

Shtadlanut as Statecraft by the Stateless

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Three of the essential skills traditionally at the core any nation's claim to self-determination—farming, soldiering and political statecraft—were nowhere to be found in the pre-1948 experience of the Jewish people. Of all the nations on earth, Jews were conspicuous for being (a) rootless, (b) defenseless, and (c) stateless. Hostage to the whims of Gentile overlords throughout their long, lachrymose history of exile and dispersion, and perennial pawns in the unending struggle between rising and waning great powers, Diaspora Jewry, according to this conventional narrative, had neither reason nor opportunity to develop an agricultural base, to practice martial arts or to cultivate foreign policy skills.

At least with respect to the latter, however, there is documented evidence confirming otherwise. Despite the absence of political sovereignty during nearly two millennia of statelessness, specially deputized Jewish emissaries, *shtadlanim*, did, in fact, engage in a remarkable form of Diaspora diplomacy known as *shtadlanut*.

The term *shtadlan*, or intercessor, derives from the Hebrew root *sh-d-l*, which has multiple meanings: to struggle, to strive, to persuade, to entice. All four of those apply equally well to the *shtadlan* who, as advocate and spokesman for the weak before the powerful, had to do his or her best to exert personal powers of persuasion, often using flattery to the point of obsequiousness, in appealing to the non-Jewish authorities and in pleading the case for dealing fairly and mercifully with their resident Jews.

Not to be confused with the equally indispensable Diaspora *shadchan* [marriage-broker], the *shtadlan*—practitioner of *shtadlanut*—has been characterized by some as a kind of “roving ambassador,” by historian Solomon Grayzel as a “backdoor diplomat,”¹ and, more recently, by political scientist Alan Dowty as a “diplomat of a sort.”² Even these flattering characterizations do not do justice to the positive, indeed vital, role played by successive generations of *shtadlanim* as stateless statesmen and Diaspora diplomats in the struggle for Jewish survival.

Yet modern Jewish commentators, Israeli and Zionist thinkers, in particular, have not been kind to the *shtadlan*.

***Shtadlanut* as Conduct Unbecoming**

Our contemporary visual rendering of the “court Jew” is altogether unflattering. When referred to in either variant, *shtadlan* or *shtadlanut*, the overwhelming response, particularly among Israelis, whether young or old, is one of derision. They stereotype the *shtadlan* as pathetic — as a bearded, somewhat sinister medieval figure, cringing and deferential, alternatively groveling and fawning before pashas and princes in begging for scraps of mercy on behalf of that potentate’s helpless Jewish wards.

This change in perception can be credited to the singular effectiveness over time of Zionist literature and the Israeli educational system. Inspired by the Zionist idea, and as part of their campaign to win Jewish hearts and minds for the nationalist enterprise, early pre-state Jewish nationalist thinkers consciously emphasized the imperative that Jews achieve full normalization. They did this by categorically negating Diaspora history, the *golab* [Diaspora] condition and the Jewish self-image.

For Herzl and political Zionists, nothing better served to contrast their Jewish revolution-in-the-making than the imperative to replace the spineless posture of *shtadlanut* with a proud Jewish diplomacy—a diplomacy underscoring world Jewry’s resourcefulness, not its material shortcomings — the calculation of interests and *quid pro quo*, not appeals for compassion and sympathy.

With the advent of sovereign Israeli foreign policy, *shtadlanut* came to be seen as an embarrassment. The *shtadlanim* were collectively accused of unbecoming conduct; of embodying everything shameful and repulsive in the *golab* experience; of even having brought discredit and dishonor to the Jewish people.

***Shtadlanut* as Unprincipled**

On the charge sheet against, the accusation is made that a great many were undeserving of the trust given them by their fellow Jews. Often referred to unflatteringly as “privileged” court Jews, *shtadlanim* emerge from the literature as paternalistic toward their downtrodden coreligionists and as egotistical and ambitious careerists bent upon improving their own positions and reputations. Dr. Nahum Goldmann’s depiction of *shtadlanim* as “philanthropists who intervened now and then”³ is a good case in point.

