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Soviet-Israeli Relations: Trends and Prospects

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A Research Paper

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Soviet-Israeli Relations: Trends and Prospects



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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of
Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with
contributions from [redacted]
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was coordinated with the Directorate of
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**Soviet-Israeli Relations:
Trends and Prospects**

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Summary*Information available
as of 5 February 1988
was used in this report.*

Under Gorbachev's leadership, the USSR has expanded its dialogue with Israel in an effort to increase its relevance to the Arab-Israeli peace process and appeal to public opinion in the West. The Soviets are pursuing their interests by gradually upgrading bilateral contacts, expanding East European ties to Israel, and allowing increased Jewish emigration. This approach has enabled Moscow to avoid the hostile Arab reaction and domestic complications that more dramatic policies, such as the restoration of full diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv, might produce.

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Moscow seeks admission to the Arab-Israeli peace process on an equal basis with the United States, and the lack of relations with Israel has been an impediment to that objective. Its increased contacts with Tel Aviv, particularly the presence in Israel of a Soviet consular delegation and Moscow's agreement to accept an Israeli delegation, lend credibility to its claims to a legitimate role in the negotiating process.

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The Soviets have tried to appeal to both Israel and the West by allowing increased emigration of Soviet Jews and indicating their intention to improve the lives of those remaining. But Gorbachev has allowed emigration to increase more gradually than Brezhnev did in the 1970s. This may reflect, at least in part, a Soviet perception that the sharp increase in emigration in the 1970s failed to elicit from the United States the economic concessions the Soviets were seeking, while the subsequent cutback in emigration created a backlash of anti-Soviet sentiment. It probably also reflects a Soviet desire to use this card as an incentive for Israeli concessions.

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The Soviet position with respect to restoring full diplomatic relations with Israel has been modified in the past several years. Soviet spokesmen, including Gorbachev, have indicated that the lack of relations is not "normal," and Moscow has made clear to its Arab friends that Soviet—Arab—interests will dictate the Soviet Union's Middle Eastern policy.

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Moscow previously had insisted that restoration of relations with Tel Aviv depended on Israel's withdrawal from all the territories taken in 1967, but it now suggests that a restoration can come in the context of movement toward an international Middle East peace conference. The Soviets also have softened their position with respect to the timing of recognition. They previously indicated that relations could only be restored after successful

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completion of the peace process, but they now suggest that it can occur during the process. [redacted]

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Tel Aviv has been consistent in stating that relations with Moscow must be restored to full diplomatic status—nothing less. In January 1988, Israel renewed the visas of the Soviet consular delegation for only one month, indicating its reluctance to allow this Soviet presence to become more permanent (at least without some reciprocity from Moscow). Moscow's subsequent agreement to accept an Israeli "consular-technical" group revealed its concern that its consular presence in Israel might be in jeopardy. Moreover, disagreement between Israel's Labor and Likud parties over Soviet participation in an international peace conference continues to slow the pace of rapprochement. [redacted]

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There is little incentive for the Soviets to reestablish full diplomatic relations with Israel. A peace conference is not imminent, and such a move probably would not give Moscow increased leverage with Israel. In addition, the Arab-Israeli dispute is competing with the Iran-Iraq war as the primary regional concern, so the Soviets probably feel little pressure to seize the initiative. Finally, the USSR is making gains in relations with the West without making further gestures toward Israel. [redacted]

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Moscow, however, has laid the groundwork for a restoration of diplomatic ties. Should the Soviets believe Israel was committed to attending the international peace conference they have proposed (a more likely possibility if Labor wins the Israeli election in November 1988), they almost certainly would be prepared to reestablish relations. It is conceivable, but far less likely, that Moscow would restore diplomatic relations without any such Israeli shift. Gorbachev would have to decide that formal ties would demonstrate that his "new thinking" has substance and would add momentum to the USSR's regional policies and/or credibility to its initiatives in the West. [redacted]

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Short of restoring full diplomatic relations, Moscow probably will try to maintain movement in relations with Israel as it continues to cultivate the image of a responsible superpower seeking constructive political solutions to regional problems. It may try to upgrade the relationship by proposing the opening of a consulate or an interests section. Similarly, to improve relations with the West and appear responsive to human rights challenges, it may allow even greater increases in Soviet Jewish emigration. [redacted]

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Should Moscow restore relations with Israel, there would be increased pressure on Washington from both its West European allies and moderate Arab states as well as from the Soviet Union to include Moscow in the Arab-Israeli peace process. Moscow's claim to a central role in the process would have greater credibility and the US ability to keep the Soviets on the sidelines would be undermined if Moscow took the step that Washington has long demanded. Allowing increased Jewish emigration and improving the quality of life for the remaining Soviet Jews would further enhance the Soviet image in the United States. On the other hand, a reversal or stagnation of Soviet efforts with respect to Israel and Soviet Jewish issues would have negative repercussions in the United States and might adversely affect Moscow's efforts to move relations with Washington forward.

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Soviet-Israeli Relations: Trends and Prospects

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The Status of Bilateral Relations

Moscow broke diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967, largely to regain the credibility it had lost with its Arab clients during the Arab-Israeli war. All of the USSR's East European allies except Romania followed suit. Over the years, numerous Soviet spokesmen have indicated, [redacted] that the decision was a mistake, as it put the USSR at a disadvantage vis-a-vis the United States in terms of mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict. The USSR's inability to improve its position in the Middle East during the 1970s and early 1980s can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that it had become irrelevant to the peace process. [redacted]

As it has moved to restructure the Soviet economic and political system, the Gorbachev regime has tried to invigorate its foreign policy and alter its international image. To ease the pressures of military expenditures and gain access to Western credit and technology, it has pushed movement in arms control and tried to improve its relations with the West. As part of its policy, it has portrayed itself as a responsible superpower interested in pursuing constructive solutions to international tension. Expanding its ties to Israel offers Moscow the prospect of enhanced regional flexibility and international credibility. [redacted]

Soviet Incentives To Improve Relations

The Soviets want to improve relations with Israel because:

- They want to end the US monopoly on mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Their claim to a central role in the peace negotiations has been undermined by their inability to deal with all parties to the dispute.
- They want to enhance their position as a world power with status equal to that of the United States.



