



## Israel and the Middle East

The Rabbinical Assembly and the Conservative Movement have articulated support for the Zionist state as one of their pillars. This has been expressed through resolutions on a wide variety of Israel-related topics.

### Support for Israel

The Rabbinical Assembly called on the US government in 1951 to provide foreign assistance to Israel and again in 1953 to “sustain and increase its support for this tried and proven friend of democracy.” In 1953, the RA called on the US Government to mediate with the Arab states and Israel with respect to the imperative of a negotiated peace. In 1956, the Rabbinical Assembly protested what it called the “moral duplicity” of the US State Department for refusing to make available to Israel the means necessary for its defense while furnishing arms to Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and refusing to recognize the effect of the imbalance created by the sale of arms to Egypt by the Communist bloc. In the same year, the RA called for a secure Israel as a democratic bulwark against Communist influence and aggression in the Middle East. The Rabbinical Assembly has continued to urge the US to grant foreign aid to Israel, as she is a bastion of democracy in the Middle East and serves as a bulwark against terrorism (1955, 1959, 1971).

The Rabbinical Assembly has also gone on the record many times in support of encouraging the American Jewish community to support the State of Israel through Israel bonds, personal donations, tourism, and other methods (1951, 1952, 1954, 1965, 1966, 1971, 1975, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1996, 2002). The Rabbinical Assembly has encouraged its members to make Aliyah, support the endeavors of other Jews who move to Israel, and to affiliate with the Masorti Movement in Israel (1987, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2003).

The Rabbinical Assembly has also supported a Conservative presence in Israel through “Aliyah, long-term study and organized synagogue and personal visits to Israel” (1950, 1954, 1955, 1966, 1968, 1987, 2001, 2003). It has encouraged members to affiliate with Masorti organizations including MERCAZ, the Foundation for Masorti Judaism in Israel, the Conservative Yeshiva, and Kibbutz Hannaton (1978, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2014.)

### Peace Process and Territorial Compromise

In 1968 the Rabbinical Assembly passed a resolution applauding “the State of Israel’s insistence that only direct negotiation with its neighbors can lead to a lasting peace.” The resolution also recognized self-defense as “a basic law of life” and called upon the United Nations to deplore all terrorist activity as immoral and illegal. In 1975 the RA urged President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger not to pressure Israel to make concessions that would jeopardize its safety and security. In 1994 the Rabbinical Assembly reaffirmed a teshuvah of the Va’ad Hahalakhah in Israel stating that the borders of the Land of Israel were never fixed in accordance with halakhah, and that halakhah therefore should not be considered a barrier to compromising territory, claiming: “To claim that the concept ‘the Whole Land of Israel’ forbids us from conceding any part of the geographic land that



happens to be under Jewish sovereignty, has no support in the halakhah.” In 1995 the RA urged its members to support Israel’s struggle for peace, support Israel and her Arab neighbors in their quest to bring about peace, and to oppose terrorism. Similar sentiments were reaffirmed in 2001, 2002, and 2005. In 2008 the RA passed a resolution praising the efforts of President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the Annapolis Summit and their continuing determination to work with Israel as a partner in the effort to reach a just and lasting peace, while refraining from imposing solutions. In 2010 the RA passed a resolution expressing its support for Israel as it engages in peace talks and calling for Israel to consider the views of Diaspora Jews as partners in the peace process.

In 2011 the RA passed a resolution opposing any unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood.

### Religious Pluralism

As far back as 1964, the Rabbinical Assembly called on the Israeli government to equally recognize “the full and equal rights of all religious groups, and their unhampered right to teach and practice their doctrines and religious rights” and condemned “any discrimination against any rabbi in Israel on the basis of his association with a particular group or religious denomination.” In 1987 the RA condemned Knesset members and Israeli politicians who “vote in such a way as to call into question the legitimacy of Conservative (Masorti) Judaism” and claimed that such politicians “thereby render themselves unacceptable...as fitting representatives of Israel at communal functions in the American Jewish community in which the participation of Conservative rabbis or laymen is expected.” Resolutions supporting equal funding for all streams of Judaism passed in 1994, 1997, 2000, 2012, and 2013. In 1988 and 2009 the RA urged the dissolution of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate.

The Rabbinical Assembly has called for the Israeli government to recognize the legitimacy of all major denominations’ religious ceremonies, including conversions (1987, 1997, 2007, 2009, 2014), weddings (2009), and citizenship under the Right of Return (1985, 1987). The RA has also called for an end to private organizations such as hotels discriminating against non-Orthodox Jews by denying them “the rights and privileges afforded Orthodox guests including the use of a synagogue and a Sefer Torah” (2012). General resolutions reaffirmed the need for religious freedom in 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006, and 2010.