Whether duly appointed by communal leaders to intercede with local noblemen or palace authorities or, alternatively, assuming the role of self-appointed spokesmen, they are indicted for being increasingly aloof and condescending to their own

people; for adopting an extravagant lifestyle; for adopting court manners and secular ways, not to mention cases of apostasy and opting out of the faith. Still worse is their portrayal as dishonorable, self-seeking individualists altogether unaccountable and unscrupulous.

***Shtaḏlanut* as Undiplomatic**

Not content with deriding their ingratiating style of behavior and impugning their motives, the censure of *shtaḏlanim* goes a step further by discounting what they did as neither negotiation nor diplomacy. Indeed, *shtaḏlanut* is regarded not only as a far cry from accepted diplomatic protocol but as antithetical to its principles, in other words, the very opposite of dignified statecraft. Detractors are willing to concede at best that these efforts represented a low form of domestic lobbying, with the “court Jew” a rather marginal figure, a middleman and “fixer” of sorts.

Clearly, the time is appropriate for a careful and more balanced reassessment of the *shtaḏlan* and his efforts at *shtaḏlanut*; of *shtaḏlanut*'s contribution to the larger struggle for Jewish survival; and of its unappreciated role in maintaining the continuity of biblical Jewish world politics by the conduct of an early form of statecraft by the stateless, well in advance of middle- and late-twentieth century national liberation and independence movements.

Sycophants or Community Servants?

The defense of *shtaḏlanut* against allegations that it was degrading, entrepreneurial and ingratiating, rather than diplomatic, must begin with the nature of the criticism itself. First, a good deal of it is ideologically motivated and ideologically biased. It can be traced to political Zionism's existential need to effect a sharp, complete break with the Jewish past in order to guarantee a safer, better Jewish future. Be that as it may, vilification of the *shtaḏlanim* is excessive, and cannot be allowed so easily to negate or even delete an entire theme of Jewish foreign relations — “Israel among the Nations.”

Similarly, as historiography, the critique of *shtaḏlanut* is context-insensitive, failing to appreciate just how unenviable was the high-risk position of these intercessors. With little or no support to speak of, they took it upon themselves to secure the minimalist objectives of a powerless outcast people in their hour of need before insensitive, callous and often hostile lords and Gentile masters. If timorous in their demeanor, and if supplicant when standing exposed and alone before both royal and ecclesiastical courts, they had, as a rule, good reason. Indeed, to their everlasting collective credit, *shtaḏlanim* personify the intangible form of courage

Rabbi Benjamin Lau refers to as *otzma shel hisarđut*, the will to survive and the willpower of the survivor.⁴

Second, much of the criticism suffers from two of the worst flaws of generalization: stereotyping and misrepresentation. Over the course of so many centuries, some intercessors must surely have acted improperly, possibly even irresponsibly, and are therefore not above reproach. To be sure, individual intercessors may have used their presence close to those in power to better themselves, to enhance their personal prestige and influence, to advance their own careers, and, in some cases, to exploit financial opportunities that accrued from their status. Still, this cannot, and should not, be allowed to defame what was a vital communal function under the adversities of Diaspora existence and a highly serviceable *political* mechanism for Jews both living under, and forced to deal with, the *goyim* [the Gentiles—literally, “nations”].

This leads us to counter possibly the most telling indictment of *sbtadlanut*—that it has nothing to do with the art of diplomacy. Here, the error lies in applying too narrow a definition of diplomacy, confining it to inter-state relations. Webster’s Dictionary, in contrast, and without reference to the political identity or status of the actors, defines diplomacy as “adroitness or artfulness in securing advantages without arousing hostility” and “the skillful or successful settlement of differences between *peoples*” [author’s italics]; diplomatic as “employing tact and conciliation”; the diplomat as a “liaison officer”; and diplomatist as “one who is dexterous, tactful or artful in meeting situations without arousing antagonism.”