Mikhail Gorbachev [redacted] 25X1

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- They want to be seen as capable of advancing the political, as well as military, goals of their Arab clients and do not want the latter to regard the United States as the only power capable of serving as an honest broker in the area.
- They hope to demonstrate the "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy.
- They want to improve relations with the United States. Their estimation of strong Jewish and Israeli influence in the United States suggests to them that improved relations with Israel would bolster their case in the United States.
- Formal ties might enable them to lobby the Israelis more effectively on issues such as Israeli participation in the Strategic Defense Initiative.
- A Soviet presence in Israel would improve Soviet espionage capabilities there and might give Moscow increased access to advanced Western technology.

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~~Secret~~**Soviet Disincentives**

There are several factors, however, that inhibit the Soviets from moving quickly to restore full relations with Israel:

- They have repeatedly asserted that relations will not be restored until certain conditions have been met, and they would lose credibility and future leverage if a satisfactory quid pro quo were not obtained.
- Israel has linked the restoration of relations to the issue of Soviet Jewish emigration, and Moscow has consistently asserted that this is an internal matter. More favorable Soviet treatment of its Jewish minority could increase demands on Moscow by other Soviet minorities.
- The Soviets seek to avoid damaging relations with Arab allies who do not want Israel's status enhanced and who do not want Israel's Jewish population bolstered by a large influx of Soviet Jews.
- Reestablishing relations might not sufficiently increase the USSR's leverage with Israel or its relevance to the peace process.
- Moscow has been improving relations with the United States and Western Europe without reestablishing diplomatic relations with Israel and thus can afford to wait.
- An Israeli Embassy in Moscow would serve as a rallying point for Jewish dissidents. Soviet leaders are well aware of the large spontaneous demonstrations that occurred in 1948, when the new Israeli Ambassador to Moscow, Golda Meir, visited a Moscow synagogue and attracted a crowd of 40,000 Soviet Jews.

Israeli Incentives

Israel wants to restore full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union because:

- Such a restoration would diminish Israel's isolation in the United Nations and the Third World, weaken the position of hardline Arab states that oppose Israel's right to exist, and lead to closer ties to other East European states.

Shimon Peres

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- Tel Aviv seeks increased emigration of Soviet Jews, one of the largest remaining sources of Jewish population for Israel.
- Normal relations with the Soviets may, over time, lead Moscow to provide less military support to Israeli foes such as Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
- A presence in Moscow would enhance Israel's ability to collect intelligence.

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Israeli Disincentives

There are several factors that inhibit Israel from improving relations with Moscow:

- Tel Aviv's leadership, although not of one mind, generally rejects Moscow's condition that Israel agree to attend (and agree to Moscow's attending) an international Middle East peace conference.
- Soviet espionage and possible acquisition of military information could undermine Israel's military dominance in the region.
- The growing community of Soviet Jews in Israel is hostile to the USSR.

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The Impasse on Diplomatic Relations

Moscow's minimum price for restoration of relations is its inclusion in an international Middle East peace conference. Israeli leaders are divided on this requirement. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres favors an international conference and has indicated that he could

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Yitzhak Shamir [redacted]

**Labor Versus Likud—Differing Attitudes
Toward Moscow**

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Virtually all Israelis favor reestablishing full diplomatic relations with Moscow, according to Israeli polls. Both major parties see formal ties as increasing Israel's international status. Both parties are prepared to participate with the Soviets in the peace process if Moscow agrees to restore diplomatic relations and allows significantly increased Jewish emigration. [redacted]

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accept Soviet participation, but Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir opposes a conference and considers Moscow's demand for inclusion both irrelevant and impossible to meet. He has often stated, however, that he would be willing to allow Soviet involvement in Arab-Israeli negotiations if Moscow first met his preconditions on formal relations and Soviet Jewish emigration. [redacted]

The main difference between Labor and Likud attitudes toward Moscow is the latter's greater suspicion regarding Soviet intentions and tactics in the region. Most Likud officials believe that the Soviets seek to advance their position in the region through the perpetuation of Middle Eastern tensions. They believe this gives Moscow opportunities to gain influence by providing arms and assistance. Even if Moscow met Israel's conditions for participation in peace talks, many Israeli officials have suggested they would try to limit Moscow's role. [redacted]

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The Soviets have given numerous indications that they are flexible on the question of emigration, and, although Prime Minister Shamir frequently demands complete freedom for all Soviet Jews to migrate to Israel, Tel Aviv has never set a specific requirement in this regard. Although the obstacles to a solution of this problem are serious, it seems likely that a compromise could be reached if other factors affecting the restoration of relations were settled. [redacted]

Hussein to coordinate their efforts with respect to Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. This agreement created concern in Moscow that a US-backed process that excluded the Soviets was again on track. [redacted]

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Expanding Dialogue: The Process

The First Steps

Shortly after Gorbachev became General Secretary in March 1985, the Soviets began to indicate interest in upgrading relations with Israel.¹ This interest was given impetus by the agreement in February 1985 between PLO Chairman Arafat and Jordanian King

Active Soviet exploration of expanded bilateral ties began in the summer, with contacts in Paris between Soviet Ambassador to France Yuliy Vorontsov, now First Deputy Foreign Minister, and his Israeli counterpart. [redacted]

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¹ In May 1985, *Izvestiya* published a message from Israeli President Chaim Herzog to the USSR on the 40th anniversary of the victory over Germany. This was the first time such a message had been published and was particularly significant in that it contained a denunciation of the Nazis. Soviet propaganda has long equated Nazi and Israeli activities. [redacted]

[redacted] These meetings were followed by expressions of Soviet interest in pursuing consular matters

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East European Relations With Israel

All of Moscow's East European allies except Romania severed relations with Israel in 1967 as a gesture of solidarity with both Moscow and their Arab clients. As Moscow has moved to upgrade contacts with Israel, several East European countries have moved ahead of the Soviets—almost certainly with Soviet approval. A Soviet academic told the Jerusalem Post in December 1987 that the step-by-step rapprochement between Israel and the various East European countries was being coordinated by the Kremlin. [redacted]

Poland initiated talks to upgrade relations with Israel in late 1985, and in October 1986 the two countries established interests sections in each other's capitals. On 14 September 1987, Israel and Hungary announced that they would establish interests sections in each other's capitals. With some 80,000 Jews, Hungary has the largest Jewish community in Eastern Europe. [redacted]

and Poland's exploration of the possibility of establishing an interests section in Israel—a move that clearly had Soviet approval. [redacted]

Subsequent developments suggested the prospect of real movement in the Soviet-Israeli dialogue. In his speech to the United Nations in October, Israeli Prime Minister Peres indicated new flexibility in the Israeli position toward the peace process, for the first time publicly endorsing the concept of an international framework for negotiations. During his visit to Paris later that month, Gorbachev hinted at flexibility with respect to relations with Israel. He stated that the faster the situation in the Middle East was normalized, the faster Moscow could consider the question of resuming relations with Tel Aviv. [redacted]

