of usual diplomatic channels. Having achieved this intervention by the States-General, the Amsterdam Jewish community’s *Gedeputierte* informed other communities about this through a circular letter, urging further action, especially in England.

- Wolf Wertheimer, who could not himself travel because of the war campaign raging in his region, initiated the following actions:

- He wrote to his brother-in-law Moses Kahn in Frankfurt, who was the banker of the Archbishop-Elector of Mayence, urging him to visit the Archbishop, who was also the Imperial Chancellor – a crucial role in any election of an Emperor.

- On his father’s orders, Wolf Wertheimer’s son Itzik, of Fürth, headed a delegation to the Bishop of Bamberg-Würzburg, who happened to be the brother of the Archbishop-Elector of Mayence, and had been playing a crucial role in recent attempts at mediation between Bavaria and the Habsburg Court.

- Wolf Wertheimer wrote to the Frankfurt community, urging them to send a delegation to the Jewish community of Rome, to try and get an audience with the Pope.

- He further wrote to his relative Hirsch Oppenheim, the financial adviser (*Faktor*) of the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne, to approach him so he might directly try to intercede with Maria Theresia.

- In another letter to his brother-in-law Moses Kahn in Frankfurt, Wolf Wertheimer further suggested to him to travel to Braunschweig and approach Alexander David, the court Jew of the Duke of Braunschweig, and ask for the help of the Duke as well as his aunt, who was Maria Theresia’s mother; he suggested to try to get letters to Maria Theresia both from the Duke and his aunt; the letters – so Wertheimer suggested – should appeal both to the ruler’s sense of Christian mercy as well as point out to the great damage that will be done to many Christian merchants by Jewish bankruptcies in Prague; for good measure he also suggested that the letters also warn Maria Theresia that the general population may be infected by illnesses spread through the expelled Jewish population which will be exposed to the hardships of the winter.

- On 1 January 1745 Wertheimer asked the court Jew in Dresden to approach the Elector of Saxony, who was also King of Poland, to write to Maria Theresia.

- On 4 January Wertheimer sent a circular letter to the Jewish communities in Rome, Mantua, Venice, and Turin, in which he asked these communities to have a corps of couriers and runners ready on call; he asked the Turin community to approach the King of Piedmont, the Rome community to approach the Papal Curia; the Venice community was advised to ask the Senate and the Papal Nuncio in Venice to approach the Papal Nuncio in Vienna.

All this Wertheimer did during the week of 29 December - 5 January, in the middle of both the winter and the Christian holiday season, with war raging around.

The results of this series of activities were remarkable:

- On 3 January at night Moses Kahn of Frankfurt met the Archbishop-Elector of Mayence. The next morning, the Archbishop met the Vienna representative to his court and wrote a personal letter to Maria Theresia. In it he advises her to use moderation in her policies regarding the Jews of Prague: were the Prague Jews to be expelled, her international standing would be damaged; if, on the other hand, she treats them with moderation, she will be universally known as a merciful sovereign. The letter was handed by the Archbishop to Kahn, who dispatched it by special courier to Rabbi Berish Eshkeles in Vienna, who was directed to forward it immediately to the Mayence representative in Vienna, who should hand it over to Maria Theresia personally.

- Moses Kahn further spoke to Baron Ertlau, who was the Court Councilor of the Archbishop of Mayence, who promised to raise the issue with the representatives of the courts of Hanover and Saxony in Mayence.

- In Saxony, the local Jewish community sent a deputation to the Court and warned that the Prague expulsion would hurt commerce in Saxony - it would be especially harmful to the Leipzig Fair, one of the main sources of international trade of the kingdom. The Jewish community in Saxony was even successful in prompting the (Christian) Merchants Guild in Leipzig to send an address to the Saxon Crown Council, as well as to Vienna warning against the repercussions of massive bankruptcies of Prague's Jewish merchants on commerce in Saxony: how would the Christian merchants be compensated in such an eventuality?

- The Saxon Crown Council wrote to its ambassador in Vienna to raise the issue with Habsburg authorities when the occasion arises.

- An attempt to approach directly the Elector of Saxony - who was also King of Poland - failed: a jewelry merchant was sent to him in Warsaw with an appropriate present, but he was robbed near Dresden and the approach was aborted.

- On 1 January the three associated communities of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck (known by their Hebrew acronym AHW) sent a circular letter to other Jewish communities, warning that the expulsion from Prague would be "far worse" than the expulsion from Spain in 1492. They also succeeded in moving the City Council of the Imperial City of Hamburg to address Maria Theresia directly on 6 January, warning that any harm to the "rich and numerous Jews of Prague" would gravely hurt trade and commerce throughout the Empire. As we have seen in earlier cases, this letter was also sent through a special courier by the Jewish community in Hamburg, this time to Count Muskau in Vienna, who was asked to transmit it to the Countess Fuchs (wife of the former Habsburg ambassador in Hamburg), who had been Maria Theresia's personal tutor: in this circuitous way it should reach the ruler directly, not through her ministers.