These criteria and job descriptions are certainly applicable to the *sbtadlan*. Moreover, our more robust twenty-first century perspective of the inclusiveness of the field of international relations better qualifies us to view the Diaspora diplomacy as a legitimate form of statesmanship also practiced by ethno-religious groups and non-state actors. The concept of *sbtadlanut* fits compatibly within the larger framework of asymmetrical superior-subordinate, patron-client relationships between many different classes of stronger and weaker actors.

***Sbtadlanut* Revisited**

With these caveats in mind, we can now take a fresh look at the *sbtadlan*, more open-minded than unfavorably predisposed, more realistic in anticipating a high rate of mission failure by “court Jews” negotiating from positions of weakness, but also less formal and conventional about what statecraft and diplomacy encompass.

In revisiting *shtadlanut*, surely one consideration of the court Jew, whether self-appointed or formally delegated, had to have been an abiding concern for the welfare of his Jewish compatriots, regardless of what motivated him.

In his classic treatise on diplomacy published in 1716, *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains*, François de Callières makes reference to “the natural and acquired endowments” of *négociateurs*.⁵ Profiled as a group, Jewish *shtadlanim* generally have the following “endowments” in common:

- **A personal calling card**

In the highly stratified feudal societies where Jews found themselves, respect and influence, especially in matters of state, provided ease of access to the ruling elite. One avenue was the formal letter deputizing someone of Jewish communal prominence to be its official representative. The other channel was a separate, entirely private appointment to high office, such as principal medical or financial adviser to the royal family. Either form contributed to the *shtadlan's* acceptance as a special category of Jewish subject and as someone not only authoritative, but of potential value to those in higher councils of state.

- **Education and initiative**

A prerequisite for any kind of dialogue, whether learned debate or some form of entreaty, had to have been the *shtadlan's* ability to converse with his Gentile interlocutors in the local vernacular and an exceptional command of foreign languages.

- **Industriousness**

Besides wisdom or formal scholarship, another important source for initial entrée into those Gentile inner circles otherwise closed to Jews often derived from the *shtadlan's* reputation for being hard-working, diligent and, hence, successful. Personal wealth was one marker, although other acquired skills also helped smooth the way, like linguistic aptitude or medical expertise. By applying themselves when given the opportunity, individual enterprising Jews, always a small number, might then share their worldly experience in such vital mercantilist professions as commodity trading; provisioning armies with grain, timber and beef; money lending; accountancy; and export-import management.

- **Allegiance**

In an age of autocracy, enlightened or not, the favored Jew had to be above reproach, since royal favor could only come through demonstrations of personal loyalty and service. Without trustworthiness, the Jewish emissary lost all credibility. Obviously, on occasion, court Jews did fall prey to power struggles, succession crises and the personal whims of a new ruler, thereby forfeiting prestige, influence, high office and possibly even their lives. On the other hand, that all Jews, irrespective of their socioeconomic station, as well as their families and congregations, were, in effect, hostages also worked to the advantage of these “roving ambassadors,” since it guaranteed their personal dependence and dependability.

- **A defined Jewish *weltanschauung***

One did not, indeed one dared not, venture into the treacherous realm of politics without at least some clear notion of how such affairs and their negotiation were conducted, and some sober expectations about what might or might not be achieved at great personal risk and exertion. Considering the closed and traditional Jewish world from which the *shtadlanim* stemmed, and their larger Jewish frame of reference, these Jewish worthies would have formed their individual approach to politics on the dual basis of prevailing norms but also distinctly Jewish experiences and precedents, teachings and warnings.

There are special Jewish qualifications indispensable for the practice of *shtadlanut* diplomacy, and then there are those belonging to the art of statecraft, in general, such as articulateness, *amour propre*, tact, persuasiveness, discernment, and, not least, the exercise of caution. Prudence, after all, is the hallmark of the professional diplomat and of the ambassadorial envoy. That is also the central thesis of this essay—that *shtadlanim* were diplomats, albeit communal diplomats, on behalf of the Jews and diplomats of the *stateless*, for whom discretion would always remain the better part of Jewish valor.

