



David Ben-Gurion  
American Jews and the Diaspora - "The Ben-Gurion Blaustein Agreement"  
August 23 1950

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## Introduction

The exchange below took place on August 23 1950 during a speech by [David Ben Gurion](#) welcoming members of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) (not to be confused with the American Jewish Congress - a more pro-Israel rival) to the new State of Israel and the reply by AJC president Blaustein.

AJC leadership, and in particular President Blaustein, were concerned that the new state would require all [Diaspora](#) Jews to come on [Aliya](#) (emigration to Israel) and they were concerned about accusations of dual loyalty. The views expressed by Ben-Gurion were reiterated in a briefer joint 1961 statement that reiterated the 1950 statement. a third issue was whether Israel could claim to cat on behalf of the entire Jewish people.

The 1950 remarks addressed these key issues. Ben-Gurion made two unequivocal statements.

## About loyalty:

The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel.

## About representation, Ben Gurion said:

In the first statement which the representative of Israel made before the United Nations after her admission to that international organization, he clearly stated, without any reservation, that the State of Israel represents and speaks only on behalf of its own citizens and in no way presumes to represent or speak in the name of the Jews who are citizens of any other country.

## For his part Blaustein added:

Jewish communities, particularly American Jewry in view of its influence and its strength, can offer advice, cooperation and help, but should not attempt to speak in the name of other communities or in any way interfere in their internal affairs.

## About Aliya, Ben-Gurion was careful to say:

In this connection let me say a word about immigration. We should like to see American Jews come and take part in our effort. We need their technical knowledge, their unrivalled experience, their spirit of enterprise, their bold vision, their "know-how." We need engineers, chemists, builders, work managers and technicians. The tasks which face us in this country are eminently such as would appeal to the American genius for technical development and social progress. But the decision as to whether they wish to come — permanently or temporarily — rests with the free discretion of each American Jew himself. It is entirely a matter of his own volition. We need *halutzim*, pioneers, too. *Halutzim* have come to us — and we believe more will come, not only from those countries where the Jews are oppressed and in "exile" but also from countries where the Jews live a life of freedom and are equal in status to all other citizens in their country. But the essence of *halutzit* is free choice. They will come from among those who believe that their aspirations as human beings and as Jews can best be fulfilled by life and work in Israel

Notwithstanding Ben-Gurion's clear statements, anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic accusations of dual loyalty and allegations that Ben-Gurion or the Zionist movement insisted on [Aliya](#) never ceased.

The history and background of the speech are given by Charles Liebman in "[Diaspora Influence on Israel: The Ben-Gurion-Blaustein "Exchange" and its Aftermath](#)", Journal of Jewish Social Studies, 1974. pp 271-280.

The AJC [refers](#) to this exchange of views or to the address as the "[Blaustein- Ben-Gurion agreement](#)". Under this heading, the AJC has placed a number of documents with much later dates. None of them constitute an agreement. None of them give the text of Ben-Gurion's speech or the exchange of views. The correspondence was published as "An Exchange of Views: American Jews and the State of Israel," in American Jewish Year Book 53 (1952), p. 564-568. There is no record of any agreement having been reached. When Blaustein wrote to Ben-Gurion in 1960, he did not refer to any agreement. He wrote

During past months . . . there have been a number of definitive violations of your August 1950 Statement.

In theory, the AJC mantra that Israel did not speak for the Jewish people and was not the "Jewish State," subverted the founding assumptions of Zionism. It is difficult to say whether that is the intent of the AJC, or if American Jewish leaders were simply jealous of the Authority of a rival claimant who would speak for "the Jews." If Israel was not the Jewish State, than what was it, and what was the purpose of so much sacrifice? However, this stricture had little effect beyond verbiage.

In practice, AJC desired that Israel should not only not speak on behalf of other Jews, but that it should not attempt to rescue them, which would have negated a central function of the national home. It would not be possible to act in certain circumstances where action was imperative.

The critique of the AJC reached somewhat extreme proportions when they tried to prevent Israel from fighting anti-Semitism abroad in 1960. In December 1960 Blaustein wrote to Ben-Gurion:

During past months . . . there have been a number of definitive violations of your August 1950 Statement. These departures are causing serious embarrassments and consequences. They are again opening up the furor that was existing at the time in 1950 when we got together and resolved the Statement we then issued.

American, Canadian and English Jewries are up in arms about these violations—and I think I should tell you that some are charging me with having been naïve in even having accepted the August 1950 Statement as bona fide. . . .