- On 8 January the King of England received a deputation of the London Jewish community, and on the same day, on the King's orders, the Lord Chancellor Lord Harrington instructed the ambassador in Vienna to consult with the ambassador of the Dutch States-General and coordinate their approaches to the Vienna government. Lord Harrington added in his letter that the King was deeply moved by the "terrible injustice done to innocent people."

- On the same day, 8 January, a Jewish delegation met the King of Denmark, who immediately wrote a personal letter to Maria Theresia: this is the only direct royal letter in the matter.

- Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschtütz, then officiating as rabbi in Metz, also wrote to the Jewish community in Rome, imploring them to approach the Pope "with whom, as we heard, our brethren in Italy are acquainted and it is said that he wishes well for our people (*doresh tov le-amenu*); who but he should, due to his religiosity, intercede on our people's behalf?"

- The Venetian Senate asked their ambassador in Vienna to raise the issue at Court.

- The Papal Curia instructed the Nuncio in Vienna to urge the Habsburg authorities not to do anything rash regarding the Prague Jews and be loyal to the precept of "love thy neighbor."

- Eventually, on 13 April, a special courier arrived from Constantinople, carrying a message from the High Porte imploring Maria Theresia to spare the Prague Jews; it is not clear how this came about, but it is hard to imagine that it was not an outcome of some Jewish approaches to the authorities in the Ottoman Empire.

Trying to sum up this hectic activity, one could see that by the middle of January, less than a month after the order was promulgated by Maria Theresia, the court in Vienna had received pleas on behalf of the Prague Jews from, among others, the following: the Kings of England and Denmark; the States-General of the United Provinces; the Duke of Braunschweig; the Archbishop-Elector of Mayence; the Venetian Senate; the City Council of the Imperial City of Hamburg; the Court Council of Saxony; the papal Nuncio in Venice; even Maria Theresia's mother.

At the time Maria Theresia was at the end of one of her many pregnancies, so due to her confinement, no diplomatic representatives were allowed to see her until the end of January 1745. By this point, the expulsion of Prague Jewry had been completed, and the deadline for the expulsion of the Jews of the Bohemian countryside and Moravia was rapidly approaching. As we will see in a moment, the various diplomatic and personal representations did finally reach the Court, giving rise to a number of consultations that eventually succeeded in averting the wholesale expulsion of Bohemian and Moravian Jewry. The postponement of the expulsion edict for the Jews of the Bohemian countryside and Moravia was as intertwined in the international politics of the Habsburgs as its initial promulgation, and was achieved due to a complex set of changing circumstances. On 20 January 1745 the reigning German Emperor - the Elector of Bavaria

- died. Maria Theresia started an international campaign to have her husband, Francis III Stephen, Duke of Lorraine, elected as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. For this she needed international support - and the active votes of the seven Imperial Electors (*Reichskurfürsten*), among them the Electors of Saxony and Hanover, who were also, respectively, the Kings of Poland and England; and of the Ecclesiastical Electors, foremost among whom was the Archbishop-Elector of Mayence, who officiated as Imperial Chancellor, as well as of the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne. We have already seen that the three of them interceded in different fashions on behalf of the Prague Jews: there is no doubt that the extra efforts made to get their support by Wertheimer and his companions was clearly influenced by their realization of the importance of these temporal and ecclesiastical rulers in light of the impending imperial election.

At the beginning of February, Maria Theresia was already fit to preside over a meeting at Court of what was called the Secret Ministerial Conference (*Geheime Ministerialkonferenz*). The meeting discussed the representations regarding the Prague Jews made by England-Hanover, Poland-Saxony and the States-General of the United Provinces. Maria Theresia insisted on her sovereign rights to make her own decision regarding her subjects, but was convinced by her ministers to be flexible regarding the implementation date, and it was postponed for a month.

Immediately, new representations were made for further postponement and eventual annulment: on 5 March by the King of England, on 10 March by the States-General, on 11 March by the Saxon Crown Council. When Maria Theresia, at the end of her confinement, went to the pilgrimage site of Mariazell, much favored by the Habsburgs, a number of Jewish notables from Vienna, well informed about the ruler's itinerary but who did not succeed until then to get an audience with her, fell on their knees before her carriage, and managed to transmit to her their own petition on behalf of their Bohemian and Moravian brethren. The English ambassador implored Maria Theresia once more, and the expulsion was postponed again - first until the end of June, and then again *sine die*. In the developing new political atmosphere, it became clear that eventually the edict would be repealed.