In the wake of these developments, [redacted] indicated that Moscow was going to upgrade relations with Israel before the Soviet Com-

munist Party congress in February 1986. [redacted]

[redacted] the activity of late 1985 was followed by a hiatus in Soviet-Israeli relations. This probably reflected both the changing regional environment and Moscow's preoccupation with domestic issues on the eve of the 27th Soviet Communist Party congress. In the Middle East, the Hussein-Arafat initiative was foundering in the wake of the Palestinian hijacking of the Achille Lauro and Israel's attack on PLO headquarters in Tunisia. The demise of this initiative eased pressure on Moscow to press its demand for a role in the Arab-Israeli peace process and gave it time to address other issues and reassess its policies. The Third World in general and the Middle East specifically were given little attention at the party congress, suggesting that, if major adjustments in policy had been under consideration, they had been postponed. [redacted]

New Soviet Initiatives

The Soviets resumed their activity on the Arab-Israeli peace front in mid-1986. In April they proposed that the USSR send a consular team to Tel Aviv to inspect their former embassy and Russian Orthodox Church property owned by the Moscow Patriarchate.³ Although they withdrew the request following the US bombing of Libya later that month, they renewed it in

³ The Soviets made a similar proposal to Israel in 1974, but the Israelis refused to consider it. [redacted]

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Moscow's Conditions for Restoring Diplomatic Relations With Israel

Moscow's position with respect to the restoration of full diplomatic relations with Israel has always been ambiguous. The Soviets recognize Israel's right to exist and frequently have asserted their willingness to reestablish diplomatic relations when the necessary conditions have been met. The definition of those conditions, however, has fluctuated. In 1973, at the Geneva Conference, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko indicated to Israeli Foreign Minister Eban that relations might be restored if there were "significant progress" in the peace process. Subsequently the Soviets emphasized that Israel must withdraw from the territories taken in 1967 (and thus remove the original cause of the break). In the early 1980s they seemed to add a demand that Israel abrogate its strategic understanding with Washington. During the US-Soviet summit meeting in late 1985, to reassure the Arabs and counter a feared move toward the United States by Yasir Arafat, the Soviets implied that PLO participation in Middle East peace talks was a condition for renewed relations. [redacted]

Under Gorbachev, the formula has shifted back toward the Gromyko formulation of 1973. Relations can be restored in the context of movement in the

peace process—specifically movement toward the convening of an international conference with Soviet participation. The Soviets also have introduced flexibility into their position with respect to the timing of the restoration, hinting but not guaranteeing that a conference does not have to take place before relations are resumed. [redacted]

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Occasionally, however, authoritative Soviet spokesmen return to the old formula—particularly when speaking to Arab audiences. In August 1987, for example, First Deputy Foreign Minister Vorontsov stated in an interview with an Egyptian newspaper that removing the conditions that provoked Moscow's break in relations with Tel Aviv would have to be accomplished before relations can be restored. More recently, in December 1987, Soviet Ambassador to Egypt Zhuravlev told another Egyptian newspaper that the USSR could only reestablish relations when Israel withdrew from the occupied territories. Thus, the Soviets retain their ambiguity—and their flexibility—both as leverage in their talks with Israel and as a counter to Arab criticism. [redacted]

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July, when they revived their calls for an international peace conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴ [redacted]

A public meeting between Israeli and Soviet officials was held in Helsinki in August 1986—the first such meeting outside occasional talks at the United Nations since 1967. The much-heralded but substantively unsuccessful session lasted 90 minutes, breaking up over differences on the agenda. The Soviets had come prepared to discuss only those topics relating to

consular matters and had sent a low-level consular delegation. The Israeli delegation, which was headed by a senior Foreign Ministry official, was determined to discuss all relevant bilateral issues, including Soviet Jewish emigration. Despite the breakdown, the fact that the talks were convened reflected the strong interest of both sides in continuing the dialogue. [redacted]

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Israeli Prime Minister Peres and Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze met at the United Nations in September 1986, the highest level meeting of Soviet and Israeli officials since 1967. Once again little substantive progress was made. The talks served to

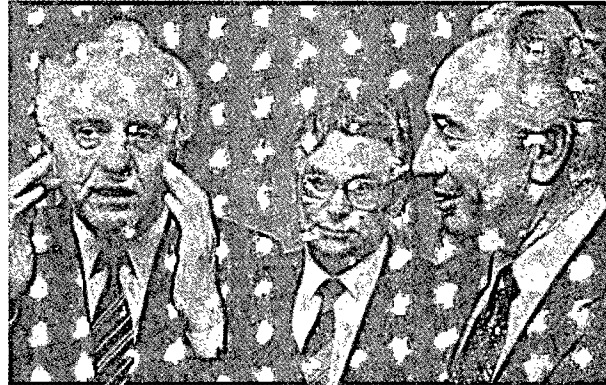
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⁴ Moscow added a new proposal to its old plans for a conference, suggesting that the permanent members of the UN Security Council meet first to coordinate the conference. Moscow actively pursued its plan and gained endorsements from the United Nations, the European Community, and the Islamic Conference Organization. [redacted]

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Russian Orthodox church in Jerusalem [redacted]



Peres and Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze meeting at United Nations, 1986 [redacted]

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energize relations, however, and were followed by increased contacts—between the Soviet and Israeli Ambassadors in the United States, between Soviet and Israeli officials at the United Nations, and between representatives of Foreign Minister Peres and Soviet Foreign Ministry and Communist Party officials.⁵ [redacted]

Soviet Consular Delegation in Israel. In July 1987 a Soviet consular delegation arrived in Tel Aviv, the first official Soviet delegation to visit Israel since 1967. The arrival marked a formal upgrading of relations and enhanced the credibility of Moscow's claims that it could sustain a dialogue with both sides in the Arab-Israeli dispute (including the PLO) without having to meet Israel's preconditions. The delegation was welcomed by Israel as the most tangible sign to date of improved Israeli-Soviet ties. The delegation has twice extended its stay in Israel, and Soviet Middle East specialist Primakov indicated to US officials in December 1987 that the Soviets view it as a permanent presence. [redacted]

Moscow has insisted that the delegation's primary functions are to provide services to Soviet citizens and to look into the status of Soviet properties in Israel. At the same time, it has left open the possibility that the