. . . Some of the violations to which I refer are as follows:

- 1) Israel's notes addressed to the United States, British and other governments regarding the swastika daubings in those countries last winter . . . Israel should have confined itself to discussing [the issue] with the Jewish communities in those countries. . . .
- 2) General Moshe Dayan's incomprehensible March 9, 1960 statement in Canada that "his government should not only represent the people of Israel, but the interests of all Jews."
- 3) And Foreign Minister Golda Meir's reply to the delegation of the Anglo-Jewish Association which resulted in the startling headlines in the Jewish National Post (April 15, 1960): "Israel will continue to speak for Jewry." . . . I assure you that if you wish your country to retain its friendships—at a time when you sorely need them—it is essential that you promptly correct the wrong impression to which I have referred. . . . Out of my closeness to you, I feel I can venture to say that you cannot expect diplomatic and financial cooperation from even friends, including me, when understandings with them, and principles dear to them, are violated or ignored. (Quoted in Liebmann, 1974, pp278-9)

These positions were clearly rendered untenable and irrelevant by historical events. Israel captured Nazi War criminal Adolf Eichmann, and prosecuted him on behalf of the Jewish people, for crimes committed before Israel was a state. With due respect, none of this could have been done by the distinguished Mr. Blaustein and his colleagues. Israel did not "confine itself" to discussions as he would have wished. Israel and American Jewry were partners in the liberation of Soviet and Ethiopian Jews. These rescues would not have been possible without this partnership. However, the awakening of Russian Jewry was probably due to the victory of the [Six day war](#), an achievement that only a state could accomplish.

The AJC seems to have [misinterpreted](#) this undertaking not to interfere in American Jewish affairs as an undertaking not to attempt to influence American Jewish opinion about Israel or the American Zionist movement,

The validity of the "exchange of views" was reaffirmed more than once by Israeli leaders, particularly with regard to the loyalties of Jewish citizens in the United States.

The positions stated by Ben Gurion describe a reality that could not be different regardless of policy declarations. American Jews would not emigrate to Israel en masse. They would continue to be American citizens. Israel could sometimes act on behalf of Diaspora Jews. It could not speak for them and it would not be wise to try to do so. On the other hand, in the world order of states, there was no other state that could and would represent the Jewish people or act for the Jewish people.

*Ami Isseroff*

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Source: [http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC\\_DATA/Files/514.PDF](http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/514.PDF) pp 64-68.

STATEMENTS BY PRIME MINISTER DAVID BEN-GURION AND MR. JACOB BLAUSTEIN ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISRAEL AND AMERICAN JEWS AUGUST 23, 1950

MR. BEN-GURION:

We are very happy to welcome you here in our midst as a representative of the great Jewry of the United States to whom Israel owes so much. No other community abroad has so great a stake in what has been achieved in this country during the present generation as have the Jews of America. Their material and political support, their warm-hearted and practical idealism, has been one of the principal sources of our strength and our success. In supporting our effort, American Jewry has developed, on a new plane, the noble conception, maintained for more than half a century, of extending its help for the protection of Jewish rights throughout the world and of rendering economic aid wherever it was needed. We are deeply conscious of the help which America has given to us here in our great effort of reconstruction and during our struggle for independence.

This great tradition has been continued since the establishment of the State of Israel

You, Mr. Blaustein, are one of the finest examples of that tradition, and as an American and as a Jew you have made many and significant contributions to the Jewish cause and to the cause of democracy. We are therefore happy on this occasion of your visit here as our guest, to discuss with you matters of mutual interest and to clarify some of the problems which have arisen in regard to the relationship between the people of Israel and the Jewish communities abroad, in particular the Jewish community of the United States

It is our great pride that our newly gained independence has enabled us in this small country to undertake the major share of the great and urgent task of providing permanent homes under conditions of full equality to hundreds of thousands of our brethren who cannot remain where they are and whose heart is set on rebuilding their lives in Israel

In this great task you and we are engaged in a close partnership. Without the readiness for sacrifice of the people of Israel and without the help of America this urgent task can hardly be achieved.

It is most unfortunate that since our State came into being some confusion and misunderstanding should have arisen as regards the relationship between Israel and the Jewish communities abroad, in particular that of the United States. These misunderstandings are likely to alienate sympathies and create disharmony where friendship and close understanding are of vital necessity. To my mind, the position is perfectly clear. The Jews of the United States, as a community and as individuals, have only one political attachment and that is to the United States of America. They owe no political allegiance to Israel. In the first statement which the representative of Israel made before the United Nations after her admission to that international organization, he clearly stated, without any reservation, that the State of Israel represents and speaks only on behalf of its own citizens and in no way presumes to represent or speak in the name of the Jews who are citizens of any other country.