In the meantime, an overall diplomatic effort was underway to insure the election of Francis as Emperor, and the two Archbishops-Electors of Mayence and Cologne figured prominently in these efforts. On 22 April 1745 the Peace of Füssen was signed, removing Bavaria from the War of Succession and insuring the election of Francis: the imperial crown, after the Bavarian interregnum, returned to adorn a Habsburg, albeit of a cadet line. Ten days later, the expulsion of the Jews from Bohemia and Moravia was practically rescinded, though the Jews of Prague were only allowed to return to their hometown after the conclusion of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), three years later. (And this came at a hefty price: in 1748, Jews were officially allowed to return to Prague - and to remain in the rest of Bohemia and Moravia - but in the same year an exorbitant

"Toleration Tax" - to be paid collectively by the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia - was introduced. Thus ended this chapter in the history of the Prague Jewish community - and in the as yet unwritten history of Jewish international diplomacy.

The close analysis of the steps taken by various Jewish communities and notables in reversing the expulsion order point to an ability to mobilize solidarity efficiently and expeditiously. Under harsh wintry conditions and in the middle of a war raging through Central Europe, a number of Jewish notables, without the machinery of state government or political power, were able to mobilize the support of an impressive array of rulers and institutions to petition and pressure the Habsburg court. Through a network of connections to the high and mighty, utilizing their own efficient couriers and messengers, a handful of Jewish community and financial leaders succeeded within less than two weeks to make the issue appear on the diplomatic agenda of some of the major European rulers and potentates. They knew how to reach the people they wanted to reach, tailored their arguments judiciously to include appeals in equal fashion to royal (and Christian) mercy, *raison d'état* and mercantilist commercial interests, and their approach suggests a sophisticated inside knowledge of European court politics and dynastic policies.

The eight copies of the original appeal from the Prague community were assiduously copied many times and, as we have seen, another version was even printed (in Venice!) and further distributed. Whatever clout Jewish bankers, "factors" and court Jews possessed was put in the service of solidarity - and obvious self-interest, for the expulsion of Prague Jewry meant not only a human and economic calamity to the community directly involved, but also a grave threat to the relative security Jews had managed to achieve in a number of European countries under 18th century conditions of enlightened absolutism. When the Hamburg-Altona-Wandsbeck notables warned that an expulsion from Prague might be as tragic as that of Spain, they were not only using hyperbole and referring to an event germane to the Iberian origin of some of their own communities: this analogy expressed a real fear that historical trends of relative acceptance and tolerance may be upset and reversed, with dire consequences for the whole House of Israel.

Many of the methods used to reverse the expulsion edict were those of traditional *shtadlanut*: but the international scope of the effort, the use of quick communication (be it on horseback or through the printing press), the judicious combination of prudential and moral argumentation, the targeting of rulers and clergy crucial to the political maneuvers surrounding Habsburg dynastic interests - all these point to the modernity of the process and the evolution, through trial and error and under pressure, of a new kind of international Jewish politics, combining traditional approaches and novel methods. This enormous and impressive effort was undertaken without any institutional structure to sustain it, using ad hoc methods to gather and disseminate information with superb acuity, coordination,

speed, and sophistication. Yet the fact that most of the rulers approached were so easily accessible to Jewish petitioners suggests by itself how the position of Jews in European society was changing: even when vulnerable and under threat of expulsion from one city, Jews could still respond by mobilizing an international network of connections based on a deeply felt solidarity. As can be seen from the voluminous correspondence, these efforts were not free from recriminations, petty personal vendettas and other mundane aspects of human life (and Jewish politics): but what matters is that the strategy and tactic was successful in averting the expulsion of the Jews in Moravia and in the Bohemian countryside, and in eventually facilitating the return, in 1748, of the Jews who had been expelled from Prague.

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The Damascus Affair of 1840 has usually been seen as the beginning of modern Jewish politics. Jewish communities and leaders undertook a Europe-wide campaign and mobilized political pressure and international public opinion both to save a number of Jews in a faraway community from prison and worse, and to try to stop the dissemination of an old libel against the Jews which – if it had gone unchallenged – would have been a major setback on the route to Jewish emancipation and acceptance into enlightened and liberal European society.⁴ The Prague case, almost a century earlier, already had many of the ingredients of that effort – with one exception: in the conditions of the 19th century, the Jewish effort could now make use of the press to pursue its efforts. The Damascus Affair is the first case when Jewish activists conducted a press campaign – writing in Jewish journals as well as in the general press, founding new newspapers, convincing and sometimes hiring newspapermen to write on their behalf.