The Method

De Callieres further observes: “The art of negotiating with sovereign Princes is of so great importance, that the fate of the greatest States often depends on the good or bad conduct, and on the capacity of the ministers [*negociateurs*] who are employed therein.”⁶ If valid for great powers, how much more absolute the dependence of weak non-state actors like Diaspora Jewry on the personal

conduct of their diplomatic agents and on the *shtadlan's* ability to carry out “a good correspondence”? Therein lies the critical difference between inter-state relations and the asymmetries of statecraft by the stateless.

Accredited ambassadors of sovereign countries had the right to claim diplomatic immunity, already before, but especially after, the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, and to insist upon being treated with respect in a spirit of reciprocity. Agents of the Jewish people enjoyed no such privilege. The *shtadlan* had no immunity whatsoever or any *locus standi*. He had no legal rights, no reciprocity and no political recourse. Supplication and prudence thus often dictated displays of flattery on the part of court Jews and, yes, obsequiousness in focusing on their three most immediate objectives—a hearing for their people, a backstage role for themselves and royal consent for acts of tolerance toward Jews.

One wonders whether in pleading the Jewish case, *shtadlanim* might not have drawn personal inspiration from the biblical precedent of Moses and Aaron standing empty-handed before Pharaoh. But unlike their forebears, the plaintive “Let our people stay!” had to be substituted for the confidently more assertive “Let my people go!”

The inability to acknowledge limits to the possible still impairs statesmen today. For the *shtadlan*, Jewish limitations were a daily reality. That he nonetheless sought diplomatic understandings and solutions with unsympathetic Christian or Muslim princes is in itself meritorious; additionally, however, the *shtadlan* was frequently summoned to intercede at the communal level in times of acute crisis, and in the face of deteriorating Jewish–Gentile relations.

Once granted an audience at court and given permission to speak or to petition in writing, we find the *shtadlan*, in practicing statecraft by the stateless, falling back upon many of the same tools one would normally associate with conventional diplomacy. Foremost among them are pragmatism, discretion, persuasion, alliances of convenience, the wielding of subtle influence, trading in information, etc. Still, nothing could hide or compensate for the Diaspora diplomat’s limited options and his limited means of influence.

This explains why the *shtadlan's* political horizons, likewise, were limited to maintaining a holding pattern until better days arrived; until the fury of a frenzied mob, an inquisitor general like Torquemada or a capricious monarch had spent itself—or until the final redemption occurred through the coming of the Messiah. Of necessity, therefore, *shtadlanut* needs to be seen from an historical perspective as having constituted defensive diplomacy by a weak, insecure actor.

Put differently, Jewish statecraft may often have proved to be failed statecraft, and for the longest time stateless statecraft, but statecraft nonetheless. Not to appreciate what for centuries was an indispensable Jewish survival tactic is nothing less than a fundamental misreading of Diaspora life and the extreme challenges it posed for each generation of Jews and their intercessors.

***Shtadlanut* Goes International**

By the nineteenth century, as a nation, Jews still remained what they had been for the better part of two millennia: unrecognized and homeless. On the other hand, one senses that a qualitative change was percolating beneath the surface in post-Napoleonic Europe. While communal-based *shtadlanut* continued, individualistic and localized deeper processes were taking place across the continent that would facilitate the transition from *shtadlanut* as backstairs diplomacy played out in the shadows and on the margins of world politics to direct, open Jewish statesmanship conducted on an international scale.

To be sure, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment periods contributed by reopening the traditional debate in Jewish circles over governing paradigms with respect to the eternal question of “Israel and the Nations”—a debate stifled for so long by the uniformly petrifying Diaspora mindset under which the rock of belief remained that of Israel besieged. For the first time, emancipated Jews, *maskilim* who advocated the jettisoning of the “enclave culture” and ghetto mentality, called for outreach to the *goyim* and to the world. Thus, rather dramatically, in the eighteenth, but especially nineteenth, centuries two antipodal worldviews—of optimism and pessimism, of *obr lagoyim* [a light unto the nations] versus *am levadad yishkon* [a nation apart]—now confronted each other, effectively mirroring a growing split in Jewish thought.