We, the people of Israel, have no desire and no intention to interfere in any way with the internal affairs of Jewish communities abroad. The Government and the people of Israel fully respect the right and integrity of the Jewish communities in other countries to develop their own mode of life and their indigenous social, economic and cultural institutions in accordance with their own needs and aspirations. Any weakening of American Jewry, any disruption of its communal life, any lowering of its sense of security, any diminution of its status, is a definite loss to Jews everywhere and to Israel in particular.

We are happy to know of the deep and growing interest which American Jews of all shades and convictions take in what it has fallen to us to achieve in this country. Were we, God forbid, to fail in what we have undertaken on our own behalf and on behalf of our suffering brethren, that failure would cause grievous pain to Jews everywhere and nowhere more than in your community. Our success or failure depends in a large measure on our cooperation with, and on the strength of, the great Jewish community of the United States, and we, therefore, are anxious that nothing should be said or done which could in the slightest degree undermine the sense of security and stability of American Jewry

In this connection let me say a word about immigration. We should like to see American Jews come and take part in our effort. We need their technical knowledge, their unrivalled experience, their spirit of enterprise, their bold vision, their "know-how." We need engineers, chemists, builders, work managers and technicians. The tasks which face us in this country are eminently such as would appeal to the American genius for technical development and social progress. But the decision as to whether they wish to come — permanently or temporarily — rests with the free discretion of each American Jew himself. It is entirely a matter of his own volition. We need *halutzim*, pioneers, too. *Halutzim* have come to us — and we believe more will come, not only from those countries where the Jews are oppressed and in "exile" but also from countries where the Jews live a life of freedom and are equal in status to all other citizens in their country. But the essence of *halutzit* is free choice. They will come from among those who believe that their aspirations as human beings and as Jews can best be fulfilled by life and work in Israel

I believe I know something of the spirit of American Jewry among whom I lived for some years. I am convinced that it will continue to make a major contribution towards our great effort of reconstruction, and I hope that the talks we have had with you during these last few days will make for even closer cooperation between our two communities

MR. BLAUSTEIN:

I am very happy, Mr. Prime Minister, to have come here at your invitation and to have discussed with you and other leaders of Israel the various important problems of mutual interest

This is the second time I have been here since the State of Israel was created. A year and a half ago my colleagues and I, of the American Jewish Committee, saw evidence of the valor that had been displayed, and felt the hopes and aspirations that had inspired the people to win a war against terrific odds. This time, I have witnessed the great achievements that have taken place in the interval and have discussed the plans which point the road upon which the present-day Israel intends to travel

I find that tremendous progress has been made under your great leadership; but also, as you well know, tremendous problems loom ahead

The nation is confronted with gigantic tasks of reconstruction and rehabilitation, and with large economic and other problems, as is to be expected in so young a state

I am sure that with your rare combination of idealism and realism, you will continue to tackle these matters vigorously; and that with your usual energy, resourcefulness and common sense, you will be able to overcome them

Traveling over the country and visiting both old and newly established settlements, it has been a thrill to observe how you are conquering the desert of the Negev and the rocks of Galilee and are thus displaying the same pioneering spirit that opened up the great West of my own country. It has been satisfying to see right on the scene, how well and to what good advantage you are utilizing the support from the American Jewish community. I am sure, too, that the American tractors and other machinery and equipment acquired through the loan granted by the Export-Import Bank will further contribute to the technological development of your country

But more than that, what you are doing and creating in this corner of the Middle East is of vital importance not only to you and to Jews, but to humanity in general. For I believe that the free and peace-loving peoples in the world can look upon Israel as a stronghold of democracy in an area where liberal democracy is practically unknown and where the prevailing social and political conditions may be potential dangers to the security and stability of the world. What President Truman is intending to do under his Four Point Program, in assisting underdeveloped peoples to improve their conditions and raise their standards of living, you here to a large extent have been doing right along under most difficult conditions and at great sacrifice

Important to your future, as you recognize, is the United States of America and American Jewry. Israel, of course, is also important to them

In this connection, I am pleased that Mr. Elath has been here during our stay. As your Ambassador to the United States, he has rendered invaluable service in bringing our two countries and communities closer together

I thought I knew it even before I came to this country on this trip, but my visit has made it still more clear to me — and as an American citizen and a Jew I am gratified — that the Israeli people want democracy and, in my opinion, will not accept any dictatorship or totalitarianism from within or from without

Democracy, like all other human institutions, has its faults; and abuses are possible. But the strength of a democratic regime is that these faults and these abuses can be corrected without the destruction of human rights and freedoms which alone make life worth living

There is no question in my mind that a Jew who wants to remain loyal to the fundamental basis of Judaism and his cultural heritage, will be in the forefront of the struggle for democracy against totalitarianism

The American Jewish community sees its fortunes tied to the fate of liberal democracy in the United States, sustained by its heritage, as Americans and as Jews. We seek to strengthen both of these vital links to the past and to all humanity by enhancing the American democratic and political system, American cultural diversity and American well-being