In this respect 1840 was different from 1745: both the other ingredients – the use of influential Jewish bankers and financiers, combining arguments of humanitarianism with self-interest, creating a network of communication and so on – were all already in evidence in the Prague case. Yet there was also a major difference due to the difference in the politics of the two centuries: while the Prague case was argued in the chambers and antechambers of chancelleries and courts, the Damascus Affair was also part of 19th century public policy.⁵

⁴ J. Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁵ For two very different cases of Jewish diplomacy, one still traditional and the other already using modern mass communication media as well as diplomatic approaches, see D. Carpi, 'Pe'ulat ha-memunim al keren pidyon shevuyim she-be-Venezia ba-shanim 1654-1670,' (Hebrew) *Zion*, vol. LXVIII/2 (2003), pp. 175-223; D. I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York, 1999). Despite the differences between approaches in the 17th and the 19th century, some of the methods as well as argumentations (humanitarianism combined with *raison d'état*) are strikingly similar.

It is also for this reason that the Damascus Affair has been engraved into the Jewish historical narrative as a constitutive symbol of the emerge of modern Jewish politics (it led, among others, to the establishment of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*); the Prague expulsion is almost totally unknown, even among professional historians, and is hardly mentioned in the annals of Jewish history.

Further dramatic expressions of this kind of Jewish politics in the 19th century combined the public as well as the private aspect of this international effort: when at the Berlin Congress of 1878 Romanian independence was made dependent on the granting of citizenship rights to the Jewish population of the Principalities of Moldavia and Walachia, this was at least partially done by traditional cameral politics, with the central role of Bismarck's banker (who also helped finance the 1870 Franco-Prussian War), Gerson von Bleichröder.⁶ It was a major achievement for Jewish emancipation – and a testimony to the ability of Jewish powerful individuals to project their power and influence on behalf of less privileged Jewish communities. And Jacob Schiff's decision not to underwrite the Russian Loan after the 1903 Kishinev Pogrom was in a similar vein: on the other hand, there is a direct line connecting these efforts to later Jewish – and Israeli – efforts to put pressure on the Soviet Union in the 1980's on the issue of Jewish emigration.

It should however be pointed out – though it cannot be discussed in detail here – that sometimes a high price has been paid for the success of these efforts which on one level were a shining example of the power of the powerless. But the powerless were using not only the power of moral suasion (had they limited themselves to this they would have probably failed, like Armenians and Kurds in parallel cases): the financial clout of influential Jewish banking houses played in these cases a crucial role.

Yet this also created a backlash. It was only after the success, mainly of the Rothschilds, in the Damascus Affair, that the first pamphlets appeared in France calling that family "*Les rois de l'époque*"; and the Jewish success in turning the press as a vehicle in their favor gave, for the first time, rise to the claim that "the Jews" control the press. Similarly, the effort to make Romanian independence dependent on Jewish citizenship rights helped the agitation that "the Jews" dictate international politics and are an enemy of the Romanian nation: as it turned out, independent Romania was able to wiggle out of most of its commitments to Jewish equal rights because the international community failed, as it usually does, to follow up on the issue: but the whole episode did add another argument to the arsenal of Romanian antisemites. Equally, it is questionable whether Schiff's undermining Russian credit did much to ameliorate the position of Russian Jews – though it might have helped pave the way for Herzl's surprisingly successful meeting with the Russian Minister of the Interior, Count Plehve, in

⁶ F. Stern, *Gold und Eisen: Bismarck und sein Bankier* (Frankfurt, 1978).

the summer of 1903.⁷ But there is little doubt that it supplied further ammunition to Russian antisemites, especially after the Russian defeat in the war against Japan in the subsequent years: it was "the Jews" who were made responsible for Russia not being sufficiently armed, and the murky accusations against Kuhn, Loeb & Co. (Schiff's merchant banking firm) became a staple of Russian antisemitic fare also in the context of the fabrication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This is not to suggest that those steps should not have been undertaken: but the balance sheet is complex.

This brings us to the modern politics of Zionism – and, in a way, of the State of Israel. Herzl, with his scant knowledge of Jewish history, knew very little of the history of *shtadlanut* or its modern variations: it is not clear what he knew about the Damascus Affair, and he certainly was unaware of the Prague expulsion and its history. Yet the diplomatic efforts he undertook on behalf of the *Judensache* followed in the footsteps of traditional Jewish politics: using connections to the high and the mighty, trying (not very successfully) to get the Jewish plutocracy to support his ideas, using the press to disseminate his policies, appealing to a combination of humanitarian arguments and *raison d'état* considerations of the various rulers he approached. Herzl's diplomatic efforts were basically a long series of failures: yet in institutionalizing his approach in the structures of the World Zionist Organization he created the tools that made possible the Zionist achievements of 1917 and 1947.