⁵ In October 1986, Peres and Shamir exchanged jobs, with Peres becoming Foreign Minister and Shamir Prime Minister in the National Unity government. Peres's focus on the peace process continued, however, as he tried to use the issue to promote his political position. [redacted]

delegation could perform other functions, including meeting with Israeli officials, should the occasion arise. Primakov asserted in December that the delegation maintained regular political contacts with Israeli officials. The Soviets consistently have denied that Israel would be given reciprocal rights, stating that an Israeli delegation would have no comparable functions to perform in Moscow. In January 1988, however, in response to Tel Aviv's threats to stop renewing the Soviet delegation's visas, the Soviets agreed to accept an Israeli "consular-technical" group in Moscow to inspect the Israeli interests desk at the Dutch Embassy. [redacted]

Jewish Emigration. The issue of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union is at the heart of Soviet-Israeli relations and also plays a major part in shaping Western perceptions of the USSR. In early 1987 the Gorbachev regime allowed an increased flow of Soviet Jewish emigrants and offered assurances that Jewish life in the Soviet Union would improve. This shift in policy probably was directed primarily at Moscow's efforts to improve relations with the United States. Indeed, Soviet officials have asked on various occasions if the new Soviet policy toward Israel and the Jews is having a positive impact on US public opinion. [redacted]

Gorbachev has moved more slowly in allowing increased emigration than Brezhnev did in the 1970s,

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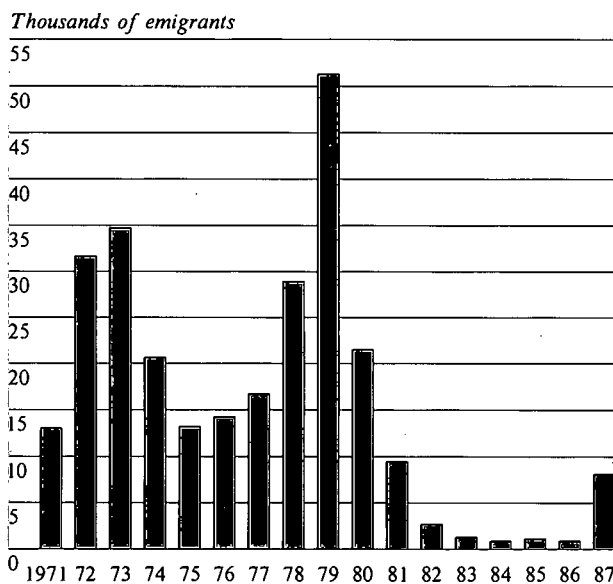
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Figure 1
Jewish Emigration From
the USSR, 1971-87



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and the 1987 figures do not approach those of the 1970s.⁶ Gorbachev may be moving cautiously because of a Soviet perception that Soviet concessions in the 1970s failed to produce the expected return in US trade and credit, while the subsequent cutback in emigration caused a substantial backlash. He may believe that Soviet interests are best served by holding out the prospect for increases until tangible benefits are obtained.

Israeli Reaction to Soviet Moves

Although the Soviet shift with respect to Jewish emigration may have been directed primarily at the

⁶ The figures rose in early 1987 and appear to have stabilized at a rate of about 800 emigres per month. Soviet Jewish arrivals in Vienna totaled 871 in May, 796 in June, 819 in July, 782 in August, 725 in September, 871 in October, 906 in November, and 899 in December.

West, it has had resonance in Israel.⁷ From Peres's point of view, the Soviets were responding to his direct appeal to Shevardnadze in September on Jewish emigration and were beginning to demonstrate a willingness to pay the price for admission to a Middle East peace conference. From Shamir's point of view, the Soviet policy was threatening because it seemed to provide impetus to Soviet-Israeli relations, to movement toward an international conference, and to Peres's position. Since mid-1987, therefore, Shamir has shifted his position and asserted that there is no linkage between emigration and improved Soviet-Israeli relations.

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Peres consistently has tried to capitalize on expanding relations with the Soviets to gain support in Israel for his concept of an international framework for Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and to lend credibility to his claims to be the "peace" advocate in the Israeli Cabinet. In April 1987 he met in Rome with the senior Soviet Communist Party officials responsible for the Middle East, Karen Brutents and Aleksandr Zotov. He subsequently described these talks as the first "serious political dialogue between the two nations."

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Apparently believing that his position was relatively strong and that there was impetus for movement in the peace process, Peres tried to bring the issue of an international conference to a vote in the Israeli Cabinet.⁸ We believe he was hoping for a vote of confidence and possibly also hoping to force an election. He did not have enough votes to accomplish this objective, however, and in mid-May he backed down.

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⁷ Peres and Shamir put greater emphasis on the emigration issue than on the reestablishment of diplomatic relations, demonstrating the importance of this issue to Israeli domestic politics. There are differences among Israeli leaders over how many Soviet Jews would actually seek to emigrate from the USSR if the gates were open. Peres maintains that tens of thousands would leave, while Shamir asserts that there would be hundreds of thousands.

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⁸ In the spring of 1987, there was active diplomacy in the region as US, Israeli, and Jordanian officials met to discuss possible movement in Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.

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New Strains in Relations

Strains in bilateral relations were evident during the summer and fall of 1987 despite continuing contacts.⁹ The Soviets almost certainly were disappointed by the failure of Peres to move his agenda forward and were more aware of Shamir's strength and Peres's weakness. Several critical themes emerged in Soviet propaganda that reflected concern about Israeli policies and suggested pessimism about the short-term prospects for improved relations. The first was a new differentiation in Soviet treatment of the Israeli leadership. Where Moscow previously had lumped all Israeli leaders together, it now referred favorably to Peres and focused sharp personal criticism on Shamir for his "rightwing policies" and "lack of political realism." Articles charged that Shamir's position precluded any chance that Soviet-Israeli relations would be restored. The second theme involved Israel's increasing military capability, specifically its development of the Jericho II missile with its capability to deliver a nuclear weapon. Criticism of the Jericho II was given extensive treatment in Soviet radiobroadcasts to Israel in the fall. [redacted]

The more realistic and pessimistic Soviet attitude was reflected in the subdued reports that followed both the August meeting in Bonn between Peres's aide, Nimrod Novik, and several members of the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the September meeting at the United Nations between Peres and Shevardnadze. Soviet reporting stressed that the August meeting was simply part of the Soviet effort to convene a peace conference and that Moscow's position with respect to relations with Israel still depended on a settlement in the Middle East: Peres, as usual, was upbeat about his meeting with Shevardnadze and reported that the latter had requested permission to establish an interests section in Tel Aviv. The Soviets denied, both