What the late nineteenth century added to the intellectual debate were three fringe revisionist schools of thought that would move increasingly to the forefront of Jewish life in the early part of the twentieth century: assimilationism, socialism and Zionism. Secularist Jews, distancing themselves from the Jewish fold and no longer willing to be branded as outsiders, elected to put their faith in French, German or any other European nationalism that would permit their full entry into society. Socialist Jews, in the second instance, still more progressive in their thinking, embraced the notion of internationalism, of rising above parochial loyalties, political borders and religious barriers. Each in its own dialectic was inspired and motivated by different elements of the “light unto the nations” orientation that preached some form of active engagement with the non-Jewish world.

The last political ideology to join in the great Jewish debate by the turn of the century, Zionist nationalism, similarly was anchored in this oldest of Jewish political-diplomatic orientations. It viewed Israel as an integral part of world affairs, yet reinterpreted the worldview of *ohr lagoyim* to mean something entirely different. Future Jewish success and rebirth should be measured by aspiring to be an “*am k'chol ha'amim*” —a Jewish people neither superior nor inferior but, for all its distinctiveness, at once comparable and accountable to other nations.

The French Revolution affected this debate between nationalists and internationalists, exceptionalists and unexceptionalists, by encouraging direct Jewish entry into each Diaspora community's national politics and national development. As the eminent Israeli scholar J. L. Talmon puts it, the revolution brought the Jews “out of the ghetto into the forum.” In a matter of only several decades, once presented with the opportunity to compete in virtually all walks of life, ambitious Jews became leaders in such key enterprises as banking, railways and telegraphic agencies. Actually, all three great European-based technological, ideological and political revolutions combined to facilitate the public practice, internationally, of Jewish stateless statecraft.

The triumph of the legendary Rothschild family provides a case in point, epitomizing how at least some Jews, when given the chance, were able to make a social leap of unprecedented magnitude, but were also able to inject themselves into national and international affairs, even to the point of altering the course of events.⁷ For example, by canceling a Belgian loan in 1837, the threat of a Belgian invasion of the Dutch Netherlands was eliminated. By withdrawing funds from the French government during the Muhammad Ali crisis of 1840, the possibility of war again decreased. The Rothschilds also twice denied Austria funds in the 1850s when the latter was menacing Piedmont. With five banking houses (Frankfurt, Vienna, Paris, London and Naples) forming a private financial and trading syndicate of truly global proportions and with their own independent communications network, the House of Rothschild conducted its worldwide business affairs with speed and confidentiality, often receiving reliable news in advance of the very governments for whom they served as bankers, including even the Holy See.⁸

Together with the *Hofjuden* [court Jews], the Rothschild brothers stood for Jewish financial diplomacy, marking the ability of little more than a handful of financiers to influence modern European history. Called with a mix of loathing and admiration “the Kings of the Jews and the Jews of the Kings,” the Rothschilds basically financed European nations through wars, revolutions and peacemaking. Enjoying a preeminent (if unofficial) position in European diplomacy, certainly the first generation of the House of Rothschild remained constant in its interventions on behalf of oppressed “coreligionists.”

Returning to the World Stage

“Everything has changed,” one of the great *shtadlanim* of the twentieth century, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, insisted. Why? Because Jews now possess equal rights, representative organizations of their very own and the State of Israel. “Our generation is therefore the first to have the opportunity of laying down a Jewish policy, and it has everything to learn in this field.”⁹ Without denying Goldmann’s own undeniably diplomatic acumen as a practitioner of *shtadlanut*, his observation is problematic on several counts. First, as this essay illustrates, post-World War II Jewry did not enter the field of international politics from ground zero, nor did we have “everything” to learn in the art of statecraft. If anything, today we would do well to relearn the lessons Diaspora diplomacy has to teach.

Second, Goldmann’s generation was not the first to have the opportunity to lay down “a Jewish policy” and to seize upon it. Contemporary political scientists may differ as to precisely when Diaspora Jewry first undertook a new, more ambitious brand of world Jewish politics and diplomacy, yet all agree that it predates the interwar period of the twentieth century.