It is in this context that Nahum Goldmann was one of the master practitioners of the art of Jewish politics. On the one hand, he worked within the institutional structures of the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization: and while the WJC, founded in one of the darkest decades in Jewish history, was not a success story, it did yeomen's work on a small scale in saving Jews during the Nazi period. Yet Goldmann was also able to transcend the limits of institutional Zionist politics by using his charm, connections, and occasional access to independent financial resources, to further the aims of the Zionist movement and the Jewish people. Two examples will suffice.

The first attests to Goldmann's role in the pre-1947 efforts to gain international support for an independent Jewish state in Palestine, which led to the UN General Assembly's decision of 29 November 1947 on partition. A crucial ingredient in the international diplomatic configuration leading to that decision was Soviet support for it – first publicly signified in Andrei Gromyko's speech at the UN General Assembly in May 1947, indicating for the first time the USSR's support for a Jewish state in Palestine.

To many, Gromyko's speech is seen as a surprising and unforeseen turn of events, and in many aspects it was: the complex reasons for Soviet

support for partition, after decades of sometimes rabid anti-Zionism, are still a subject for scholarly disagreement, even after the (partial) opening of former Soviet archives. Yet what has sometimes been neglected, though the record is in many respects available, is the constant and continuing Zionist attempt to approach the Soviets and expose them to a Zionist point of view regarding the future of Palestine: given geopolitical realities as well as Soviet ideology, it is not surprising that this was initially accompanied by many disappointments and dead ends. But with incredible stamina, and against the odds, the Zionists tried every possible approach, and eventually created the context for the Soviet turnaround. It is in this effort that Goldmann played a crucial role, again exemplifying his adeptness at pulling all the strings of traditional Jewish politics.

As the recent documentation of Israeli-Soviet relations shows, one of the first attempts in this direction, bordering on the bizarre, was initiated by Chaim Weizmann in early 1941. At the height of German victories in Europe, and with the Soviet Union still allied with Nazi Germany, Weizmann sought a meeting with the Soviet Ambassador in London, Ivan M. Maiskii. In a generally sympathetic account,⁸ Maiskii mentioned that Weizmann "speaks excellent Russian, although he left Russia forty-five years ago"; he reported with a straight face that the ostensible reason for the meeting was a request by Weizmann to allow oranges from Palestine, which was cut off by the war from its traditional markets in Europe, to be exported to the USSR in exchange for Russian furs (Weizmann did not specify who exactly in Palestine would be in need of Russian furs). Maiskii listened politely, and in good Soviet diplomatic fashion responded that "while I could not say anything, I promised to make enquiries." For good measure he added that "however, as a preliminary reply, I said that ... no great hopes should be placed on us, since we did not as a rule import fruit from abroad" (nothing, of course, came out of this barter suggestion).

But then, Maiskii continued in his report, "in the course of the conversation about oranges, Weizmann talked about Palestinian affairs in general" – and it is here that Weizmann's diplomatic skill becomes clear, as he delineates the Jewish Agency's worries about the future of European Jews and the necessity to find refuge for them in Palestine. He has the temerity (and Maiskii gently notes it) to maintain – at the time when Stalin was still Hitler's ally – that "Germany will not win the war"; but then goes on to suggest that even if Britain wins the war, the Jewish community in Palestine will continue to have trouble with the British – as the British favor the Arabs. When Maiskii asked why, Weizmann (the great Anglophile) astutely mentioned for Soviet ears that most British officers in Palestine have British colonial and imperial experience in "Nigeria, the Sudan, Rhodesia"; hence they are comfortable with the Arabs who are satisfied with the colonial

⁷ See my 'Theodor Herzl's Diaries as a Bildungsroman,' *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1999), pp. 28–30.

⁸ *Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations 1941–1953* (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation), ed. Eytan Bentsur et al. (London and Portland, 2000), vol. I, pp. 3–4.

pattern of "a few roads, some courts, a little missionary activity, a little medical care for the population." While sufficient for the Arabs, this is not good enough for the Jews who want to modernize and industrialize the country. It is this, Weizmann maintains, that creates structural tensions between the British colonial administration and the Jewish population in Palestine.

As mentioned, nothing came of the "oranges for furs" deal. But Weizmann masterfully used the occasion, quite rare in these days, to be able to convey to a high ranking Soviet representative some of the Zionist concerns, which Maiskii dutifully passed on to his superiors. As we shall see, some seeds were already sown.