⁹ Cultural exchanges are being arranged to include performances by the Bolshoi Ballet, the Red Army Chorus, and the Moyseyev Dancers in Israel and by Israeli groups in the USSR. [redacted]

The Jericho II Missile

In mid-July 1987, Radio Moscow in Hebrew charged that Israel's development of the Jericho II missile constituted a threat to the Soviet Union. It referred to Western press descriptions of the missile as capable of carrying a nuclear warhead and having a range of 1,500 km. Following this criticism, Foreign Minister Peres issued an unusual statement, claiming that Israel does not consider the Soviet Union an enemy and rejecting Soviet threats. The statement went on to support US and Soviet efforts to moderate the arms race and to welcome Moscow's announced intention to avoid introducing short- and medium-range missiles into the Middle East—a reference to Moscow's announced decision not to deliver the SS-23 to Syria. The Israeli press subsequently reported that, even if rumors of the missile's range were accurate, Israeli targets would be Arab capitals, not the Soviet Union. [redacted]

Radio Moscow subsequently responded that, although the Soviet Union did not believe the Jericho missile was designed to jeopardize the southern part of the Soviet Union, Israel's "big uncle" (the United States) might believe differently and so might members of the "institutionalized right" (which, it said, includes Prime Minister Shamir). It argued that intermediate missiles are designed to deliver a first strike and that the USSR might have to take suitable measures to help those countries that have "already been victims of Israeli adventures." Both this broadcast and a Radio Peace and Progress Broadcast in Hebrew on 31 July linked the Jericho II to Soviet and US efforts to negotiate an agreement on the removal of medium- and short-range missiles—a gambit Moscow did not repeat in talks with Washington. [redacted]

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publicly and privately to US officials, that Shevardnadze had made such a request.¹⁰ [redacted]

Soviet spokesmen have indicated their frustration with Israeli politics and suggested a more pessimistic attitude toward improved relations. At a news briefing in early October, Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Pyadyshev emphasized that Moscow's position was that a genuine Arab-Israeli peace process could stem only from an international conference and that no improvement in Soviet-Israeli relations would be possible without Israeli flexibility on this issue. [redacted]

[redacted] in November, Soviet Communist Party official Zotov expressed frustration with Israeli politics and indicated that Israeli policy would have to change if progress were to be made in bilateral relations. In early December a Soviet academic told the *Jerusalem Post* that there could be no diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel because Israel (meaning Shamir) was "not ready." [redacted]

The Soviets made their unhappiness clear to Israel by supporting the annual UN vote to rescind Israel's credentials in October. This act was used by Shamir's office to discount the Peres line that progress was being made in bilateral relations, and Peres himself stated in late December that the Soviet attitude had become less flexible. [redacted]

Tel Aviv, in turn, became more willing to push its own agenda. In January 1988 the Soviets requested another extension of visas for their consular delegation in Israel. The Israelis granted a one-month, rather than a three-month, extension, indicating that this would give Moscow time to consider their own pending request for visas for a "consular-technical" group. [redacted]

¹⁰ Peres may have misunderstood Shevardnadze when the latter either held out the prospect of establishing interests sections within the "context of movement in the peace process" or referred to Moscow's request for an extension of the stay of the Soviet consular delegation in Israel. It is possible that Peres chose deliberately to exaggerate Shevardnadze's comments to promote his pursuit of the peace process. On the other hand, Shevardnadze may have proposed creating an interests section to entice Israel to make further concessions with respect to Soviet participation in the Arab-Israeli peace process. [redacted]

Continued Momentum

Moscow's announcement in mid-January that it had accepted Israel's request and would grant such a delegation two-month visas revealed its concern that its consular presence in Israel might be in jeopardy. The Soviet agreement was particularly striking given its timing. Moscow had been critical of Tel Aviv's response to disturbances in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during December and January and certainly would have preferred to postpone making any gesture toward Israel in the middle of international debate over Israeli policy. [redacted]

Moscow's commitment to sustaining its dialogue with Israel also has been demonstrated by its continuation of bilateral meetings (Soviet and Israeli officials met in Helsinki in mid-January) and by its new willingness to allow exit visas for temporary visits to Israel to increase dramatically in late 1987 and early 1988. [redacted]

Soviet Concern About Arab Reaction

Soviet concern about the reaction of the Arabs, particularly key clients such as Syria and the PLO, has long been a constraint on Soviet policy toward Israel, but, during the visit of Syrian President Assad to Moscow in April 1987, Gorbachev indicated that this consideration was no longer as important as it had been. In his dinner speech, Gorbachev stated that the absence of relations with Israel was not normal and suggested that Soviet-Israeli relations could be renewed "in the mainstream of the peace process," a major step forward in Moscow's ambiguous references to the conditions and timing for restoring relations. Gorbachev emphasized that war was no longer an option in the Middle East and that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be resolved only through political means—an implicit rejection of Assad's efforts to achieve strategic parity with Israel and to pursue a military solution. [redacted]

Moscow has attempted to make its approach to Israel acceptable to its Arab allies by suggesting that any

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new leverage it gains with Tel Aviv will be used for the benefit of its friends. It has accompanied its efforts to improve ties to Israel with efforts to project itself as the main supporter of the Arab cause and the chief advocate for Arab unity. The Soviets were deeply involved in the reunification of the PLO that occurred in Algiers in April 1987 and have consistently argued that a united Arab position is essential to a successful peace process—just as they have argued that they should have ties to Israel if they are to protect Arab interests in peace negotiations. [redacted]

Thus far, Arab reaction to Moscow's improving contacts with Israel has been relatively muted, and moderates such as Jordan and Egypt support the development. The Syrians and Palestinians have been less accepting of Soviet policy [redacted]

Prospects

Moscow almost certainly will sustain its gradual upgrading of contacts with Israel in 1988, hoping for a Peres victory in the Israeli election. The policy has lent legitimacy to its claims to a mediating role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and has given it some credibility in the West on the issue of human rights. The costs to Moscow in terms of relations with its Arab clients have been minimal. [redacted]

By keeping their consular delegation in Israel and allowing the Israeli "technical" delegation to remain, the Soviets would have de facto interests sections operating. They might propose the opening of a consulate or the establishment of more formal interests sections—moves short of a full restoration of diplomatic relations. They might also allow a gradual increase in Jewish emigration. This would enable the Soviets to demonstrate continuing dynamism in their policy, help prevent a backlash of anti-Soviet sentiment that might develop if they seemed to halt their efforts, and hold out the lure of further concessions if their conditions were met. They would be more likely to move in this direction if they believed Israel would respond favorably (for example, if Peres gained power in the election). [redacted]