In his important study of the 1840 Damascus Affair, Jonathan Frankel argues convincingly that that event signified the true return to Jewish international politics. He relates how the charge levied by Ottoman authorities against a group of Damascus Jews of ritually murdering a missing Italian monk and his manservant grew into a *cause célèbre*.¹⁰ The Damascus affair is where the eastern question and the Jewish question converged; for instance, fierce competition for influence in the Ottoman Near East all but assured support of the Austrian and British governments for the campaign to gain justice for the Jews of Damascus. In purposely exploiting these rivalries, and by playing upon the insecurities and suspicions of the several European great powers relating to Turkey, Europe’s “sick man,” Jewish leaders were, in effect, directly engaging as never before in world politics.

Moreover, in striking contrast to the 1556 Ancona boycott attempted by Dona Gracia, the outrageous Damascus libel evoked unprecedented expressions of Jewish unity. Immediately upon learning of the episode, separate and uncoordinated Jewish communal prayers and rallies were held in Manchester, Liverpool, Dublin, Portsmouth, Hamburg, Barbados, Curaçao and Jamaica; in the United States, rallies took place in Richmond, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston and Cincinnati. A public fast was proclaimed in Metz. Poems and petitions of deliverance were read throughout Europe. Contributions poured in from communities as diverse as Hamburg, Philadelphia, New York, Curaçao, St. Thomas, Copenhagen, Livorno, Tangiers and Berlin. Clearly, these responses

collectively served to transform the Jewish question—the plight of the Jews—into an *international* issue.

Reflecting the growing air of Jewish self-assurance, there was a palpable need felt by many Jews in the countries of their dispersion to no longer rely exclusively upon others, and instead to lead the campaign themselves. As one speaker at a public meeting convened in London by the Board of Jewish Deputies in June 1840 declared, “It is our own battle we fight.” Not relying solely upon great power intermediaries, the British Board of Jewish Deputies and Consistoire of French Jewry deputized Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885) and Isaac Adolphe Crémieux (1796–1880) to intercede directly with the Sublime Porte. The two spokesmen set off together to meet with Muhammad Ali in Egypt and Sultan Abdul Mejid in Turkey. Consequently, the condemned Jews of Damascus were released in September 1840. With some degree of truth, Crémieux and Montefiore could tell Muhammed Ali they spoke for “the Israelites of the whole world.”

Thereafter, and well into his nineties, Montefiore would cut an impressive figure when traveling through Europe and engaging in personal diplomacy. He undertook a number of personal missions to press for the rights of his persecuted brethren, including to Romania, Morocco, the Vatican, Turkey and Persia. He visited Palestine no less than seven times to encourage the early Jewish settlers. So, too, on two separate visits to St. Petersburg did he attempt to intercede on behalf of Russian Jewry.

A century before the international struggle for Jewish statehood in the corridors of the United Nations, Jews could be found expressing their solidarity as a people and as a nation, while using open international diplomatic channels and framing explicitly political and diplomatic arguments on behalf of an overtly Jewish cause.¹¹ Following the Damascus Affair, it became possible for the first time in centuries to speak once again of “world Jewry” as a political reality rather than a purely ethnic, religious or geographical abstraction.¹²

No less troubling is Dr. Goldman’s third assertion that since 1948–1949 “everything has changed” because of Israel’s rebirth and membership in the UN organization, breaking the mold, once and for all, of *shtetlanut* and its bent posture of deference. From now on, so he and others wished to believe, Jewish external affairs would no longer need appeal to human decency, try to buy goodwill, plead, rely upon others, or ask for favors. Reengagement with the world would signal a fundamental revision of the rules of the game, and with it, a change in attitudes—of the nations of the world toward the Jewish people, and of the Jewish people toward the nations of the world. Henceforth, Jewish affairs would be conducted

by accredited Jewish representatives, acting with greater confidence, increased assertiveness and on the basis of quid pro quo.