The Zionist attempts to get the ears of the Soviets gained new momentum once Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. As early as 17 July 1941, Emanuel Neumann and one of his colleagues met in Washington, on behalf of the Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs, with the Soviet Ambassador to the United States Konstantin A. Umanskii (who, like Maiskii, was Jewish). In the meeting, which Neumann described as conducted in "a friendly and even cordial atmosphere," the Jewish representatives pointed out that "recent developments" (i.e. the German invasion of the USSR), "seem to offer an opportunity for establishing better relations" between representatives of Jewish organizations and the Soviet government. Hence, they wished to raise a number of humanitarian issues - primarily, the plight of Jewish Polish refugees - some of them Zionist activists - trapped in the Soviet Union: Neumann asked permission for them to proceed to Palestine; at the same time, the Jewish representatives asked permission for American Jewish relief organizations to be able to extend help to those, and other Jews, in the USSR. It is clear that Neumann and his colleagues realized that the new geopolitical situation offered new opportunities. The ambassador's response was encouraging, asking for a detailed memorandum; when, however, the issue of Zionism was raised, Umanskii suggested "that it would be better not to enter upon a discussion of that subject."⁹

The attempts to gain the hearing of Soviet representatives continued: on 9 October 1941 Ben-Gurion, then stuck in London, met the Soviet Ambassador Maiskii, and reported to him on the war effort of the Jewish community in Palestine for "the common victory," and asked for permission to send a small delegation to Moscow to convey to the Soviet people the efforts of the Jewish Labour movement in Palestine.¹⁰

In January 1942 Eliahu Epstein (Elath), the Jewish Agency's representative in Istanbul, met the Soviet Ambassador in Ankara, Sergei A. Vinogradov. In Epstein's detailed and long report to the Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, Moshe Shertok (Sharett), about their two meetings it becomes clear that the discussion ranged far beyond immediate concerns.¹¹ Epstein reported about the Yishuv's support for the Soviets'

valiant stand against Hitler, mentioned the Jewish volunteering for the British Army - and for the first time brought up the fact that the Palestinian Arabs, politically supported in the past by the Soviet Union, turned out to be pro-Nazi: "The war has clearly shown who is interested in the victory of democracy and progressive humanity and who desires a regime of fascism and Nazi rule in the East as well." Epstein went on to criticize what he called "a mistaken political orientation towards those circles in Palestine and the neighboring countries who had quickly been revealed as agents and henchmen of Nazism," further elaborating on the "clericalist, reactionary social background of the mufti and his gang." Epstein recounted that the Ambassador "heard me out attentively"; that some of these points struck home became clear when Vinogradov responded to what Epstein called the "mistaken" Soviet orientation by commenting: "Was it not a Trotskyite business?"

This relentless effort to convey to Soviet representatives - and through them to the Soviet government - the Zionist arguments is of historical significance, as it is obvious that the Zionist leadership realized that the war situation created a novel opportunity. Until then, the Soviet leadership knew about Zionism and the situation in Palestine only through Palestinian Arab voices or - even worse - from Jewish anti-Zionist communists, both in Palestine as well as in Europe and the Soviet Union itself. Here, for the first time, high ranking Zionists could convey to the Soviets directly, and not through the distorted Arab or Jewish anti-Zionist lenses, their version of the Zionist effort in Palestine.

On 2 March 1942, Weizmann transmitted to Maiskii in London a four-page memorandum on both the Yishuv and the aims of Zionism.¹² In it Weizmann went out of his way to bring out the "fundamental aspects of the Soviet social philosophy [which are also] embodied in the national system which is being built up in Palestine by the Zionist movement": they are "collective welfare and not individual gain..., equality of standing between manual and intellectual workers, and...fullest scope for intellectual life and the development of labor." The strategy of stretching these points is obvious: to counter the conventional Soviet image of Zionism (usually provided by Jewish communists) as a reactionary, bourgeois movement. From Weizmann's memorandum it is also clear that he was responding to an earlier query by Maiskii about the absorptive capacity of Palestine: evidently, the background deliberations in Moscow of how to deal with Zionism in a postwar world were determined not only by ideological arguments but also by practical and pragmatic considerations: if it was true that Palestine was already overpopulated, as claimed by the Arabs and the anti-Zionists, then it would not make sense to support Zionism. Given this Soviet concern, it becomes clear why the issue of the absorptive capacity of Palestine figures so prominently in Weizmann's memorandum as well as in subsequent Zionist meetings with Soviet officials.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 5-7.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 11-3.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 16-24.

¹² Ibid., pp. 25-9.

