

Introduction

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This year and next, 2012 and 2013, are a critical period for the Jewish people, with Israel facing its greatest existential challenges since independence. Today, the largest Jewish community in the world is threatened by the advancing Iranian nuclear program, placing an enormous burden first on Israeli leadership but also on Diaspora Jewry.

The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) has invested considerable energies developing a systematic set of indicators as a tool to measure and track key trends and dynamics of the Jewish people. Our current Annual Assessment introduces a dashboard that gauges Jewish well-being across time in five main dimensions – geopolitical developments, demography, identity formation, intra and inter-community bonds, and material resources. Our future as a civilization – one with significant religious and national components – will largely be determined by the efforts we expend addressing each of these dimensions, and their intersections, today.

JPPI's *2012 Conference on the Future of the Jewish People*, in which we are honored to have your participation, is designed to focus on some of the most daunting concerns in the Jewish world today largely through the prism of peoplehood at a time of a 'distancing discourse.' These key issues will be discussed in five working groups, which will use as their starting point the background papers included in this special Conference publication.

Two of the working groups are dedicated to international and Middle-East developments, and their most problematic trends:

- ***Uncertain Realities – the Geopolitical Landscape*** will focus on Iran, the turmoil in the Middle East and the stalemate in the peace process, and their implications for Israel, the Diaspora, and the Jerusalem-Washington-North American Jewry Triangle;
- ***Global Shifts and the Phenomena of De-Legitimization*** will analyze shifting dynamics in the international system and the emergence of the emerging Asian powers. New threats posed by the rise of political Islam and modern forms of anti-Semitism, which together target Israel as the core state of the Jewish people and its regional presence, will also be addressed.

The other three working groups are designed to examine internal Jewish people drivers. In these areas, JPPI's dashboard shows slight improvement, due partly to some Israeli progress, and partly to the achievements of committed lay and professional leaders in the Diaspora, especially in North America. It is, therefore, essential to understand the need to prepare for the transitions of leadership many Jewish organizations will undergo in the next few years. These three groups will focus on:

- ***Challenges of Peoplehood and Communal Bonds***, to understand better Diaspora Jewry's expectations of Israel as the core state of the Jewish people, and Israelis' expectations of world Jewry, and the appropriate role of the Israeli government in encouraging a new paradigm for Israel-Diaspora relations;
- ***Identity and Identification: New Patterns, Meaning, and Networks*** will consider directions and new opportunities to ensure the flourishing of the next generations of Jews;
- ***Conceptualizing Jewish People 'Ways and Means'*** will be dedicated to an effort to better understand and utilize the Jewish assets available to us in shaping a thriving future.

Our last conference, in 2010, was devoted to discussing strategies for the Jewish future with the 2030 time horizon in mind. Many creative ideas and views raised in the deliberations were translated into policy recommendations in the impressive 2012 book by Ambassador Stuart E. Eizenstat, ***21st Century Global Forces: Their Impacts on the Jewish People, Israel and the United States***, in the last two JPPI Annual Assessments, and in other strategic papers published by the Institute. Our findings were presented at a weekly meeting of the Israeli cabinet in June as well as to other Jewish organizations worldwide.

This year's conference will help us to assess which policy recommendations have had an impact, and which need to be updated. Many of the factors at play in shaping the future are not in our control. But still, the hard power achieved by the State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry's considerable soft power have together yielded significant accomplishments for the Jewish people over the past decades.

JPPI's dashboard clearly reflects that the main drivers affecting the Jewish people in 1945, a year we use as a baseline, were mostly negative. But these turned around rapidly as, in a unified effort, we created the capacity to successfully confront many threats and challenges as they appeared. Planning for the future requires an analysis

of the current situation and its dynamics while working out action-oriented policy recommendations.

The impact of JPPI's work, which is deeply inspired and influenced by these gatherings, is endorsed this time by the Government of Israel. The Secretary of the Cabinet and the most senior officials in the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, Diaspora Affairs, and Strategic Affairs will participate in a special session to promote concrete measures to advance Israel's participation in strengthening Jewish life in the Diaspora.

JPPI is once again honored that President Shimon Peres has agreed to serve as the Conference's Honorary Chair. There is no more serious thinker or experienced leader who could serve as our torchbearer. The readiness of some senior cabinet members and representatives of the opposition to join us shows how seriously they take the issues on the Jewish agenda and how much value they place on this gathering as a forum for clarifying them.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome back Ambassador Dennis Ross who, after completing his tenure as a senior official in the Obama administration, has re-joined our leadership alongside Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat and Leonid Nevzlin who together head a dedicated board and Professional Guiding Council. Their commitment, together with the energies of our talented staff, has made this conference possible. I warmly thank them not only on my own behalf, but also on yours.

Avinoam Bar-Yosef
President and Founding Director