Continuing to mirror this idealized image of a *shtadlanut*-free Jewish diplomatic revolution, in the fiftieth year of Israel's independence and following the celebration of Zionism's centennial anniversary, Hebrew University Professor Sasson Sofer credited Jewish statecraft with having fully come of age. "Within two generations, the familiar figures of the Jewish 'fixer' and the emissary of the Zionist pioneering movement were obliged to shed their shabby raiment and don the formal garb of the diplomat."¹³

While possibly correct at the level of international legal principles and diplomatic protocol, this description hardly corresponds, however, to political reality, nor does it apply at the level of embedded cultural mindsets and basic postures. Not everything has changed, and not necessarily for the better.

Indeed, strong traces of traditional *shtadlanut* still characterize Jewish affairs because neither post-modernism nor Israel's founding have resolved the basic acceptance-rejection duality of the Jewish relationship to the non-Jewish world, and of the world to Jewish ascendancy. Respective attitudes on both sides indicate an enduring deep and reciprocal ambivalence, manifested, on the one hand, in Israel's uneasy status today within the international community, and on the other, by the recrudescence of antisemitism in various subtle and not-so-subtle forms. Jews still waver between the three foundational biblical paradigms traditionally governing the political equation of "Israel among the Nations": idealistic engagement or pessimistic insularity or pragmatic unexceptionalism.

Like history, world politics has a habit of playing tricks. Notwithstanding the claims by world Jewish leaders and by spokesmen for the sovereign State of Israel about having effectively relegated the era of *shtadlanut* to the dustbin of history, both the publicized intercessions of globetrotting Jewish personages and the behavior patterns of Israel as an international state actor continue to bear more than a passing resemblance to the mindset and practices of *shtadlanut*.¹⁴

The continued existence of *shtadlanut* as a political phenomenon in the twenty-first century can be explained, in part, because some traits of the *shtadlanim*, such as patient and passive observation, the search for solutions in a roundabout way, persuasion and the inclination toward compromise, also happen to be the "hallmarks of diplomacy at its best."¹⁵ A further explanation is the fact that large segments of world Jewry continue to suffer bouts of insecurity which neither sovereignty nor affluence can assuage. Each in their own way, whether Israeli citizens shielded by the Israel Defense Forces or Jews shielded by constitutions and enjoying the

full protection of legal equality in the United States and elsewhere, still harbor a residual and perceived sense of potential danger.

Flagship organizations operating independently of Israel like the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, the Anti-Defamation League, Hadassah and a whole slew of other Jewish bodies have proliferated in recent decades. Each is actively engaged in promoting Jewish agenda items worldwide and in dealing with foreign governments. Each lays claim to being an authentic voice, if not *the* authentic voice, of world Jewry, or important segments of it, and to best represent Jewish interests in international *fora*.

Lastly, Jewish advocates and advocacy groups engage in a modern form of upgraded political and diplomatic intercession not totally divorced from traditional *shtadlanut* because they, too, are subject to forces of intimidation. This is manifested in the kind of blatant intimidation expressed in frontal accusations inspired by the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, accusing Jews of undue control over world affairs, as well as in the veiled intimidation couched in scholarly language and backed by pages of learned footnotes in supporting the thesis that American foreign policy can be subverted by a loose coalition of determined American Jews in the service of Israel.¹⁶

These worldly Jewish agencies are certainly sophisticated and well-oiled machines. Some may be financially secure, polished and cosmopolitan, and skilled in the art of public relations. They are able to resort to a wide range of diplomatic reinforcement measures, including judicial action, overt political pressure, legislative initiatives, economic incentives and sanctions, and media campaigns. Yet for all that, *shtadlanim*, nonetheless, are ever watchful and constantly on their guard.

Turning, as well, to Israel, what informs Israeli external behavior if not a traditional basic Jewish suspicion of the outside world? What better epitomizes the conduct of foreign relations by Israel than a posture of defensiveness and dependency? This defensiveness stems from the need to respond to an array of plausible Middle Eastern military threat agents extending from as near as *al-Jibad al-Islami* cross-border rocket launchers to as far as a nuclear-armed Iran — to say nothing of ongoing political initiatives by a formidable anti-Israel coalition aimed at delegitimizing the Jewish state as well as isolating it economically and diplomatically. That dependency can only be rationalized through a liberal interpretation of the Zionist ethos of exaggerated self-reliance, thus giving *shtadlanut* a new lease on life.