The meetings continue:

- In May 1942 Weizmann met in Washington with the Soviet Ambassador Maxim M. Litvinov.¹³

- As an outcome of Eliahu Epstein's meetings in Turkey, in August 1942 two members of the Soviet Embassy in Ankara visited Palestine and met with Jewish leaders, among them Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Chairman of the National Committee of Palestinian Jewry (*Va'ad Leumi*).¹⁴

- In January 1943 Shertok met Maiskii in London and presented, at his request, a memorandum on postwar refugee resettlement in Palestine.¹⁵

- In March 1943 Epstein and Eliezer Kaplan, the Treasurer of the Jewish Agency, met in Ankara with Ambassador Vinogradov.¹⁶

- In the same month in Washington, Shertok and Goldmann met Ambassador Litvinov.¹⁷

- On 27 May 1943 Goldmann provided Edvard Beneš, the President-in-Exile of Czechoslovakia, on the eve of his trip to Moscow to meet Stalin, with a lengthy memorandum on the Yishuv, Zionism and especially the absorptive capacity of Palestine. Goldmann managed to insert into the memorandum a sly comment that historically, Zionists found more understanding for their efforts among non-Jewish communists than among communists of Jewish origin. Goldmann asked Beneš to transmit as much of this as possible to his Soviet interlocutors, if possible to Stalin, and especially to raise with them the issue of where to settle Eastern European Jewish survivors of the war (by that time enough information was already available about what happened under Nazi occupation) - pointing to Palestine as the only conceivable place of settlement.¹⁸

- In September 1943 Goldmann met for the first time with the new Soviet Ambassador to Washington - Andrei Gromyko.¹⁹ In his practiced manner, Goldmann said that he has no concrete issues to discuss, but just wishes to establish contact. He referred to meetings of Gromyko's predecessor, Litvinov, with both Weizmann and Ben-Gurion. He said he realizes that the Soviet government will not decide upon its postwar policies until much later, but suggested that he keep Gromyko informed about Zionist thinking, so that when Moscow is ready to make its decision, it will be in possession of the necessary information. In his report to the Zionist Executive, Goldmann described Gromyko as a "youngish, quiet man, very careful but sympathetic."

- It is in the context of these ongoing contacts that Maiskii made his visit to Palestine in August 1944 - the highest ranking Soviet official ever to

visit the country until then. Ostensibly, the visit took place while he was en route from Britain to his home country; in accordance with strict Soviet protocol, all his contacts were channeled through the British High Commissioner - and it is through him that Ben-Gurion was formally notified. On the Jewish side Ben-Gurion was accompanied by Eliezer Kaplan: part of the meeting took place in the presence of the British Chief Secretary, but then Maiskii was taken to a nearby kibbutz. The meeting again focused on the absorptive capacity of the country, and Ben-Gurion reported to the Jewish Agency Executive that he had an impression from his previous meeting with Maiskii in London that the latter had some doubts about whether the kibbutzim were really as described: now, Ben-Gurion maintained, he could be convinced directly. Maiskii told Ben-Gurion that once the war is over, the Soviet Union will have to make new policy decisions, as "after the war there will be a serious Jewish problem and it will have to be resolved." Hence he questioned Ben-Gurion in some detail about the settlement plans the Jewish Agency had for the postwar period and asked to have further material sent to him. Ben-Gurion was impressed that "it was very clear that he displayed a serious political attitude towards the issue of whether Palestine could solve the Jewish problem after the war."²⁰

- In the same month, on 15 August 1944, Goldmann traveled to Mexico City to meet his acquaintance, Umanskii, the former Ambassador to the US, who was now serving as Ambassador to Mexico.²¹ The meeting was initiated by Umanskii, who said to Goldmann that he wanted to discuss a number of issues with him, "not as an ambassador, but as someone who is interested in certain questions both as a Russian and as a Jew." After this doubly surprising opening, he confided to Goldmann that while he did not know whether the Soviet Union was yet ready to take a formal position, he nonetheless "believe[d] that the thinking was along the lines furthering a Jewish state in Palestine." The rest of the conversation focused on the postwar refugee problem in Europe, as well as the possible orientation of a future independent Jewish state in Palestine.

While Umanskii at that time had been relegated to a marginal position, he seemed to continue to be well connected in Moscow and allowed himself considerable leeway in his conversation with Goldmann. This also seems to be the first indication coming from the Soviet side about possible Soviet support for Jewish statehood.