There seems little incentive for Moscow to move ahead much faster with Tel Aviv. Relations with the United States are improving without significant gestures toward Israel. In addition, Moscow probably believes that moving quickly at this point would not give it sufficiently increased leverage with Israel or access to the peace process. [redacted]

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Still, the Soviets have indicated flexibility on almost all relevant issues, including the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. Ambiguity with respect to process and timing suits Moscow's interests, allowing it to pursue various options simultaneously without having to make commitments or reconcile incompatible positions. [redacted]

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Although movement toward an international peace conference or some other forum that included the Soviets in a prominent role would provide the most likely incentive for restoring relations with Israel, it is conceivable—but unlikely—that Moscow will go to full relations with Israel without being formally admitted to the peace process. Restoration could come, for example, as part of an effort to demonstrate that the "new Soviet thinking" has substance and to lend credibility to Moscow's efforts to show that it is taking a constructive approach to international problems. It would be intended as a significant gesture toward the West as well as toward Israel. [redacted]

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It is similarly conceivable, but almost as unlikely, that the Soviets would allow a dramatic increase in Jewish emigration. Such a breakthrough, particularly if Israel were governed by a Labor-led government, might lead to greater flexibility in Israel's conditions for Soviet participation in the peace process. [redacted]

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As there are factors that encourage Moscow to accelerate its policy toward Israel, so there are factors that suggest a slowdown. Soviet preoccupation with internal matters, as in the period before the 27th Communist Party congress in 1985-86, could lead to a loss of momentum in foreign policy. Similarly, as there is resistance to Gorbachev's internal policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, there almost certainly is resistance to change in foreign policy. A Soviet Foreign

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Ministry official stated in February 1988 that there were differences within the Soviet Union over how to manage contacts with the Israelis. [redacted]

Soviet consular delegation in Tel Aviv and the delegation's dealings with the Israelis clearly point to some meaningful communication. [redacted]

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Regional and global developments also could interfere with Soviet-Israeli rapprochement. The resumption of a separate approach to peace negotiations (as, between Jordan and Israel) could again prompt Moscow, with its rejectionist clients (Syria and the PLO), to adopt an obstructionist role in the peace process. This would entail a harder line toward Israel. Similarly, a deterioration in Moscow's relations with the West, particularly with the United States, would reduce its incentives to improve relations with Israel. [redacted]

Moscow will continue to use its efforts to improve relations with Israel and to move the peace process forward on its terms to demonstrate that it is the United States and Israel that are the "braking factor" with respect to progress toward peace. The Soviets will try to focus attention on what they describe as a "lack of leadership" in Israel and "indifference" in the United States. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

Soviet relations with Israel will have an impact on Moscow's relations with Washington. The Soviets know that improvement in US-Soviet relations has been hampered by regional conflicts including the Arab-Israeli dispute. Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister Vorontsov linked the two directly in a recent interview with the Egyptian press, stating that a true and lasting detente with the United States will be possible only if the hottest regional conflicts, such as the Middle East, are settled. [redacted]

The establishment of full Soviet-Israeli diplomatic ties probably would be accompanied by Soviet pressure on its allies (Syria and the PLO) to take the steps necessary to get to an international conference, including urging the PLO to recognize Israel's right to exist. A successful Soviet policy would put pressure on Israel and the United States to respond. [redacted]

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Washington has long insisted that the Soviet Union should restore diplomatic relations with Israel if it expects to return to the peace process. We believe Moscow's claim to an active, central role in the process would have greater credibility and the US ability to keep the Soviets on the sidelines of negotiations would be undermined if Moscow follows Washington's prescription. Even a gradual improvement in relations increases the Soviet claim to a role, as it can speak to both sides in the dispute. The presence of a

The Arab Gulf states probably would react negatively to a restoration of Soviet-Israeli ties, and those states that have been exploring ties to the Soviets might slow the progress of expanding bilateral ties. On balance, however, we believe that, except in the immediate aftermath of a restoration of Soviet-Israeli relations, the Gulf states would work out their ties to Washington and Moscow on the basis of a much broader range of regional issues. [redacted]

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Appendix A

Jewish Emigration From the USSR

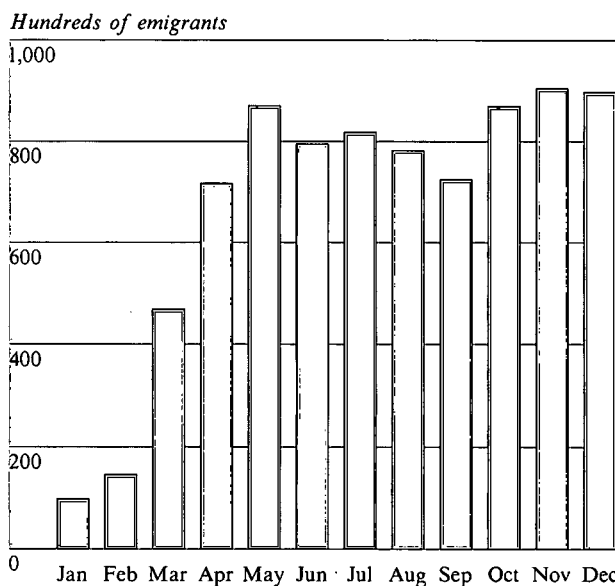
The issue of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union is complex, involving Soviet internal policies with respect to minorities and dissidents, the Israeli desire to increase its Jewish population and help Soviet Jews, and questions of human rights that have an impact on Soviet relations with the West, particularly the United States. [redacted]

In the 1970s the Brezhnev regime allowed a dramatic increase in Soviet Jewish emigration to improve the climate of relations with the United States. With the Jackson-Vanik Amendment of 1974, however, emigration was formally linked to Soviet efforts to gain most-favored-nation status. The Stevenson Amendment to the Export-Import Bank Bill subsequently restricted credit allocations to the Soviets to a four-year total of \$300 million, a pittance compared to Soviet expectations. Immediately thereafter, the Soviets repudiated their commitments with respect to Jewish emigration, and the number of emigrants dropped. Emigration increased again in the late 1970s, peaking at over 51,000 in 1979. During the early 1980s the numbers decreased, and from 1982 to 1986 they were negligible. [redacted]