Then, as now, Jewish and Israeli statecraft call for circumspection. Then, as now, for all the changes and improvements in the *Jewish* condition, so much of the fate of

world Jewry—as a global people, Jewish well-being; as a sovereign nation-state, Israeli security—rests in the hands of global powers and systemic global forces. It is this interplay of powerful actors, international institutions and global trends that must bring out the best talents and political sensitivities that the two poles of Jewish power and influence, Israel and the Diaspora, are able to mobilize.

By their tenacious engagement in solo acts of intercession and representation, negotiation and persuasion, conducted under the least promising conditions and situations imaginable, Jewish history's corps of stateless Jewish statesmen—"equipped by generations of mobile experience to foresee trouble, to bend to passing storms, to overcome adversity, and to endure"¹⁷—can serve as further inspiration for today's immeasurably more activist practitioners. So, too, do the unsung *shtadlanim* of old in their dedication and circumspection symbolize the unbroken constancy of Jewish diplomatic theory and its application at different times and places in actual practice.

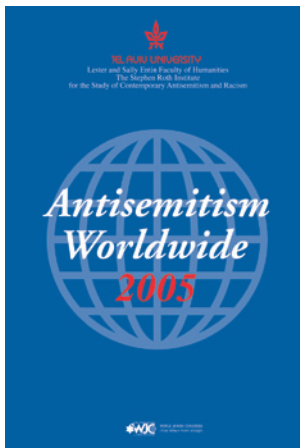
Notes

- ¹ Solomon Grayzel, *A History of the Contemporary Jews: From 1900 to the Present* (New York, 1960), p. 507.
- ² Alan Dowty, "Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)* III: 1 (March, 1999), 26.
- ³ Nahum Goldmann, *The Jewish Paradox* (New York, 1978), p. 62.
This is what Rabbi Meir Benjamin Lau refers to as "*otsma shel bisarhut*." See *Chachamim* [Hebrew] Vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 2007), p. 146.
- ⁵ François de Callières, *The Art of Diplomacy*, trans. H.M.A. Keens-Soper and Karl W. Schweizer (eds.) (New York, 1983), p. 65.
- ⁶ *Ibid*, p. 65.
- ⁷ Niall Ferguson, *The World's Banker: The History of the House of Rothschild*, first published in England (London, 1998) and then in the United States in a two-volume edition as *The House of Rothschild: Money's Prophets, 1798-1848* (New York, 1999); also Howard Morley Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (New York, 1963), pp. 130–133.
- ⁸ The Rothschilds were not the first, however. See Leon Poliakov, *Jewish Bankers and the Holy See From the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1977).
- ⁹ Goldmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.
- ¹⁰ Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge, 1997).
- ¹¹ This theme is examined by Daniel Guttwein in his chapter, "Jewish Nineteenth-Century Diplomacy: The Birth of Jewish Nationalism" (pp. 159-176), in Judah Reinhartz, Yosef Salmon, Gideon Shimoni (eds.), *Nationalism and Jewish Politics: New Perspectives* (Jerusalem, 1996).
- ¹² The status and plight of the defenseless Jews actually came up for discussion at the

1815 Congress of Vienna. Several Eastern European Jewish communities even sent unofficial delegates of their own, but their influence on behalf of greater economic and social rights and call for Jewish emancipation proved ineffective against the reactionary spirit that quickly reasserted itself across most of the continent. A committee of the Congress brought in a resolution essentially calling for permitting the Jews to enjoy the rights already granted them, but nothing more.

- ¹⁵ Sasson Sofer, *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 380.
- ¹⁴ What better proof of the continuity of Diaspora diplomacy than the term *shdula*? Used in modern colloquial Hebrew to denote special interest groups, political action committees and lobbies, it, too, like *shtaḏlan* and *shtaḏlanut*, is a derivative form of the root *sh-ḏ-l*.
- ¹⁵ Sofer, op.cit., p. 366.
- ¹⁶ See John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby* (New York, 2007).
- ¹⁷ Herman Wouk, *The Will to Live On* (New York, 2000), p. 75.

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