Never since the 1917 Revolution had Soviet officials been so much exposed to a Zionist version of the issues involving both the factual situation in Palestine, as well as plans for its future. The Arab support for the Nazis in World War II, as well as the Soviet realization that there would be "a Jewish problem" in Eastern Europe - i.e. in areas set to become part of

13 Ibid., p. 29.

14 Ibid., pp. 35-42.

15 Ibid., pp. 51-2.

16 Ibid., pp. 53-4.

17 Ibid., pp. 55-6.

18 Ibid., pp. 60-7.

19 Ibid., p. 69.

20 Ibid., pp. 70-2.

21 Ibid., pp. 79-81.

the Soviet sphere of influence – figure clearly in the background of these discussions, and they were deftly structured and presented by the Zionist interlocutors, as in their answering in great detail the Soviet concerns about the absorptive capacity of Palestine. Gromyko's speech in 1947 came after years of internal Soviet preparation, the details of which we still do not know enough: yet the preparatory work was done in the last years of the war by various Soviet representatives – in London, Washington, and Ankara. Patient discussions, ostensibly generalized "tours d'horizon" (at which Goldmann, among others, excelled) helped provide the Soviet leadership with the detailed information they needed, and also assisted them to offset decades of anti-Zionist positions which had, until then, been the sole basis for their policy deliberations. The progress of this aspect of Zionist diplomacy in the war years was certainly a sideshow to the major diplomatic efforts aimed at Great Britain, the United States, and confronting the Holocaust in Europe; yet nonetheless it achieved one of the major triumphs of Zionism on the road to Israeli independence – the Soviet support for partition and the establishment of Israel. Goldmann's continuous contribution to this effort was considerable – and may explain, at least partially, also his standing in the eyes of Soviet diplomacy in the post-1948 period as well.

The second area in which Goldmann's contribution was decisive – and probably more important – was in the reparations negotiations with the Federal Republic of Germany. With Israel still lacking diplomatic relations with Bonn, and reluctant to initiate them, Goldmann in his capacity as President of the World Jewish Congress was able to step in and bring to the effort his considerable talents in traditional Jewish diplomacy. The early fifties were still a period of twilight and transition from pre-state Jewish and Zionist diplomacy to the state-driven diplomacy of independent Israel, and hence Goldmann's skills and contacts were well-tuned to the task, especially as it related both to an event that predated the establishment of Israel and to the delicate inter-face between Israel as a sovereign nation and as a representative of the Jewish people.

This cannot be said regarding Goldmann's abortive attempt to mediate between Israel and Egypt, culminating in the non-event of his trip to Egypt to meet President Nasser. Let me just state what to me appears as an issue of principle, and why I think Goldmann's initiative – if it was his initiative – was ill-advised and structurally doomed to failure.

Nahum Goldmann was the epitome of Jewish pre-state diplomacy, which had crafted, over centuries, instruments of statecraft without having a state at its disposal: as such, it was a unique Jewish contribution to diplomacy, and Goldmann was undoubtedly one of its most accomplished practitioners.

Yet with the establishment of Israel, the context has radically changed, and with it the rules of the game. It is my contention that Goldmann probably did not realize it. Without getting into the details of the issues at stake between Goldmann and Prime Minister Golda Meir, the situation was no longer that of a people without a state, wielding the instruments of diplomacy as if it were a full-fledged player on the international scene. Now

Goldmann appeared as though he was trying to create a parallel diplomacy to that of Israel – and he launched his attempt, among other things, because he disagreed with the policies of the Jewish state in the Middle East conflict.

It is immaterial whether Goldmann was right in his policy approach and the Government of Israel was wrong: even if one grants this, this is not the point. Jewish traditional diplomacy tried to fill in the vacuum of the absence of a Jewish *public* space, a *parhessia*, in the times when a Jewish polity did not exist. After 1948, such a *parhessia* already existed, and as we have seen Goldmann himself had a crucial role to play in its coming into existence. Furthermore, this Jewish *parhessia* was structured on democratic principles, inherited from the Zionist movement, and was based on free elections, a free press, and public accountability. In such a new landscape, traditional Jewish diplomacy – such a crucial weapon of a weak, stateless people – had no public space. Of course, as a private citizen Goldmann could criticize the policies of the Israeli government of the day. The point is that he tried to suggest an alternative public voice: it is also conceivable that he might have been used by Nasser as a weapon to undermine official Israeli positions. This, obviously, is not the continuation of traditional Jewish politics of pre-state days: it is a completely new phenomenon.

I do not know – and nobody knows – whether Goldmann would have succeeded had he been given the green light to go to Cairo and meet with Nasser: it is beside the point, and those taking part in the guessing game usually project their political preferences unto what might have happened – but did not. What is not beside the point is that Goldmann's attempt was destined to fail, and it should have failed – as it meant, among other things, the diminution of Jewish sovereignty as epitomized in the State of Israel.

None of this should detract from Goldmann's historical achievements, nor from the glorious history of Jewish diplomacy, which rose from meek *shtadlanut* to a sometimes proud, and even powerful, weapon of the weak. It is a chapter in Jewish history, and the history of diplomacy and statecraft, that has still to be written.