During Gorbachev's first two years in power, there was only a modest change in Moscow's position toward Soviet Jews. Well-known refuseniks, such as Anatoliy Shcharanskiy, Grigoriy and Isai Goldshtein, and Ilya Essas were allowed to leave. But the total number of Jews allowed to emigrate did not rise. Soviet pressure on Jews seeking to emigrate intensified, with nine Jewish activists being arrested and imprisoned. [redacted]

In 1987 the Soviets allowed the number of Jewish emigrants to rise, permitted prominent refuseniks to leave, allowed Soviet emigres to return on visits, and somewhat clarified emigration procedures. Soviet assurances that they would allow improved conditions for those Jews who chose to remain in the Soviet Union were reinforced by Moscow's release of the so-called prisoners of Zion (mostly Hebrew teachers) and

Figure 2
Jewish Emigration From the USSR,
January-December 1987



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by indications that Hebrew classes would be offered publicly. In addition, an unofficial group established to defend Jewish culture has been allowed to function, while there have been hints that the USSR's Anti-Zionist Committee would be disbanded. These measures have been slow and halting, however, and broad-based discrimination against Soviet Jews continues. [redacted]

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Israeli leaders call for free emigration and are careful not to hint at a minimally acceptable number. We believe that Tel Aviv would be satisfied by a Soviet

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commitment to allow tens of thousands of Jews to leave each year for an indefinite period. Israeli officials often refer to the pace of the 1970s, when over 30,000 Soviet Jews emigrated annually for several years. Although most of these emigrants probably would not go to Israel, the influx of a large number of immigrants in a short period would strain Israel's absorption system, and Israeli officials might prefer a more orderly influx. [redacted]

In addition to pressing for increased emigration and improved conditions for Soviet Jews, Tel Aviv consistently has sought direct flights from the Soviet Union to Israel to ensure that emigrants who have declared Israel as their destination do not go to Western Europe or North America. The Soviet Union has refused to permit direct flights, arguing that it is up to the individual to decide on his destination and denying that Soviet Jews are citizens of Israel with a "right to return." [redacted]

In the spring and early summer of 1987 there were several reports [redacted] that the Soviets were considering allowing direct flights to satisfy Tel

Aviv's interests. In mid-July, however, a Soviet spokesman indicated in an interview with *Corriere Della Sera* that the emigration issue was "very touchy" and that direct flights "would go against the real intentions of the emigrants." [redacted]

The current Soviet position on direct flights is less responsive to Israeli interests than it is to those of the Arabs, who want to keep the Jewish population of Israel down; to the United States and its Jewish community, which argue for the emigrants' freedom to choose their destination; and to its own domestic position, which is to treat minorities as Soviet citizens, not citizens of other states. An Israeli interpretation of the Soviet position as of the summer of 1987 was that the Soviets were more interested in appealing to the United States and its Jewish community than in meeting Israeli demands. [redacted]

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Appendix B

Soviet and Israeli Views of a Middle East Peace Conference

To reassert its role in the Middle East, play to the interests of moderate Arab states, prevent US-backed peace negotiations, and demonstrate that it can creatively and constructively participate in the resolution of regional crises, the Soviet Union under Gorbachev has actively campaigned for an old idea—the convening of an international conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Soviet spokesmen, led by Gorbachev, have tried to demonstrate their seriousness about this approach by enunciating a new rationale:

- It is impossible to resolve the Middle East problem through armed confrontation because of the dangers involved.
- Given low oil prices, it is impossible for the Arab states to bear the burden of armaments.
- It is, therefore, time to concentrate on resolving the conflict through political means.

The Israelis are divided on the subject of an international approach to a settlement. Foreign Minister Peres has endorsed an international framework for talks, seeing this as the only means to bring the Arabs to the negotiating table. Prime Minister Shamir rejects the concept, arguing that the extreme Arab position would prevail at such a conference and that Israel would be under intense pressure to make territorial concessions in the occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights.

There are basic differences between the Soviet concept of a conference and Peres's concept, primarily concerning the structure and authority of such a gathering. The Soviets insist that all participants (including themselves) must have the opportunity to play an effective role and that the conference must not become merely an umbrella for direct talks between the parties to the dispute. This reflects their consistent rejection of separate accords; their demand for a comprehensive settlement that excludes none of the main parties, particularly their clients, Syria and the PLO; their desire to demonstrate their political value to their Arab clients; and their concern that they not again become irrelevant to the process.

Those Israelis who support a conference insist that it only provide a general framework in which direct talks can be held. They also insist that decisionmaking authority rest with the working groups, and they reject the authority of the overall conference to approve or veto those decisions.

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Another basic difference concerns the role of the PLO. Virtually all Israelis reject the participation of the PLO in any phase of negotiations. Moscow's position has been that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and that it is up to the PLO to determine who will represent the Palestinians.

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Over the years the Soviets have indicated flexibility on virtually every issue having to do with a settlement—save their own participation. Although they have called for Israeli withdrawal from the territories taken in 1967, self-determination for the Palestinians, including the establishment of their own state, and mutual recognition of the sovereignty of all states in the region, they have frequently indicated that they would accept any position that the Arabs themselves were willing to accept.

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Under Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviets have indicated an increased willingness to meet Israeli (as well as US and Jordanian) concerns about the structure of a conference. They have not, however, abandoned their insistence that a conference have authority to sanction any agreements reached. The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported on 6 September 1987, for example, that a senior Soviet diplomat had said that an international conference need not have a veto or the power to force a solution. He said, however, the USSR insists on the signing of one comprehensive accord and will not accept separate agreements between Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians without agreements with Syria and Lebanon. He did not rule

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out the possibility of further flexibility on the part of the Soviet Union. Soviet officials privately substantiated this account in subsequent talks with US Embassy officials in Moscow. [redacted]

Soviet proposals for a peace conference have contained the following points:

- A conference should have parallel frameworks, including a full meeting with the participation of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and regional committees of the countries directly involved.
- There should be discussions by the full conference of the international aspects of the process—such as guarantees of peace, the nature of a Palestinian entity, and the status of Jerusalem.
- The regional committees should convey all agreements reached to the full conference to give them international legitimacy.
- There should be reciprocal recognition by the PLO and Israel and acceptance of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

According to the Kuwaiti news agency KUNA, the Israelis rejected a Soviet proposal to this effect in mid-September 1987. [redacted]