In 1990 the Rabbinical Assembly came out in support for Women of the Wall and their work ensuring freedom of worship at the Kotel. In 2004 the RA condemned an Israeli plan to “[extend] the area separating men and women and reducing the public space,” decrying it as “a unilateral change...and an affront to many Jews the world over.” The Rabbinical Assembly also registered its support for the Sharansky plan to create space for egalitarian prayer at Robinson’s Arch in 2013.

### Jerusalem

In 1992 the RA asked the United States government to recognize “the indivisibility of Jerusalem and...Jerusalem as the legitimate capital of Israel.” In that resolution the RA also expressed “its



profound joy in that unification.” The Rabbinical Assembly affirmed in 2001 the centrality of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount to the heart of Judaism, while also recognizing the importance of this site in Islamic tradition. In 2008 the RA passed a resolution calling for any future peace agreements to ensure that Jerusalem remain the capital of Israel; advocating Israeli control over sacred Jewish sites and a guarantee of free access for all Jews regardless of denominational affiliation; asking the United Nations and other international organizations to affirm Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; and calling upon all parties involved in negotiations to guarantee access to significant historical and religious sites for all people.

### Divestment

In 2005 the Rabbinical Assembly expressed its concern over mainstream church groups, especially those in the US, who are pursuing divestment in Israel as a tool to promote Middle East peace. The Rabbinical Assembly has done much work over the years through the National Council of Synagogues to educate church and interfaith groups on the issue of divestment and the links between anti-Israel rhetoric and anti-Semitism. In the aforementioned 2005 resolution the RA called on its members to build bridges to non-Jewish groups in Europe and Israel; to dispel misperceptions and improve relations; to show church leaders how using divestment from Israel as a lever against the Jewish state, instead of condemnation of terrorism, only plays into the hands of extremists and exacerbates violence; and to support interfaith projects and cooperative programs between Palestinians and Israelis.

Similarly, in 2010, the Rabbinical Assembly passed a resolution condemning anti-Semitic attacks on Israel and its citizens by the global community, including boycott and delegitimizing efforts. It also passed a 2010 resolution criticizing the Presbyterian Church’s publication “Breaking Down the Walls” for its “one-sided perspective that places the full blame for the conflict on Israel and rejects the notion of a two-state solution.” In 2012, the Rabbinical Assembly passed a resolution voicing concerns over anti-Israel activities on college and university campuses.

### Terrorism

In 2002 the Rabbinical Assembly called for the United States House and Senate to pass a bill (S 1409 and HR 1795) requiring sanctions be imposed on the PLO and the Palestinian Authority if these groups do not meet their commitments to end terrorism.

### Threat from Iran

In 2007 and again in 2008, the RA declared its support for efforts to stop Iran from achieving nuclear capability and urged the United States and the United Nations to prevent Iran from supporting and supplying Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and any organization seeking to attack the people or the State of Israel.

### Pollard Case



In the 1980s and 1990s the RA passed several resolutions on the release of Jonathan Pollard. In 1987 the RA called for a thorough investigation and expressed its desire that this incident not hamper the exchange of intelligence information between the US and Israel. In 1992, 1994, and 1995 the RA urged clemency for Pollard or that his sentence be commuted to time served. In 2011 the RA again called for the commutation of Pollard's sentence.

#### Missing Israeli Soldiers

The Rabbinical Assembly has on several occasions called for the safe return of Israeli soldiers missing in action (2001), most recently in 2007 with the capture of Gilad Shalit, Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser (the latter two of whom were unfortunately killed). The RA has participated in rallies and protests and has written to US and other governments' officials to urge Israeli soldiers' safe return. The RA passed a resolution in 2010 calling for the release of Gilad Shalit.

#### Israeli Non-Profits

In 1989 the Rabbinical Assembly passed a resolution endorsing the formation of the organization Rabbinic Human Rights Watch, now known as Rabbis for Human Rights. In 1994 the RA reiterated its endorsement of RHR and called upon all rabbis to support this organization.

The Rabbinical Assembly voiced its support for Magen David Adom through resolutions in 1976 and 1978.

#### Security Fence

In 2004 the Rabbinical Assembly issued a resolution supporting the right of the State of Israel to create a security fence as a legitimate tool of self-defense. The resolution states that the purpose of the fence is to "aid the renewal of the negotiations for peace and maintain the Jewish and democratic character of the State while seeking to avoid unnecessary hardships to innocent Palestinians."

#### War in Iraq

In 2003, the year the Iraq War began, the RA passed a resolution praising the US Armed Forces and other coalition members for their efforts to remove threats posed by terrorism and calling for the US and its allies to articulate plans for humanitarian aid and restoring an Iraqi government. In 2004 the RA congratulated the US and its coalition partners on the capture of Saddam Hussein and called upon the Governing Council of Iraq, the United States, and the United Nations to conduct a fair and public trial according to the rules of international law so as to expose the atrocities he committed. The resolution also called on the Governing Council of Iraq, the United States, and the United Nations to rebuild the infrastructure of Iraqi society and to reconstruct its institutions of government so as to help the Iraqi people build a society based on law, democracy, and freedom.