As to Israel, the vast majority of American Jewry recognizes the necessity and desirability of helping to make it a strong, viable, self supporting state. This, for the sake of Israel itself, and the good of the world

The American Jewish Committee has been active, as have other Jewish organizations in the United States, in rendering, within the framework of their American citizenship, every possible support to Israel; and I am sure that this support will continue and that we shall do all we can to increase further our share in the great historic task of helping Israel to solve its problems and develop as a free, independent and flourishing democracy

While Israel has naturally placed some burdens on Jews elsewhere, particularly in America, it has, in turn, meant much to Jews throughout the world. For hundreds of thousands in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, it has provided a home in which they can attain their full stature of human dignity for the first time. In all Jews, it has inspired pride and admiration, even though in some instances, it has created passing headaches

Israel's rebirth and progress, coming after the tragedy of European Jewry in the 1930's and in World War II, has done much to raise Jewish morale. Jews in America and everywhere can be more proud than ever of their Jewishness

But we must, in a true spirit of friendliness, sound a note of caution to Israel and its leaders. Now that the birth pains are over, and even though Israel is undergoing growing pains, it must recognize that the matter of good will between its citizens and those of other countries is a two-way street: that Israel also has a responsibility in this situation — a responsibility in terms of not affecting adversely the sensibilities of Jews who are citizens of other states by what it says or does

In this connection, you are realists and want facts and I would be less than frank if I did not point out to you that American Jews vigorously repudiate any suggestion or implication that they are in exile. American Jews — young and old alike, Zionists and non-Zionists alike — are profoundly attached to America. America welcomed their immigrant parents in their need. Under America's free institutions, they and their children have achieved that freedom and sense of security unknown for long centuries of travail. American Jews have truly become Americans; just as have all other oppressed groups that have ever come to America's shores

To American Jews, America is home. There, exist their thriving roots; there, is the country which they have helped to build; and there, they share its fruits and its destiny. They believe in the future of a democratic society in the United States under which all citizens, irrespective of creed or race, can live on terms of equality. They further believe that, if democracy should fail in America, there would be no future for democracy anywhere in the world, and that the very existence of an independent State of Israel would be problematic. Further, they feel that a world in which it would be possible for Jews to be driven by persecution from America would not be a world safe for Israel either; indeed it is hard to conceive how it would be a world safe for any human being

The American Jewish community, as you, Mr. Prime Minister, have so eloquently pointed out, has assumed a major part of the responsibility of securing equality of rights and providing generous material help to Jews in other countries. American Jews feel themselves bound to Jews the world over by ties of religion, common historical traditions and in certain respects, by a sense of common destiny. We fully realize that persecution and discrimination against Jews in any country will sooner or later have its impact on the situation of the Jews in other countries, but these problems must be dealt with by each Jewish community itself in accordance with its own wishes, traditions, needs and aspirations

Jewish communities, particularly American Jewry in view of its influence and its strength, can offer advice, cooperation and help, but should not attempt to speak in the name of other communities or in any way interfere in their internal affairs.

I am happy to note from your statement, Mr. Prime Minister, that the State of Israel takes a similar position. Any other position on the part of the State of Israel would only weaken the American and other Jewish communities of the free, democratic countries and be contrary to the basic interests of Israel itself. The future development of Israel, spiritual, social as well as economic, will largely depend upon a strong and healthy Jewish community in the United States and other free democracies

We have been greatly distressed that at the very hour when so much has been achieved, harmful and futile discussions and misunderstandings have arisen as to the relations between the people and the State of Israel and the Jews in other countries, particularly in the United States. Harm has been done to the morale and to some extent to the sense of security of the American Jewish community through unwise and unwarranted statements and appeals which ignore the feelings and aspirations of American Jewry

Even greater harm has been done to the State of Israel itself by weakening the readiness of American Jews to do their full share in the rebuilding of Israel which faces such enormous political, social and economic problems

Your statement today Mr. Prime Minister will, I trust, be followed by unmistakable evidence that the responsible leaders of Israel, and the organizations connected with it, fully understand that future relations between the American Jewish community and the State of Israel must be based on mutual respect for one another's feelings and needs, and on the preservation of the integrity of the two communities and their institutions

I believe that in your statement today, you have taken a fundamental and historic position which will redound to the best interest not only of Israel, but of the Jews of America and of the world. I am confident that this statement and the spirit in which it has been made, by eliminating the misunderstandings and futile discussions between our two communities, will strengthen them both and will lay the foundation for even closer cooperation

In closing, permit me to express my deep gratitude for the magnificent reception you and your colleagues have afforded my colleague and me during our stay in this country

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