In September, at the United Nations, Peres presented his program for the peace process, and it differed significantly from that of the Soviet Union. It called for direct talks; no imposed settlement and no veto; acceptance of UN Security Council resolutions providing for the withdrawal from occupied territories and recognition of Israel's right to exist; negotiations to resolve the Palestinian problem with a joint delegation of Palestinians and Jordanians; negotiations to be conducted by three regional committees; and a committee of regional states and the permanent UN Security Council members to chart the future and to legitimize the process. [redacted]

Thus, the basic impasse remained in early 1988. The Soviets continue to insist on a conference with "authority," while the Israelis continue to insist on the primacy of direct talks. At the US-Soviet summit meeting in December, the Soviets repeated their argument against bilateral agreements concluded outside the context of an international conference. Soviet spokesman Polyakov indicated that such agreements would be "blown up" like the 1983 Lebanese-Israeli agreement. [redacted]

The Palestinian Issue

With respect to Palestinian representation at a conference, the Soviet position under Gorbachev has become more flexible. Moscow's basic position has been that the PLO is the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people. While consistently stating that it will abide by any representation that the Palestinians accept, Moscow has insisted that it is the PLO that must make this decision. [redacted]

In recent months the Soviets have tried to convey an impression of increased ambiguity in their approach to the issue. In a late September discussion with US Embassy officers, Foreign Ministry Middle East Department Deputy Director Robert Turdiyev indicated that there was no single answer to the problem but that the Soviets remained convinced that the PLO constituted the only credible and accredited representative of the Palestinian people. He stated that the PLO was not a monolith, there were large differences within the organization, and the task was to encourage the most suitable views. [redacted]

The Soviets avoided describing the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people during the fall of 1987, while continuing to assert that the PLO must be involved in the peace process. During the visit of King Hussein to Moscow in December 1987, for example, Gorbachev stated that all sides, including the PLO, should participate in working out a settlement. This type of formulation leaves room for a variety of approaches, such as the creation of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. [redacted]

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Appendix C

Major Events in Soviet-Israeli Relations

May 1948	USSR recognizes Israel (second country to do so). [redacted]	25X1
February 1952	Prime Minister Ben Gurion reads Knesset note to the USSR giving assurances that Israel will not join any aggressive pact against the USSR. Calls on USSR to permit emigration of Jews to Israel. [redacted]	25X1
February 1953	USSR breaks diplomatic relations with Israel following bomb explosion in Soviet Legation in Tel Aviv. [redacted]	25X1
July 1953	USSR-Israeli diplomatic relations resume. [redacted]	25X1
June 1967	USSR breaks diplomatic relations with Israel after the Arab-Israeli war. [redacted]	25X1
December 1968	Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Simonev and Israeli Ambassador Tekoah hold direct talks in New York on bilateral relations and the Middle Eastern crisis. [redacted]	25X1
December 1969	Soviet-Israeli talks conducted through Romania. [redacted]	25X1
Spring 1970	Soviet approaches made to Israelis in Argentina, New York, and Geneva. [redacted]	25X1
	[redacted]	25X1
June 1971	[redacted]	25X1
	[redacted] Soviet journalist Viktor	25X1
	Louis visits Israel, meets with Prime Minister Meir. [redacted]	25X1
	[redacted]	25X1
December 1973	Soviet and Israeli Foreign Ministers Gromyko and Eban meet at the 1973 Geneva Peace Conference on the Middle East. [redacted]	25X1

Late 1974

Moscow requests Israeli permission to assign several Soviet consular officials to the Finnish Embassy in Tel Aviv to handle consular services for Soviet passport holders. Israel eventually agrees on condition that Soviet officers serve on a temporary basis and that Moscow accept a reciprocal Israeli group to study procedures for handling Soviet Jewish emigration. Nothing further occurs on this subject until 1986. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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24 September 1975

Foreign Ministers Gromyko and Allon meet for three hours in New York at Israel's initiative to discuss the Middle Eastern situation. [redacted]

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6 May 1976

Soviet and Israeli Ambassadors to the United Nations meet to discuss Soviet policy statements on Middle East. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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24 September 1981

Foreign Ministers Gromyko and Shamir meet at the United Nations in New York. First public meeting in six years. [redacted]

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30 November 1981

US and Israel sign Joint Political Military Agreement, labeled a strategic cooperation agreement aimed against the USSR. [redacted]

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14 December 1981

Israel annexes Golan Heights. [redacted]

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6 June 1982

Israel invades Lebanon. [redacted]

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19 September 1982

TASS statement condemns Israel for the massacre of Palestinians at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon. [redacted]

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21 April 1983

The Anti-Zionist Committee is established in Moscow. [redacted]

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June 1984

Israeli press reports Romanian President Ceausescu conveyed a Soviet message to the Israeli Minister of Communications expressing a willingness to consider renewing relations if Israel agrees to attend an international peace conference. Similar signals are made in Scandinavia and the Netherlands. [redacted]

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September 1984

Foreign Ministers Gromyko and Shamir meet during the UN General Assembly. It is their first meeting in three years. [redacted]

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December 1984	Ambassadors Dobrynin and Rosenne meet in Washington to discuss relations, but no progress is achieved, according to the Israeli press. <input type="text"/>	25X1
July 1985	Ambassadors Vorontsov and Sofer meet in Paris and discuss renewing relations. No agreements are reached. <input type="text"/>	25X1
September 1985	Foreign Minister Shevardnadze refuses to meet privately with Foreign Minister Shamir at the United Nations. <input type="text"/>	25X1
May 1986	USSR issues a statement criticizing Israel's decision to participate in the Strategic Defense Initiative. <input type="text"/>	25X1
August 1986	Soviet and Israeli consular officials meet for 90 minutes in Helsinki. No agreements are reached. <input type="text"/>	25X1
September 1986	Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and Prime Minister Peres meet at the United Nations. First public meeting with an Israeli Prime Minister. <input type="text"/>	25X1
October 1986	Poland establishes an interests section in Tel Aviv. <input type="text"/>	25X1
April 1987	Foreign Minister Peres meets with senior Soviet Communist Party officials responsible for the Middle East. <input type="text"/>	25X1
July 1987	Soviet consular delegation arrives in Israel. <input type="text"/>	25X1
September 1987	Foreign Ministers Shevardnadze and Peres meet at the United Nations. <input type="text"/>	25X1
	Hungary and Israel agree to exchange interests sections. <input type="text"/>	25X1
	Moscow receives three-month extension for consular delegation. <input type="text"/>	25X1
January 1988	Moscow receives one-month extension for its consular delegation and grants Tel Aviv's request to send delegation to Moscow to inspect interests desk at Netherlands Embassy. <input type="text"/>	25X1

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